Dorset Council

Approach to Internal Audit Planning 2026-27

Internal Audit ▪ Risk ▪ Special Investigations ▪ Consultancy

Internal Audit Planning 2026-27: The Approach

The work of Internal Audit should align strategically with the aims, objectives and key risks of the organisation, taking into account key operations, transformation and changes. In order to do this Internal Audit needs to be flexible in adapting audit plans to handle rapidly changing risks, priorities and challenges.

It is the responsibility of the Senior Leadership Team, and the Audit & Governance Committee to ensure that the audit work scheduled and completed throughout the year contains sufficient and appropriate coverage of key risks.

Approach to Internal Audit Planning 2026-27

SWAP works closely with Senior Management in Dorset Council and in collaboration with the Risk Manager to deliver a flexible, responsive and risk-based approach to audit planning. Given the continued pace of change within local authorities and the transformational demands placed on services, a static annual plan would no longer provide the level of flexibility required. Over a number of recent years, we have demonstrated that our flexible planning approach has ensured that we are supporting the Council by collaboratively aligning our work to the Council's aims, objectives and key risks. This helps to ensure that we are auditing the right things, at the right time; enabling us to provide insight and value when and where it is required.

We have fully embedded our continuous risk assessment and rolling plan approach and we build our plan in conjunction with management throughout the year.

The resulting programme will be a combination of audit work requested by management aligned to corporate priorities and work recommended by SWAP driven by our continuous risk assessment. This risk assessment draws on the Council's Principal and service risk registers (balanced against the Council's risk appetite), the Council's performance management data, and other known sources of assurance (where relevant and where known). We share the results of our risk assessments with Senior Management in Directorates to obtain their view on the value of internal audit involvement.

As the year progresses, we will update the Committee through our usual quarterly update report on Internal Audit activity. Alongside this, live access to SWAP's Audit management system AuditBoard, enables Senior Leadership and Audit & Governance Committee members to monitor coverage throughout the year and assess whether it remains sufficient and appropriate, aligned to key risks.

Delivery of an internal audit programme of work that provides sufficient and appropriate coverage of key risks, will enable us to satisfy our requirement to provide a well-informed and comprehensive year-end annual internal audit opinion.

Annually, or as required by change, we provide you with our Internal Audit Charter for your approval, which reflects our role and responsibilities as internal auditors within your organisation. We have included the Audit Charter for the Committee's consideration and approval at Appendix 1 to this paper.

Additionally, Appendix 2 presents the Audit Strategy, which details SWAPs longer term objectives and how these align to the objectives of Dorset Council.

Internal Audit Planning 2026-27: The Approach

We would encourage SLT and the Audit & Governance Committee to regularly review the dashboard in AuditBoard in order to assess our rolling internal audit coverage.

This will help to confirm:

- **That the internal audit plan builds throughout the year to provide adequate coverage of the key risks faced by the organisation**
- **That sufficient assurance is being received to monitor the organisation's risk profile effectively; and**
- **That the areas included on the Future Proposed Audits remain appropriate, with an accurate priority assessment**

Note: Priorities remain fluid and are amended as work becomes more or less of a priority

A Rolling & Live Programme of Audit Work

Throughout 2025-26 we have continued to develop and refine a live rolling plan dashboard which is held on SWAPs Audit Management system, AuditBoard. Through this system Committee members and Senior Council officers are able to access and view our live rolling audit plan document.

This dashboard shows how audit work is building throughout the year to support SWAP in providing an annual opinion on the Council's governance, risk management and control environment. Our continuous risk assessment and planning approach, highlighted above, aims to ensure that we have a reasonable and equitable spread of work covering the Authority's key strategic risks.

The rolling plan dashboard details all work we have completed across the year, along with work in progress and the status of that work.

The list of 'Future Proposed Audits' (found by clicking on the future proposed tab at the bottom of the dashboard) is our rolling audit plan, and details audit work that we propose to undertake in the future, along with an assessment of the priority and timing of that work. The tables below detail examples of our future proposed work currently planned and this will grow and change as the year progresses. The scope of our work is not fixed at this point and will be agreed at the point the work commences.

Audit Title	Type of Work	Audit Timing	Risk Priority
Capital Delivery	Assurance	Next	Higher priority
Dept for Business and Trade (DBT) Grant Certification	Grant Certification	Next	Higher priority
Embedding of Risk Management (Council-wide)	Assurance	Later	Higher priority
Monitoring of High Needs Block Expenditure	Assurance	Later	Higher priority
Property Acquisitions and Disposals	Assurance	Next	Higher priority
Response to Climate Emergency Phase 2	Assurance	Later	Higher priority
RP Obligations & NROSH+ Returns	Advisory	Next	Higher priority
Adults Social Care Transformation Programme	Assurance	Earlier	Medium priority
Brokerage/ Commissioning Process	Assurance	Earlier	Medium priority
Centralised Debt Recovery Processes	Assurance	Earlier	Medium priority
Cifas and NFI	Assurance	Next	Medium priority
Core Services in Place benchmarking	Advisory	Next	Medium priority
Debt Collection - Adults & Housing	Assurance	Next	Medium priority
Families First Partnership Programme	Assurance	Later	Medium priority
Harbour Authority Benchmarking	Advisory	Next	Medium priority

Audit Title	Type of Work	Audit Timing	Risk Priority
Housing Delivery/ Planning obligations under Section 106	Assurance	Earlier	Medium priority
New Procurement Regulations and Contract Compliance	Assurance	Later	Medium priority
Post-CQC Inspection Review	Assurance	Earlier	Medium priority
Premises Related Health and Safety re-visit	Assurance	Earlier	Medium priority
Accreditation for H&S in Waste - gap analysis	Assurance	Later	Lower priority
Active Travel Fund 5 (2024/25): No 31/7518 & 31/7519	Grant Certification	Later	Lower priority
Councillor Code of Conduct	Assurance	Earlier	Lower priority
Data Breaches	Assurance	Later	Lower priority
Dorset Centre of Excellence, LATCO	Assurance	Later	Lower priority
Effective Property Services	Assurance	Later	Lower priority
Effectiveness of using Digital Technology to Support the...	Assurance	Later	Lower priority
Elective Home Education - impact of the Children's Well...	Assurance	Later	Lower priority
Family Hubs Programme Phase 2	Assurance	Later	Lower priority
Fraud Risk Assessment Re-visit / exploring outcomes	Proactive fraud work	Later	Lower priority
Highway Maintenance Capital Funding (Highway Mainte...	Grant Certification	Later	Lower priority

Internal Audit Planning 2026/27: SWAP Internal Audit Services

SWAP is a public sector, not-for-profit internal audit partnership covering 28 organisations. Dorset Council is a part-owner of SWAP, and we provide the internal audit service to the Council.

Over and above our Internal Audit service delivery, SWAP will look to add value throughout the year wherever possible. This will include:

- **Benchmarking and sharing of best-practice between our public-sector Partners.**
- **Regular updates containing emerging issues, risks and fraud alerts identified across the SWAP partnership and beyond.**

As a company, SWAP has adopted the following values, which we ask our clients to assess us against following every piece of work that we do:

- **People Centred**
- **Professional Integrity**
- **Supportive Collaboration**
- **Service Excellence**
- **Purpose-Driven Efficiency**

Your Internal Audit Service

Audit Resources

The 2026/27 Internal Audit programme of work will be delivered within an overall budget of £471,580, which represents a 3% increase on the previous year, as agreed by the Service Manager for Assurance. No budget cuts have been proposed for the forthcoming year. The current Internal Audit resources available represent a sufficient and appropriate mix of seniority and skill to be effectively deployed to deliver the expected work. We would encourage alternative sources of assurance to be sought or identified where internal audit coverage of key risks has not been undertaken.

The key contacts in respect of your Internal Audit service for Dorset Council are:

Sally White, Assistant Director – sally.white@swapaudit.co.uk, 07820312469
Sophie Blackburn, Principal Auditor – sophie.blackburn@swapaudit.co.uk 07951 245945

External Quality Assurance

Over the past year SWAP work has been completed to comply with the Global Internal Auditing Standards (GIAS) in UK Public Sector.

As required within the GIAS, SWAP is subject to an External Quality Assessment (EQA) of Internal Audit Activity at least every 5 years. The last of these was carried out in December 2024 which confirmed 'General Conformance' with the IPPF (the previous Internal Auditing standards framework). Members of the Audit Committee were provided with a full copy of this report at that time.

Conflicts of Interest

We are not aware of any conflicts of interest within Dorset Council that would present an impairment to our independence or objectivity. Furthermore, we are satisfied that we will conform with the Global Internal Audit Standards ethics and professionalism standards in relation to Integrity, Objectivity, Confidentiality, & Competency.

Our Reporting

A summary of Internal Audit activity will be reported quarterly to the Audit & Governance Committee (*as well as our detailed rolling plan dashboard highlighted above being available throughout the year*). Our reporting to the Audit & Governance Committee will include any significant risk and control issues, governance issues, and other matters that require the attention of SLT and/or the Audit & Governance Committee. We will also report any response from management to a risk we have highlighted that, in our view, may be unacceptable to the organisation.