
WEDDIN SHIRE COUNCIL

INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER

Adopted by Council 17 August 2023

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Weddin Shire Council (Council) has established the Internal Audit Function as a key component of the Council's governance and assurance framework and in compliance with the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit in local councils in NSW*. This Charter provides the framework for the conduct of the Internal Audit Function and has been approved by the governing body taking into account the advice of the Council's Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC).

1. Definitions

Internal Audit Function – the function which provides internal audit services to the Council

Internal Audit Provider – the external third-party provider of internal audit services

Executive Officer – Council employee internally responsible for the Internal Audit Function of the Council

2. Purpose of Internal Audit

Internal audit is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the Council's operations. It helps the Council accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes¹.

Internal audit provides an independent and objective review and advisory service to provide advice to the governing body, General Manager and the ARIC about the Council's governance processes, risk management and control frameworks and its external accountability obligations. It also assists the Council to improve its business performance.

3. Independence

The Council's Internal Audit Function is independent of the Council so it can provide an unbiased assessment of the Council's operations and risk and control activities.

The Internal Audit Function reports functionally to the ARIC on the results of completed audits and for strategic direction and accountability purposes and reports administratively to the General Manager to facilitate day-to-day operations. Internal audit activities are not subject to direction by the Council and the Council's management has no role in the exercise of the internal audit activities.

The ARIC is responsible for communicating any internal audit issues or information to the Council. Should the Council require additional information, a request for the information may be made to the Chair of the ARIC by resolution. The Chair may only provide the information requested by the Council where the Chair is satisfied that it is reasonably necessary for the Council to receive the information for the purposes of performing its functions under the Local Government Act. Individual Councillors are not entitled to request or receive information from the ARIC.

The General Manager must consult with the Chair of the ARIC before appointing or making decisions affecting the employment of the Executive Officer. If the Executive Officer is dismissed, the General Manager must report the reasons for their dismissal to the governing body.

¹ As defined by the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (2017)*

Where the Chair of the ARIC has any concerns about the treatment of the Executive Officer, or any action taken that may compromise their ability to undertake their functions independently, they can report their concerns to the governing body.

The Executive Officer is to confirm at least annually to the ARIC the independence of internal audit activities from the Council.

4. Authority

The Council authorises the Internal Audit Function, within the scope of its role and responsibilities to have access to all functions, premises, assets, personnel, records and other documentation and information that the Executive Officer deems necessary to enable the Internal Audit Function to fulfil its responsibilities.

All records, documentation and information access while undertaking internal audit activities are to be solely used for the conduct of these activities. The Executive Officer and Internal Audit Provider are responsible and accountable for maintaining the confidentiality of the information and documentation accessed while undertaking the internal audit activities.

All internal audit documentation is to remain the property of the Council, including where internal audit services are performed by an external third-party provider.

Information and documents pertaining to the Council are not to be made publicly available. The Internal Audit Function may only release Council information to external parties that are assisting the Internal Audit Function to fulfil its responsibilities with the approval of the General Manager or their delegate, except where it is being provided to an external investigative or oversight agency for the purpose of informing that agency of a matter that may warrant its attention.

5. Role

The Internal Audit Function is to support the ARIC to review and provide independent advice to the Council in accordance with section 428A of the Local Government Act 1993. This includes conducting internal audits of the Council and monitoring the implementation of corrective actions.

The Internal Audit Function also plays an active role in:

- developing and maintaining a culture of accountability and integrity
- facilitating the integration of risk management into day-to-day business activities and processes, and
- promoting a culture of high ethical standards.

The Internal Audit Function has no direct authority or responsibility for the activities it reviews. The Internal Audit Function has no responsibility for developing or implementing procedures or systems and does not prepare records or engage in the Council functions or activities (except in carrying out its own functions).

6. Executive Officer

The Internal Audit Function is to be led by a member of the Council's staff with sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to ensure it fulfils its role and responsibilities to the Council and the ARIC. The Executive Officer must be independent, impartial, unbiased and objective when performing their work and free from any conflicts of interest.

Responsibilities of the Executive Officer include:

- contract management
- managing the internal audit budget
- ensuring the external provider completes internal audits in line with the ARIC's annual work plan and four-year strategic work plan
- forwarding audit reports by the external provider to the ARIC
- acting as a liaison between the external provider and the ARIC
- monitoring the Council's implementation of corrective actions that arise from the findings of audits and reporting progress to the ARIC, and
- assisting the ARIC to ensure the Council's internal audit activities comply with the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*.

Safeguards in place to limit any real or perceived bias or conflicts of interest include:

- any potential issues or conflicts of interest arising from a dual role being formally documented in the Council's Internal Audit Charter, and
- where there is an internal audit being conducted into a service area under the Executive Officer's or their manager's responsibility, the Executive Officer and their manager will step aside and the General Manager will identify a suitable alternative officer to oversight that audit.

7. Internal Audit Provider

The Council is to contract an external third-party provider to undertake its internal audit activities. To ensure the independence of the external provider, the Executive Officer is to ensure the external provider:

- does not conduct any audits on specific Council operations or areas that they have worked on within the last two years
- is not the same provider conducting the Council's external audit
- is not the auditor of any contractors of the Council that may be subject to the internal audit, and
- can meet the Council's obligations under the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*.

The Executive Officer must consult with the ARIC and General Manager regarding the appropriateness of the skills, knowledge and experience of any external provider before they are engaged by the Council.

8. Performing Internal Audit Activities

The work of the Internal Audit Function is to be thoroughly planned and executed. The ARIC must develop a strategic work plan every four years to ensure that the matters listed in Schedule 1 are reviewed by the committee and considered by the Internal Audit Function when developing their risk-based program of internal audits. The strategic work plan must be reviewed at least annually to ensure it remains appropriate.

The ARIC must also develop an annual work plan to guide the work of the Internal Audit Function over the forward year.

All internal audit activities are to be performed in a manner that is consistent with relevant professional standards including the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors and International Standard on Risk Management – ISO 31000:2018.

The Executive Officer is to provide the findings and recommendations of internal audits to the ARIC at the end of each audit. Each report is to include a response from the relevant senior manager.

The Executive Officer is to establish an ongoing monitoring system to follow up the Council's progress in implementing corrective actions.

The General Manager, in consultation with the ARIC, is to develop and maintain policies and procedures to guide the operation of the Internal Audit Function.

The Executive Officer is to ensure that the ARIC is advised at each of the ARIC's meetings of the internal audit activities completed during that quarter, progress in implementing the annual work plan and progress made implementing corrective actions.

9. Conduct

Internal audit personnel must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct. Complaints about breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct by internal audit personnel are to be dealt with in accordance with the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*. The General Manager must consult with the ARIC before any disciplinary action is taken against the Executive Officer in response to a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct.

Internal audit must also comply with the Code of Ethics for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors.

10. Administrative Arrangements

10.1 Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee Meetings

The Executive Officer will attend ARIC meetings as an independent non-voting observer. The Executive Officer can be excluded from meetings by the ARIC at any time.

The Executive Officer must meet separately with the ARIC at least once per year.

The Executive Officer can meet with the Chair of the ARIC at any time, as necessary, between ARIC meetings.

10.2 External Audit

Internal and external audit activities will be coordinated to help ensure the adequacy of overall audit coverage and to minimise duplication of effort.

Periodic meetings and contact between internal and external audit shall be held to discuss matters of mutual interest and to facilitate coordination.

External audit will have full and free access to all internal audit plans, working papers and reports.

10.3 Dispute Resolution

The Internal Audit Function should maintain an effective working relationship with the Council and the ARIC and seek to resolve any differences they may have in an amicable and professional way by discussion and negotiation.

In the event of a disagreement between the Internal Audit Function and the Council, the dispute is to be resolved by the General Manager and/or the ARIC. Disputes between the Internal Audit Function and the ARIC are to be resolved by the governing body.

Unresolved disputes regarding compliance with statutory or other requirements are to be referred to the Departmental Chief Executive in writing.

10.4 Review Arrangements

The ARIC must review the performance of the Internal Audit Function each year and report its findings to the governing body. A strategic review of the performance of the Internal Audit Function must be conducted each Council term that considers the views of an external party with a strong knowledge of internal audit and reported to the governing body.

This Charter is to be reviewed annually by the ARIC and once each Council term by the governing body. Any substantive changes are to be approved by the governing body.

11. Further Information

For further information on Council's internal audit activities, contact mail@weddin.nsw.gov.au

Reviewed by [head of Internal Audit Function]

[sign and date]

Reviewed by Chair of the Council's ARIC

[sign and date]

Reviewed by General Manager

[sign and date]

Reviewed by Council in accordance with a resolution of the governing body

Weddin Shire Council

Resolution 181/23

Schedule 1 – Internal Audit Function Responsibilities

Audit

Internal Audit

- Conduct internal audits as directed by the ARIC.
- Implement the Council's annual and four-year strategic internal audit work plans.
- Monitor the implementation by the Council of corrective actions.
- Assist the Council to develop and maintain a culture of accountability and integrity.
- Facilitate the integration of risk management into day-to-day business activities and processes.
- Promote a culture of high ethical standards.

External Audit

- Provide input and feedback on the financial statement and performance audit coverage proposed by external audit and provide feedback on the audit services provided.
- Review all external plans and reports in respect of planned or completed audits and monitor the Council's implementation of audit recommendations.
- Provide advice on action taken on significant issues raised in relevant external audit reports and better practice guides.

Risk

Risk Management

Review and advise:

- if the Council has in place a current and appropriate risk management framework that is consistent with the Australian risk management standard
- whether the Council's risk management framework is adequate and effective for identifying and managing the risks the Council faces, including those associated with individual projects, programs and other activities
- if risk management is integrated across all levels of the Council and across all processes, operations, services, decision-making, functions and reporting
- of the adequacy of risk reports and documentation, for example, the Council's risk register and risk profile
- whether a sound approach has been followed in developing risk management plans for major projects or undertakings
- whether appropriate policies and procedures are in place for the management and exercise of delegations
- if the Council has taken steps to embed a culture which is committed to ethical and lawful behaviour
- if there is a positive risk culture within the Council and strong leadership that supports effective risk management
- of the adequacy of staff training and induction in risk management

- how the Council's risk management approach impacts on the Council's insurance arrangements
- of the effectiveness of the Council's management of its assets, and
- of the effectiveness of business continuity arrangements, including business continuity plans, disaster recovery plans and the periodic testing of these plans.

Internal Controls

Review and advise:

- whether the Council's approach to maintaining an effective internal audit framework, including over external parties such as contractors and advisors, is sound and effective
- whether the Council has in place relevant policies and procedures and that these are periodically reviewed and updated
- whether appropriate policies and procedures are in place for the management and exercise of delegations
- whether staff are informed of their responsibilities and processes and procedures to implement controls are complied with
- if the Council's monitoring and review of controls is sufficient, and
- if internal and external audit recommendations to correct internal control weaknesses are implemented appropriately.

Compliance

Review and advise of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's compliance framework, including:

- if the Council has appropriately considered legal and compliance risks as part of the Council's risk management framework
- how the Council manages its compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policies, procedures, codes, and contractual arrangements, and
- whether appropriate processes are in place to assess compliance.

Fraud and Corruption

Review and advise of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's fraud and corruption prevention framework and activities, including whether the Council has appropriate processes and systems in place to capture and effectively investigate fraud-related information.

Financial Management

Review and advise:

- if the Council is complying with accounting standards and external accountability requirements
- of the appropriateness of the Council's accounting policies and disclosures
- of the implications for the Council of the findings of external audits and performance audits and the Council's responses and implementation of recommendations

- whether the Council's financial statement preparation procedures and timelines are sound
- the accuracy of the Council's annual financial statements prior to external audit, including:
 - management compliance/representations
 - significant accounting and reporting issues
 - the methods used by the Council to account for significant or unusual transactions and areas of significant estimates or judgements
 - appropriate management signoff on the statements
- if effective processes are in place to ensure financial information included in the Council's report is consistent with signed financial statements
- if the Council's financial management processes are adequate
- the adequacy of cash management policies and procedures
- if there are adequate controls over financial processes, for example:
 - appropriate authorisation and approval of payments and transactions
 - adequate segregation of duties
 - timely reconciliation of accounts and balances
 - review of unusual and high value purchases
- if policies and procedures for management review and consideration of the financial position and performance of the Council are adequate
- if the Council's grants and tied funding policies and procedures are sound.

Governance

Review and advise of the adequacy of the Council governance framework, including the Council's:

- decision-making processes
- implementation of governance policies and procedures
- reporting lines and accountability
- assignment of key roles and responsibilities
- committee structure
- management oversight responsibilities
- human resources and performance management activities
- reporting and communication activities
- information and communications technology (ICT) governance, and
- management and governance of the use of data, information and knowledge.

Improvement

Strategic Planning

Review and advise:

- of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's integrated, planning and reporting (IP&R) processes
- if appropriate reporting and monitoring mechanisms are in place to measure progress against objectives, and

- whether the Council is successfully implementing and achieving its IP&R objectives and strategies.

Service Reviews and Business Improvement

Review and advise:

- if the Council has robust systems to set objectives and goals to determine and deliver appropriate levels of service to the community and business performance
- if appropriate reporting and monitoring mechanisms are in place to measure service delivery to the community and overall performance, and
- how the Council can improve its service delivery and the Council's performance of its business and functions generally

Performance Data and Measurement

Review and advise:

- if the Council has a robust system to determine appropriate performance indicators to measure the achievement of its strategic objectives
- if the performance indicators the Council uses are effective, and
- of the adequacy of performance data collection and reporting.