

Internal Audit Progress Report (Quarter 2)
October 2023



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In the event of any questions arising from this report please contact Andrew Wood, Audit Manager andrew-wood@tamworth.gov.uk

The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during our internal audit work. Whilst every care has been taken to ensure that the information provided in this report is as accurate as possible, Internal Audit have only been able to base findings on the information and documentation provided and consequently no complete guarantee can be given that this report is necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist, or of all the improvements that may be required. This report was produced solely for the use and benefit of Tamworth Borough Council. The Council accepts no responsibility and disclaims all liability to any third party who purports to use or rely for any reason whatsoever on the report, its contents, conclusions, any extract, reinterpretation, amendment and/or modification.

01 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

This report summarises internal audit activity and performance for the period to 30 September 2023.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF INTERNAL AUDIT

The Accounts and Audit Regulations require councils to undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of their risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards or guidance.

This progress report and opinion forms part of the framework of assurances that is received by the Council and is used to help inform the annual governance statement. Internal audit also has an independent and objective consultancy role to help managers improve risk management, governance and control.

Internal Audit's professional responsibilities as auditors are set out within Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) produced by the Internal Audit Standards Advisory Board produced by the Internal Audit Standards Advisory Board.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Internal audit is grateful to the directors, heads of service, service managers and other staff throughout the council for their help during the period.

02 INTERNAL AUDIT WORK UNDERTAKEN

The internal audit plan for 2023/24 approved by the Audit & Governance Committee at its meeting in March 2023. The plan was for a total of 16 audits. To the end of quarter 2 2023/2024 and taking into account the exceptional circumstances previously reported to committee we have 25% of the audit plan. In addition we have fully completed the 3 audits rolled forward from 2022/23. Work has been ongoing on all audits contained within the plan in respect of scoping and briefing and agreeing with management the start dates for the reviews, this is outlined in the attached **Appendix 1** and provides the position as at 30th September 2023. An analysis of audit plan completion and indicatively planned audits is shown in the table below;

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of audits allocated per quarter	4	4	6	2
% of plan	25	25	37	13
Cumulative 2023/24 audit plan % completed	0	25		
Completed and finalised 2022/23 audits	2	3		
Audits drafted and awaiting management agreement 2022/23	1	0		

Planned work initially envisaged that by 30 September 2023 we would have completed 50% of the Audit Plan, actual out turn figures show that we have due to exceptional circumstances that we have completed 25% of the expected plan. The work undertaken and the progress on each audit is shown in summary and progress made this year is included at **Appendix 01**.

03 OPINION

SCOPE OF THE OPINION

In giving an opinion, it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute. The most that the internal audit service can provide to the Council is a reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in risk management, governance and control processes.

The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during our internal audit work and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist, or of all the improvements that may be required.

In arriving at an opinion, the following matters have been taken into account:

- The outcomes of all audit activity undertaken during the period.
- The effects of any material changes in the organisation's objectives or activities.
- Whether or not any limitations have been placed on the scope of internal audit.
- Whether there have been any resource constraints imposed upon us which may have impinged on our ability to meet the full internal audit needs of the organisation.
- What proportion of the organisation's internal audit needs have been covered to date.

INTERNAL AUDIT OPINION

On the basis of audit work completed, the Audit Manager’s opinion on the council’s framework of governance, risk management and internal control is reasonable in its overall design and effectiveness. Certain weaknesses and exceptions were highlighted by audit work. These matters have been discussed with management, to whom recommendations have been made. All of these have been, or are in the process of being addressed.

Specific Issues

No specific issues have been highlighted through the work undertaken by internal audit during the period.

Fraud & Irregularity

No matters of fraud or irregularity have been reported during the period. Also see the fraud update on this Committee’s agenda.

Consultancy & Advice

The audit team may be requested by managers to undertake consultancy and advice on governance, risk management and internal control matters from time to time. During the period to 30 September 2023 no additional work was requested.

04 Follow Up

As previously agreed by the Committee, all high priority actions and those arising from no and limited overall assurance reports are followed up by audit, managers confirmation applies to the rest.

The total outstanding actions at the end of Quarter 2 are 38 (11 high, 17 medium, 10 low). During 2023/24 the Audit Manager will continue to hold quarterly meetings with all Assistant Directors to review all outstanding recommendations. This has shown a specific improvement in the implementation and the number of recommendations, over time, has been shown within **Appendix 3**. This shows in tabular graph form the progress regarding the number of outstanding audit recommendations over time.

Priority of Recs	Number of O/S recs – 30 June 2023	Number of recs closed during the period June 23 – Sept 23	Number of additional recs made during Q2	Number of current O/S recs as at 30 Sept 2023	Overall movement of rec numbers during the quarter 2
High	13	3	1	11	-2
Medium	33	23	7	17	-16
Low	18	15	7	10	-8

As at 30 September 2023 there were 11 high priority recommendations outstanding however of these 3 were overdue and these have been followed up with Assistant Directors. All current outstanding high priority recommendations are contained within **Appendix 3** of this report.

Compliance with professional standards

We employ a risk-based approach in planning and conducting our audit assignments. Internal audit work has been performed in accordance with PSIAS.

Conflicts of interest

There have been no instances during the year which have impacted on internal audit's independence that have led to any declarations of interest.

Performance of Internal Audit

Internal audit quality assurance

To ensure the quality of the work internal audit performs, there is a programme of quality measures which includes:


- Supervision of staff conducting audit work.
- Review of files of working papers and reports by managers.
- Regular meetings of our networking groups, which issue technical and sector updates.

Performance Measures


- Complete 90% of the audit plan - 25% relates to assurance work completed.
- 100% Draft reports issued within 6 weeks of start date – 75%
- 100% Closure meetings conducted within 5 days of completion of audit work – 75%
- 100% draft reports to be issued within 10 working days of closure meeting – 100%
- 100% of all high priority actions are implemented at follow up – N/A
- All no and limited assurance reports have a revised assurance rating of substantial or reasonable on follow up – Not applicable
- Achieve an average customer satisfaction score of 4 or more – not applicable

Appendix 01: Summary of Internal Audit Work Undertaken

Assurance	Audit/Corporate Risk	Scope	Indicative Planned Quarter	Assurance Summary	Assurance Opinion
Core Financial Systems	Creditors CR1,CR6	Risk based review covering the adequacy and effectiveness of controls around the maintenance of creditors systems.	Q2	Audit briefed issued and finalised with management, start date agreed 6 November 2023.	
	Procurement CR1, CR6	Risk based review of Procurement systems to ensure controls in place for the adherence to procurement legislative requirements.	Q1	Fieldwork fully completed and closure meeting held with management to agree recommendations.	
Strategic & Operational Risks	Business Continuity CR1, CR2, CR3, CR6	Risk based review of the council's arrangements for business continuity.	Q2	Audit briefed issued and finalised with management, start date agreed 13 November 2023.	
	Corporate Policy Management CR1, CR3, CR4, CR5, CR6	Risk based review of the council's arrangements for policy development, update and change. Incorporating reporting and approval requirements.	Q3	Audit briefed issued and finalised with management, start date agreed 20 November 2023.	
	Taxi Licences CR3, CR4, CR6	Risk based review of the council's management arrangements for taxi licensing across the Borough, ensuring all checks both individual and vehicle are carried out and completed.	Q3	Audit briefed issued and finalised with management, start date to be agreed but proposed date in February 2024.	


Assurance	Audit	Scope	Planned Quarter	Assurance Summary	Assurance Opinion
	Community Safety CR3, CR4, CR6	Risk based review of Community Safety arrangements at the Council.	Q3	Allocated to BDO. Audit brief and scope to be agreed with management.	
	Training & Development CR2, CR6	Risk based review looking at the Council's arrangements for training and development.	Q1	Fieldwork fully completed and closure meeting held with management to agree recommendations.	
	Safeguarding CR3, CR4, CR5, CR6	Risk based review of the Council's controls around the safeguarding to ensure all legislative requirements are met and being consistently applied.	Q4	Audit scoped and agreed with management, fieldwork started.	
	Insurance CR1	Risk based review to ensure that all insurable risks are identified and appropriately managed.	Q3	To be allocated.	
	Time recording & absence management CR2	Risk based review to ensure that time recording system is appropriately managed and that a consistent approach is maintained in respect of absence management.	Q1	<p>The Council have Reasonable controls in place to support the management of time recording and absence management processes for staff.</p> <p>Staff policies for absence management were clear and in line with our expectations, however, procedure notes on how to record time on Tensor could be improved.</p> <p>The automatic workflows set in Tensor notifies line managers for approval of absences after being completed by staff which enables these requests to be authorised in a timely manner. This was noted through our sample testing of absences.</p> <p>However, there was significant non-compliance by staff in clocking out of Tensor during their lunch break, resulting in a default 20-minute lunch break being applied. This could distort records for staff breaks or could be symptomatic of staff not taking a lunch break which could have longer term impacts on well-being. Furthermore, our analysis of Tensor data for three weeks (between March and May 2023) identified that while most staff do clock-in during usual</p>	 <p>H-0 M-3 L-0</p> <p>Reasonable Assurance</p>



			<p>business hours, there were some customer-facing departments where there were higher levels of staff starting and finishing early. We understand that this has been raised internally by the Council at Executive Leadership Team and is being monitored to ensure there is sufficient capacity during business hours to meet customer needs.</p> <p>It is important to note that this report sets out control improvement areas in relation to time recording per the risks identified in the scope. However in addition to this, it is important for senior leadership at the Council to discuss and agree the purpose of why time recording is required and what they aim to achieve from having such systems in place. This includes agreeing the culture they aim to achieve, the purpose of monitoring time, how time is monitored, actions taken as a result of this analysis and how this will be communicated to the organisation. Without setting this tone from the top, there is a risk that any control improvements will not achieve the desired change.</p>	
Shared Services CR1, CR3, CR5	Risk based review looking at key aspects of the council's shared services arrangements.	Q2	Audit briefed issued and finalised with management, start date agreed 13 November 2023.	

Assurance	Audit	Scope	Planned Quarter	Assurance Summary	Assurance Opinion
	Housing Voids CR1	Risk based review looking at Housing Void arrangements to ensure properties are appropriately managed and void periods minimised.	Q1	Audit scoped and briefed all fieldwork completed, at draft report stage.	
	Events Management Defer to 23/24	Risk based review looking at key aspects of the council's operations in relation to the management of events, to include; bidding for external events, management of internal events.	Q3	Deferred through to 2023/24.	
ICT	Remote Working	ICT review of the development of remote working solutions.	Q1-Q4	<p>There are generally good IT management and technical controls over remote working, although we have identified some risks that need to be addressed. Remote working is covered in a number of documented corporate IT policies, including Mobile Computing Policy, Acceptable Use Policy, Acceptable Use Guidance and the SMART Working Policy, which is a HR policy. Collectively the policies cover the main areas relevant to remote working, with the exception of remote access security and details on corporately approved collaboration tools. IT policies are published via Astute, a policy management system, which logs confirmation from users that policies have been read and understood. The plan was to re-issue the IT policies annually and get user confirmation, however, we found they have not been issued since they were approved in 2020.</p> <p>All remote access is subject to multi-factor authentication in accordance with good practice. We have identified some technical security weaknesses with the remote access system that provides VPN (Virtual Private Network) access to a small number of users. IT Services are aware of the issues but have no plans to address them as the system is being replaced in the next four/five months. This is accepted.</p> <p>The password policy used for authenticating remote users is the same as the one used on the internal network. A review of the policy found the minimum password length and requirement for password complexity and expiry do not comply with current good practice standards. Remote access logs are available but are not retained for a</p>	 <p>H-1 M-4 L-7</p> <p>Reasonable Assurance</p>

				<p>sufficient period of time as defined by PSN (Public Sector Network) requirements.</p> <p>Personally owned computers are allowed to connect remotely to the network but only via a virtual desktop, thus minimising security risks.</p> <p>There is an inventory of all computer equipment, including laptops, desktops and other mobile devices. A review of the inventory details found that a small number of laptops and some mobile devices do not have a designated owner assigned and hence it is not possible to confirm who they are issued to.</p> <p>All laptop computers are encrypted and a security policy is applied to mobile devices. We have identified a high risk relating to users copying data onto removable USB storage devices, such as memory sticks/flash drives. This access should be blocked to prevent personal data being copied onto insecure devices, which if lost or stolen, could result in a data breach. The password policy for personally owned mobile devices should also be strengthened and all users of personal devices should sign the Bring Your Own Device agreement.</p> <p>There are some configurations on Microsoft Teams that should be changed to further strengthen security over meetings and file sharing.</p>	
	Network Infrastructure	ICT review of the council's network infrastructure to ensure that it is maximised and 'downtime' minimised with the resolution of issues in a prompt manner by third party suppliers.	Q1-Q4	Allocated to E-Tec Business Services, to brief and scope reviews.	
Governance Fraud & Other Assurance	Disabled Facilities Grant	Assurance Statement	Q3	Assurance work required for certification sign off	
	Municipal Charities	Preparation of municipal charities accounts	Q3	2022 accounts fully completed and submitted to management.	No assurance required.
	Counter Fraud	Work to support the mitigation of fraud risk, the provision of fraud awareness training, pro-active fraud exercises and reactive investigations.	Q1-Q4	On-going	

	Annual Governance Statement	Production of the AGS	Q1-Q2	AGS fully completed and reported to Audit & Governance Committee for 2022/23.	
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Assurance	Audit	Scope	Planned Quarter	Assurance Summary	Assurance Opinion
	Annual Audit Opinion	Production of the Annual Audit Opinion	Q1-Q2	Complete	
	Management and Planning	Management, planning and assurance reporting to CMT and Audit & Governance Committee	Q1-Q4	On-going	
	Ad-hoc / Consultancy / Contingency	Contingency allocation to be utilised upon agreement of the Chief Finance Officer	Q1-Q4	On-going	
	IA QAIP and PSIAS	Review of PSIAS standards and review	Q3	Ongoing	
22/23 Planned Audits finalised	Agency Staff	Risk based review of the arrangements for appointment and monitoring of Agency Staff.		<p>The system has some good controls in place to mitigate against key risks.</p> <p>A business case is completed and approved. These were seen for all the agency staff tested. The recruitment for temporary agency staff form was completed for all staff. Agency staff personal details are obtained, and staff had undertaken an induction which included reference to the Council's code of conduct and corporate training of policies/ procedures. Training was provided either in person or through Astute. Performance was monitored by the Manager who agrees workload and hours worked prior to approval for the payment of the invoices.</p> <p>Some weaknesses were identified which included the recruitment of temporary agency staff form not being fully completed, particularly the clearance checks required to be completed by the agency. A DBS check had not been evidenced by the agency for any of the sample tested. Declaration of interest/ secondary employment forms are referred to in the code of conduct which staff are made aware of at induction. Two induction forms did not provide evidence that the code of conduct had been discussed. In addition, two booking forms/ contract for agency staff could not be located. Implementation of the recommendations in the action plan will enhance arrangements and address these risks.</p>	 <p>H-1 M-3 L-0</p> <p>Substantial Assurance</p>

Assurance	Audit	Scope	Planned Quarter	Assurance Summary	Assurance Opinion
	Recovery and Reset	Programme assurance based review of Recovery and Reset programme. Programme assurance includes programme planning, governance structure and controls, delivery, change management, RAIDD management (Risk, Action, Issue, Decision, Dependency), testing and reporting.		<p>The Council have Substantial controls in place to support the management of the Recovery and Reset Programme. As this was a key corporate programme, we would expect robust governance to support oversight and monitoring of projects.</p> <p>Support for the Recovery and Reset Programme was provided by Trueman Change, who maintained effective oversight of risks, performance and the delivery of the programme. They also developed clear reports on the progress of the Programme and individual projects to the ELT and the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Financial savings and project costs were monitored regularly and escalated through the governance structures where required. Furthermore, project initiation documentation identified the project objectives, providing tangible measures to assess the success of the Programme.</p> <p>Overall, this was a well-managed programme with robust oversight and documentation. Programme templates supported consistency for project proposals, reporting and post-implementation evaluations of projects.</p>	 <p>H-0 M-0 L-0</p> <p>Substantial Assurance</p>
	Income Management	Risk based review of the Council's controls around the management of income throughout the Council is ensure that this collected in a robust manner that accounts for monies received.		<p>We have reached the overall opinion that the Council's controls for income management, collection and reporting were Substantial.</p> <p>The Council's Financial Guidance establishes clear policies and procedures for cash handling and banking, and income collection from non-cash transactions. Our review of three departments where cash is regularly collected identified that there was compliance with these procedures, maintaining security of cash and prompt banking.</p> <p>The Finance Team perform monthly reconciliations between E-Fins (the general ledger system) and Academy (the revenues system) to ensure that council tax and NNDR payments, which are a high proportion of the Council's income, to ensure that transactions are coded correctly. Similarly, the suspense account was cleared regularly and our review of 15 suspense account transactions identified</p>	 <p>H-0 M-0 L-0</p> <p>Substantial Assurance</p>

			<p>that these were supported by sufficient backing documentation.</p> <p>The Revenues and Benefits Team produce monthly reporting on income collection and management, focused on council tax, NNDR and sundry debts. These were robust and provided comparisons to the target collection rates and the previous year.</p>	
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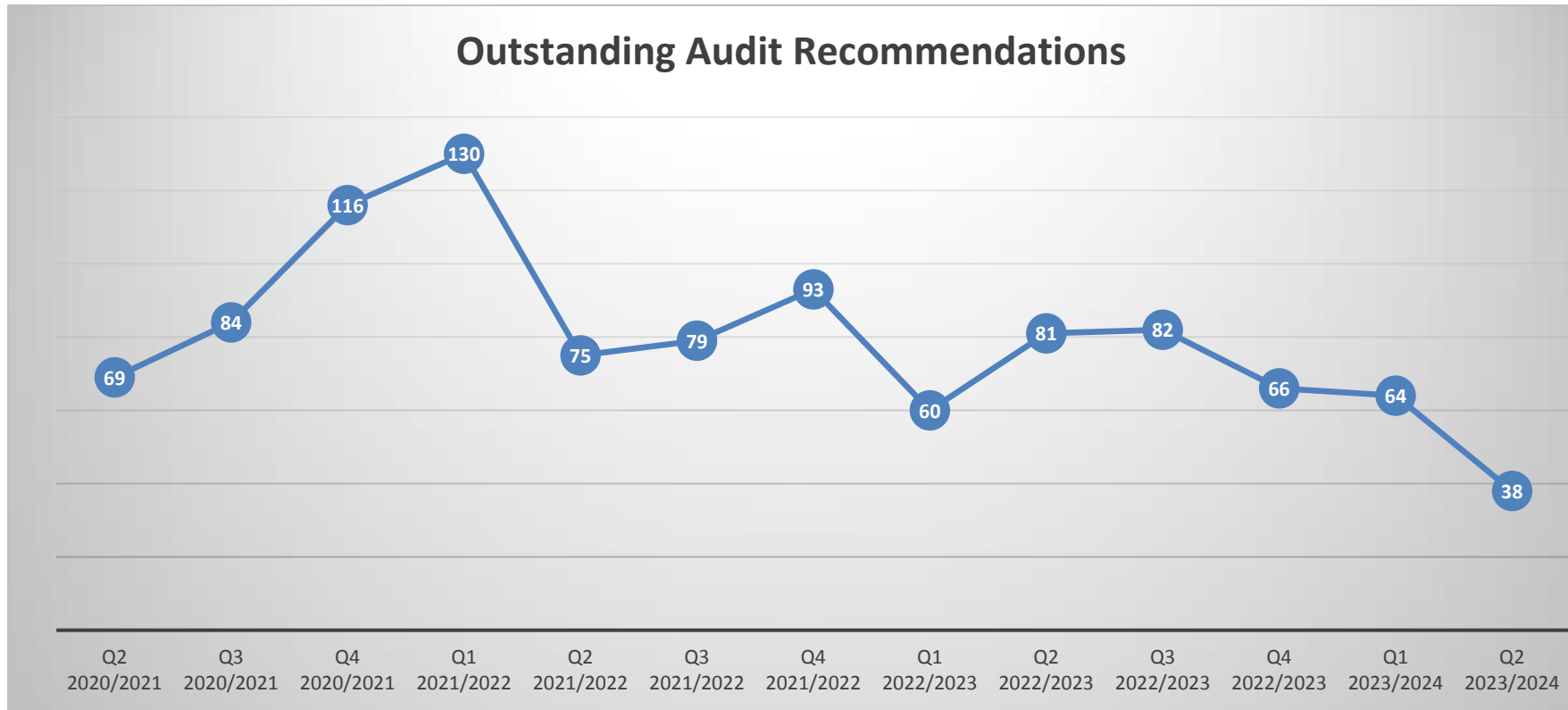
Appendix 02: Assurance and Recommendation Classifications

Overall Assurance Opinion	Definition
Substantial	There is a sound system of internal control designed to achieve the organisation's objectives. The control processes tested are being consistently applied.
Reasonable	While there is a basically sound system of internal control, there are some weaknesses which may put the organisation's objectives in this area at risk. There is a low level of non-compliance with some of the control processes applied.
Limited	Weaknesses in the system of internal controls are such as to put the organisation's objectives in this area at risk. There is a moderate level of non-compliance with some of the control processes applied.
No	Significant weakness in the design and application of controls mean that no assurance can be given that the organisation will meet its objectives in this area.

Recommendation Priority	Definition
High	High priority recommendation representing a fundamental control weakness which exposes the organisation to a high degree of unnecessary risk.
Medium	Medium priority recommendation representing a significant control weakness which exposes the organisation to a moderate degree of unnecessary risk.
Low (Housekeeping)	Low priority (housekeeping) recommendation highlighted opportunities to implement a good or better practice, to add value, improve efficiency of further reduce the organisation's exposure to risk.

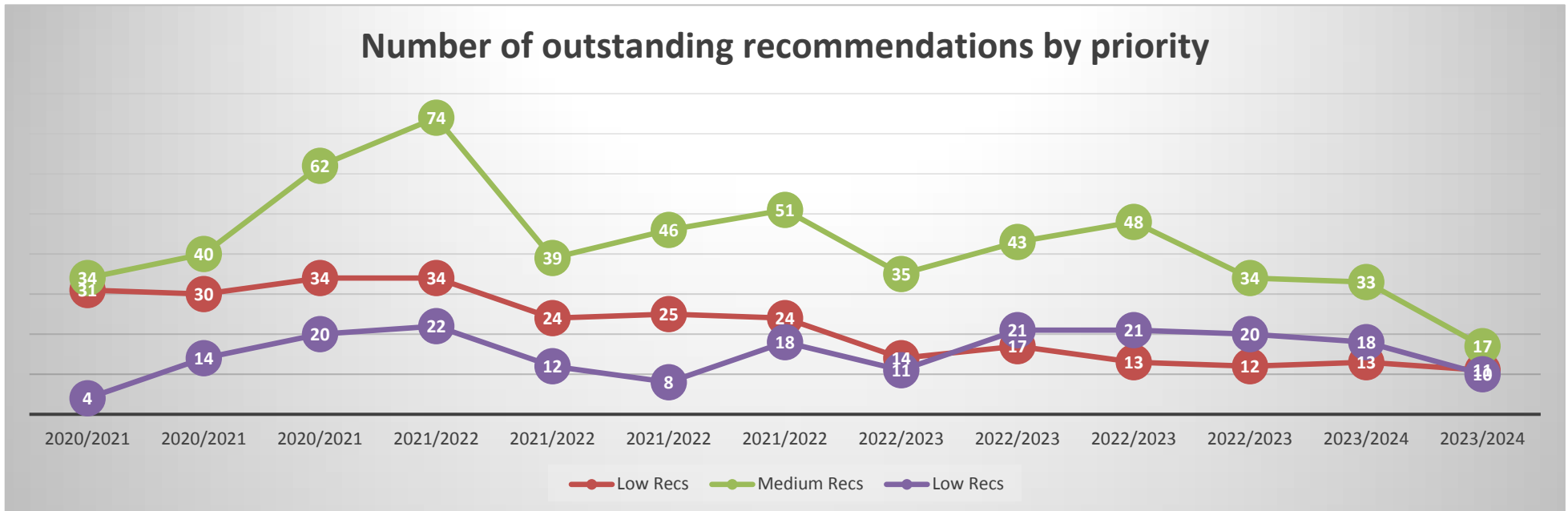
Appendix 03: Outstanding Audit Recommendations

The graph below shows the number of outstanding audit recommendations over time.



To inform the process I have included a table below outlining the number of outstanding actions whether High, Medium or Low Priority.

Below is a table showing the number of recommendations in each assurance level.



Financial Year	Quarter	No of Outstanding Recommendations	No of High Recs	No of Medium Recs	No of Low recs
2020/2021	Q1				
	Q2	69	31	34	4
	Q3	84	30	40	14
	Q4	116	34	62	20
2021/2022	Q1	130	34	74	22
	Q2	75	24	39	12
	Q3	79	25	46	8
	Q4	93	24	51	18
2022/2023	Q1	60	14	35	11
	Q2	81	17	43	21
	Q3	82	13	48	21
	Q4	66	12	34	20
2023/2024	Q1	64	13	33	18
	Q2	38	11	17	10

Analysis of current high priority outstanding audit recommendations.

Title	Recommendation	Status	Due Date	Assistant Director Responsible	Comments
Housing Repairs Policy	The policy is reviewed, updated and relevantly approved.	Overdue	30-Apr-23	Paul Weston	Awaiting confirmation of agreement of the new Schedule of Rates and Price per Property arrangements, once agreed this recommendation will be completed.
Pentana Training & Procedures	<p>a) Detailed procedures notes are developed for the use of the contract register on Pentana and made available to staff.</p> <p>b) Detailed training is provided to staff on the requirements of contract monitoring and management, how to use and update the contract register in Pentana to ensure staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and how to appropriately manage their contracts.</p>	In Progress	30-Nov-23	Joanne Goodfellow	Work is ongoing streamlining and updating data on Pentana. Draft procedures have been produced on the operation of the system and how to include contracts on the system.
Asset Management Policy/Strategy	An Asset Management Policy and Strategy covering planned maintenance should be produced, approved and communicated with stakeholders. This should also include the frequency of the stock condition survey.	Overdue	30-Nov-22	Paul Weston	Awaiting confirmation and approval by Cabinet, once received this recommendation will be completed.
PCI DSS Compliance	The PCI DSS Policy and Procedure should be reviewed and finalised. The policy should clearly define all key roles and responsibilities, including the corporate lead for PCI compliance.	In Progress	31-Dec-23	Joanne Goodfellow/Zoe Wolicki	Action Plan agreed with ICT for implementation by due date.
PCI DSS Compliance	The scope of the PCI environment should be explicitly defined, covering people, processes and technology. This should include a list of all service providers. Data flow maps may help define the PCI scope.	In Progress	31-Dec-23	Joanne Goodfellow/Zoe Wolicki	<p>Action Plan agreed with ICT for implementation by due date.</p> <p>PCI scope document mostly complete, some 3rd party info/hardware/process to be confirmed.</p>

Title	Recommendation	Status	Due Date	Assistant Director Responsible	Comments
PCI DSS Compliance	The relevant SAQ's should be identified and completed on an annual basis.	In Progress	31-Dec-23	Joanne Goodfellow/Zoe Wolicki	Action Plan agreed with ICT for implementation by due date. SAQ to be confirmed following completion of scoping.
Climate Change	Management should develop an action plan for climate change which should be approved and endorsed at a senior level. This should identify short, medium and long-term actions that have been costed. Progress against the action plan should be monitored by senior management and by members periodically. Areas that the Council may wish to consider include in its action plan are; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council housing stock and waste management • Transport/fleet management • Internal Council operations 	In Progress	31-Dec-23	Anna Miller	Financial waiver currently being to sort to progress this further. This will potential use the same consultants who undertook the initial work for the Council. ISAG completion date by end of December 2024.
Climate Change	Following the development of the action plan, management should establish a set of KPI's to monitor performance. These should be reported to management and Committees, as appropriate, to maintain effective oversight of the performance. The KPIs should be aligned to the actions agreed by Cabinet in the action plan.	In Progress	31-Dec-23	Anna Miller	Requires delivery of the action plan.
Climate Change	As part of the action plan, the Council should establish a cross department working group to meet at least monthly to monitor the action plan and oversee joint arrangements for reducing carbon emissions.	In Progress	31-Dec-23	Anna Miller	Unable to resource this area despite a recruitment campaign to employ into the Climate Change role.

Title	Recommendation	Status	Due Date	Assistant Director Responsible	Comments
Climate Change	The Council should review the financial and staff resource available for climate change to assess whether it is sufficient. Based on the lack of activity around developing an action plan and KPI's, it should consider increasing resources to support the delivery of its carbon reduction targets.	In Progress	31-Dec-23	Anna Miller	Assistant Director looking at other recruitment avenues.
GDPR	A ROPA should be developed and maintained.	Overdue	30-Jun-23	Nicola Hesketh; Robert Smith	Ongoing development required for implementation. Awaiting final information from service areas.