

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **26 June 2025**
By **Chief Internal Auditor**
Title of Report **Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion**
Decision

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1. Receive and consider the Annual Audit Report (2024/25) and the Audit Opinion (2024/25); and**
 - 2. Agree that the Committee is satisfied with the effectiveness of Internal Audit during 2024/25.**
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1. Introduction

1.1 This report presents the Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion for 2024/25 and includes:

- The annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of SDNPA’s internal control environment;
- A summary of audit coverage and outcomes for 2024/25, and
- Summary of our performance against key indicators.

1.2 This opinion contributes to the annual review of governance arrangements and the production of the Annual Governance Statement for the Authority.

2. Policy Context

2.1 The Accounts and Audit Regulations require that a “*relevant authority must undertake an effective internal audit to evaluate the effectiveness of its risk management, control and governance processes, taking into account public sector internal auditing standards or guidance*”.

2.2 The committee’s Terms of Reference requires the committee to “*meet the requirements of the Accounts and Audits regulations 2015 in respect of; conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of internal audit*”. To support this annual review, the committee is presented with information within the annual report that outlines how we comply with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) in the following areas:

- Purpose, authority and responsibility;
- Independence and objectivity;
- Proficiency and due professional care;
- Quality assurance and improvement programme;
- Managing the internal audit activity;

- Nature of work;
- Engagement planning;
- Performing the engagement;
- Communicating results;
- Monitoring progress; and
- Communicating the acceptance of risks.

2.3 Please note that PSIAS will be superseded by the Global Internal Audit Standards for the next financial year (2025/26).

3. Issues for consideration

3.1 The purpose of this report is to give an opinion on the adequacy of the South Downs National Park Authority’ control environment as a contribution to the proper economic, efficient, and effective use of resources. The report covers the audit work completed in the year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 in accordance with the Internal Audit Strategy 2024/25.

3.2 It is a management responsibility to establish and maintain internal control systems and to ensure that resources are properly applied, risks appropriately managed and outcomes achieved.

3.3 The Internal Audit Strategy and Plan, which was approved by Policy & Resources Committee on 29th February 2024, provides a key mechanism for providing assurance that the Authority’s internal control, risk management, and governance arrangements are effective.

3.4 Consultations on the Internal Audit Plan continued throughout the year with the Chief Finance Officer and the Chief Executive. For 2024/25 there was one agreed amendment to the approved Internal Audit plan, to replace the Strategic Objectives Review with an Asset Management audit. This was approved by the Policy & Resources Committee at the June 2024 meeting.

3.5 All audits were completed by the financial year end.

3.6 Our Annual Report is attached at Appendix I.

3.7 Based upon the Internal Audit work undertaken, our overall opinion is that Reasonable Assurance can be provided and that an effective system of internal control is in place at SDNPA for the financial year ended 31 March 2025.

3.8 During the 2024/25 financial year, we have seen an increased number of high and medium priority actions which aren’t implemented within agreed timescales.

4. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No. The Internal Audit plan should be delivered within the agreed audit fee.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The Internal Audit Service is provided through a contract with Brighton & Hove City Council which formed part of a wider procurement of financial services.

Implication	Yes*/No
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	All PMP Outcomes and Corporate plan objectives are considered as part of the annual audit plan process.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	Audit clients identified as appropriate.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	This report doesn't directly contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	No
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes – there are no equalities issues arising from this update report. Equalities considerations are also taken into individual audit reviews as appropriate.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	No
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	No, but the service includes the provision of advice and investigation of frauds and irregularities when required.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	No, but individual audits consider health and safety risks where appropriate.
Are there any Data Protection implications?	No, but individual audits consider GDPR issues where appropriate.

5. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 5.1 Internal Audit has an important role to play in relation to effective risk management for the organisation. The SDNPA risk register is considered when developing the Internal Audit Strategy and Plan and the planning of individual audit reviews. Audit review and testing of controls are orientated towards these risks plus the operational controls within individual systems and services.

AMANDA CRAIG

Principal Auditor

South Downs National Park Authority

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Appendices: I. Annual Audit Report and Opinion 2024/25

SDNPA Consultees: Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer; Legal Services, Head of Governance; Head of Finance & Corporate Services

External Consultees: None

Background Documents: Internal Audit Strategy and Plan 2024/25
Individual audit reports
Internal Audit Progress reports to Policy and Resources Committee

Appendix 1



**INTERNAL AUDIT
ANNUAL REPORT & OPINION
2024/2025**



1. Internal Control and the Role of Internal Audit

1.1 All local authorities must make proper provision for internal audit in line with the 1972 Local Government Act (S151) and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The full role and scope of the Internal Audit Service is set out within our Internal Audit Charter.

1.2 For clarity, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) is an “authority” by virtue of section 2 and schedule 2 to the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. The Internal Audit service is provided by Orbis Internal Audit, through an external contract with Brighton & Hove City Council as part of the Orbis Partnership.

1.3 It is a management responsibility to establish and maintain internal control systems and to ensure that resources are properly applied, risks appropriately managed and outcomes achieved.

1.4 Annually the Chief Internal Auditor is required to provide an overall opinion on the Authority’s internal control environment, risk management arrangements and governance framework to support the Annual Governance Statement.

2. Delivery of the Internal Audit Plan

2.1 The Authority’s Internal Audit Strategy and Plan is updated each year based on a combination of management’s assessment of risk (including that set out within the risk registers) and our own risk assessment of the Authority’s major systems and other auditable areas. The process of producing the plan involves consultation with a range of stakeholders to ensure that their views on risks and current issues, within individual departments and corporately, are identified and considered.

2.2 In accordance with the audit plan for 2024/25, a programme of audits were carried out and, in accordance with best practice, this programme was reviewed during the year. For 2024/25 there was one change to the audit plan that was approved by the Policy & Resources Committee on 27 June 2024. The change included the removal of the previously agreed Strategic Objectives Review, and the inclusion of an Asset Management review.

3. Audit Opinion

3.1 No assurance can ever be absolute; however, based on the internal audit work completed, the Chief Internal Auditor can provide **Reasonable¹Assurance** that the South Downs National Park Authority has in place an adequate and effective framework of governance, risk management, and internal control for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

3.2 Further information on the reasons for forming this opinion is provided in the basis of opinion section below.

¹ This opinion is based on the activities set out in this report. It is therefore important to emphasise that it is not possible or practicable to audit all activities of the Authority within a single year.

3.3 Where improvements in controls are required as a result of any of our work, we have agreed appropriate remedial action with management.

4. Basis of Opinion

4.1 The opinion and the level of assurance given takes into account:

- All audit work completed during 2024/25;
- Follow up of actions from previous audits;
- Management’s response to the findings and development of agreed actions;
- Ongoing advice and liaison with management;
- Effects of significant changes in the Authority’s systems;
- The extent of resources available to deliver the audit plan; and
- Quality of the internal audit service’s performance.

4.2 During the 2024/25 financial year, we have seen an emerging theme, with the increased number of high and medium agreed actions not being implemented in-line with the target implementation dates.

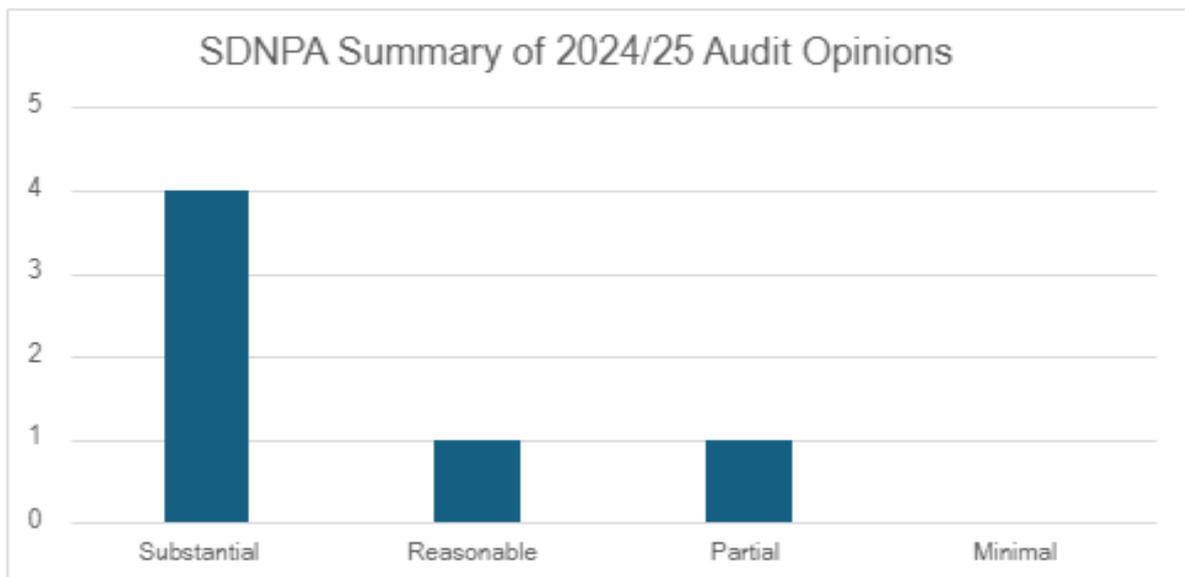
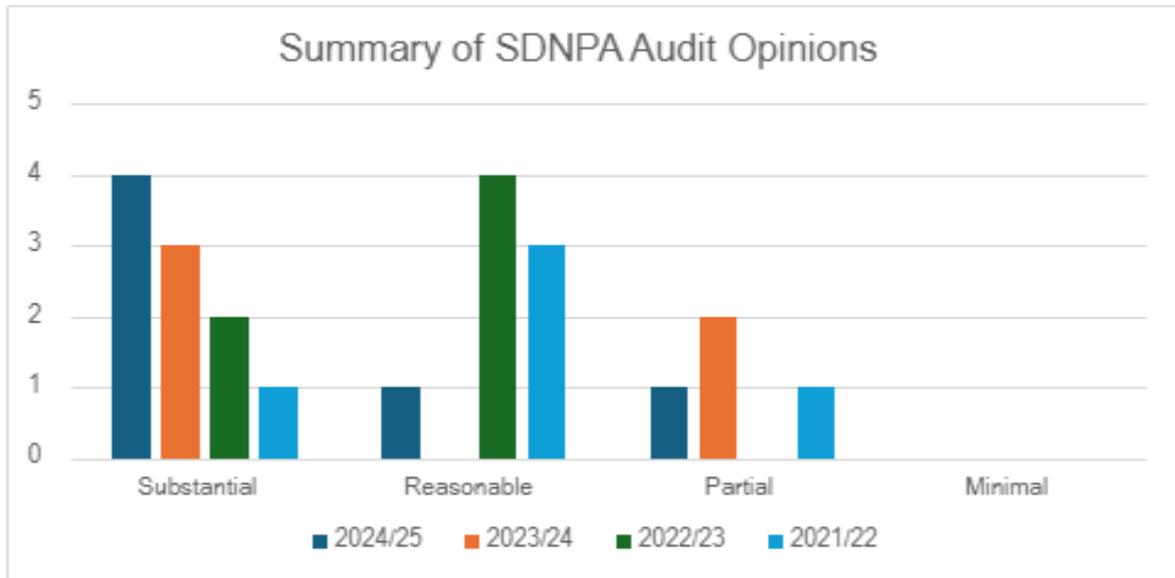
4.3 No limitations have been placed on the scope of Internal Audit or our work during 2024/25.

5. Key Internal Audit Issues for 2024/25

5.1 The overall audit opinion should be read in conjunction with the key issues set out in the following paragraphs. These issues, and the overall opinion, should be taken into account when preparing and approving the Annual Governance Statement.

5.2 The internal audit plan is delivered each year, the bulk of our work is delivered through formal reviews with standard audit opinions, with direct support for projects and new system initiatives, grant audits and ad-hoc advice where appropriate. The following graphs provide a summary of the outcomes from all audits finalised over the past four years:

Summary of Audit Opinions



5.3 A full listing of all completed audits and opinions for the year is included in Appendix B, along with an explanation of each of the assurance levels. The results of all audit work completed are reported to both the Senior Leadership Team and the Policy & Resources Committee throughout the year.

EU Grant Claim Certification

5.4 During 2024/25, we have not been asked to certify any grant claims, however, we will continue to do so as and when requested.

Amendments to the Audit Plan

5.5 In accordance with proper professional practice identified within the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), the Internal Audit plan for the year was kept under regular

review to ensure that the service continued to focus its resources in the highest priority areas based on an assessment of risk.

5.6 As referenced previously, there was one amendment to the Internal Audit plan required during 2024/25.

6. Internal Audit Performance

6.1 Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), replaced on 1 April 2025 by new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS), required the Internal Audit service to be reviewed annually against the Standards, supplemented with a full and independent external assessment at least every five years. The following paragraphs provide a summary of our performance during 2024/25, including the results of our latest independent PSIAS assessment, an update on our Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme and the year end results against our agreed targets. This information can be used by the Policy and Resources Committee in discharging their requirement to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit.

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS)

6.2 The Standards cover the following aspects of internal audit, all of which were independently assessed during 2022 by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA):

- Purpose, authority and responsibility;
- Independence and objectivity;
- Proficiency and due professional care;
- Quality assurance and improvement programme;
- Managing the internal audit activity;
- Nature of work;
- Engagement planning;
- Performing the engagement;
- Communicating results;
- Monitoring progress; and
- Communicating the acceptance of risks.

6.3 The completed assessment incorporated a full validation of our own comprehensive self-assessment against the standards, together with interviews with key stakeholders from across all the Orbis partner councils and discussions with Internal Audit team members.

6.4 Orbis IA were assessed as achieving the highest level of conformance available against professional standards with no areas of non-compliance identified, and therefore no formal recommendations for improvement arising. In summary, the service was assessed as:

Excellent in:

- Reflection of the Standards
- Focus on performance, risk and adding value

Good in:

- Operating with efficiency

- Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme

Satisfactory in:

- Coordinating and maximising assurance

6.5 As previously reported to the Policy and Resources Committee, Orbis Internal Audit has been assessed as achieving the highest level of conformance available against professional standards, with no areas of non-compliance identified. Our most recent self-assessment against the standards in 2023 found that this continued, with only minor areas for improvement identified. Work is currently underway to complete an updated self assessment against the new global standards which will be reported to committee during 2025/26.

Internal Quality Review

6.6 In addition to the independent external assessment, and the annual self-assessment against the PSIAS standard, our own internal quality review of a sample of SDNPA audit assignments conducted found no major areas of non-compliance with our internal processes.

Key Service Targets

6.7 Performance against our previously agreed service targets is set out in Appendix A. Overall, client satisfaction levels remain high, demonstrated through the results of our post audit questionnaires, discussions with key stakeholders throughout the year and annual consultation meetings with Chief Officers.

6.8 We have completed 100% of the 2024/25 audit plan.

6.9 The majority of all high and medium priority actions due in the 2024/25 financial year have now been implemented.

6.10 Internal Audit will continue to liaise with the external auditors to ensure that the Authority obtains maximum value from the combined audit resources available.

6.11 In addition to this annual summary, Policy and Resource Committee will continue to receive performance information on Internal Audit throughout the year as part of our quarterly progress reports and corporate performance monitoring arrangements.

Appendix A

Internal Audit Performance Indicators 2024/25

Aspect of Service	Orbis IA Performance Indicator	Target	RAG Score	Actual Performance
Quality	Annual Audit Plan agreed by Audit Committee	By end April	G	2024/25 Internal Audit Strategy and Plan approved by Policy & Resources Committee on 29 th February 2024.
	Annual Audit Report and Opinion	By end July	G	2024/25 Internal Audit Report & Opinion produced and presented to Policy & Resources Committee on 26 th June 2025.
	Customer Satisfaction Levels	90% satisfied	G	98% - Orbis Wide Customer Satisfaction survey results.
Productivity and Process Efficiency	Audit Plan – completion to draft report stage	90%	G	100% of 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan completed.
Compliance with Professional Standards	Public Sector Internal Audit Standards	Conforms	G	<p>Dec 2022 - External Quality Assurance completed by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA). Orbis Internal Audit was assessed as achieving the highest level of conformance available against professional standards with no areas of non-compliance identified, and therefore no formal recommendations for improvement arising. In summary the service was assessed as:</p> <p>Excellent in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection of the Standards - Focus on performance, risk, and adding value <p>Good in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Operating with efficiency

Aspect of Service	Orbis IA Performance Indicator	Target	RAG Score	Actual Performance
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme Satisfactory in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinating and maximising assurance
	Relevant legislation such as the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act	Conforms	G	No evidence of non-compliance identified.
Our staff	Professionally Qualified/Accredited	80%	G	90% ²

The following Key Performance Indicator is not wholly owned by Internal Audit, but demonstrate improvement in the internal control framework, as influenced by Internal Audit:

Aspect of Service	Orbis IA Performance Indicator	Target	RAG Score	Actual Performance
Outcome and degree of influence	Implementation of management actions agreed in response to audit findings	95% for high and medium priority agreed actions	R	66.6% of all medium and high priority actions falling due in the past 12 months have been implemented.

² Includes Part Qualified Staff

Summary of Opinions for Internal Audit Reports Issued During 2024/25

(Explanation of assurance levels provided at the bottom of this document)

Substantial Assurance:

- Creditors/ Accounts Payable
- Health & Safety
- Payroll
- Main Accounting & Budget Management

Reasonable Assurance:

- Asset Management

Partial Assurance:

- Financial Management of Project Budgets (previously named Finance Project Reporting)

Minimal Assurance:

- None

Other Audit Activity Undertaken During 2024/25

- None

Audit Opinions and Definitions

Opinion	Definition
Substantial Assurance	Controls are in place and are operating as expected to manage key risks to the achievement of system or service objectives.
Reasonable Assurance	Most controls are in place and are operating as expected to manage key risks to the achievement of system or service objectives.
Partial Assurance	There are weaknesses in the system of control and/or the level of non-compliance is such as to put the achievement of the system or service objectives at risk.
Minimal Assurance	Controls are generally weak or non-existent, leaving the system open to the risk of significant error or fraud. There is a high risk to the ability of the system/service to meet its objectives.

