

Subject	Corporate Assurance Progress Report	Status	For Publication
Report to	Audit and Governance Committee	Date	07/03/2024
Report of	Head of Corporate Assurance		
Equality Impact Assessment	Not Required		
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1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Corporate Assurance Team activity completed, and the key issues arising from it, for the period 27th November 2023 to 18th February 2024.
- 1.2 To provide information regarding the performance of the Corporate Assurance Team during the period.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members consider the report and as necessary request further information and/ or explanations from the Corporate Assurance Team or Management.**

3 Background Information

- 3.1 The Audit and Governance Committee has responsibility for reviewing the adequacy of the Authority's corporate governance arrangements, including those relating to internal control and risk management. The reports issued by the Corporate Assurance Team are a key source of assurance contributing to the evidence the Committee receives to assure them that the internal control environment is operating as intended.
- 3.2 The Head of Corporate Assurance produces an Annual Report (reported into the July Committee meeting), which provides her overall opinion on the adequacy of the Authority's control environment and compliance with it during the year.

4. Implications

- 4.1 The proposals outlined in this report have the following implications:

Financial	The cost of the services of the Corporate Assurance Team is contained within the budget and is periodically invoiced.
Human Resources	n/a
ICT	n/a
Legal	Section 73 of the Local Government Act 1985 requires the Authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs; and Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the Authority to maintain an adequate and effective system of Internal Audit (Corporate Assurance) of its accounting records and of its system of internal control. This report does not contain any information which is exempt under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
Procurement	n/a

Sharon Bradley CMIIA
Head of Corporate Assurance

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Background papers and other sources of reference include: Corporate Assurance Charter 2021-24, Annual Plan 2023-24, Individual Assurance Reports, MK Insight (Audit Management System), Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2017	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Westgate Plaza, Barnsley.



South Yorkshire Pensions Authority Corporate Assurance Progress Report

Audit and Governance Committee

7th March 2024

The matters arising in this report are only those which came to our attention during our corporate assurance work and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist, or of all the improvements that may be required. Whilst every care has been taken to ensure that the information provided in this report is as accurate as possible, based on the information provided and documentation reviewed, no complete guarantee or warranty can be given with regard to the advice and information contained herein. Our work does not provide absolute assurance that material errors, loss or fraud do not exist.

CORPORATE ASSURANCE PROGRESS REPORT 27th November 2023 to 18th February 2024

Purpose of this report

This report has been prepared to update the Committee on our activity for the period 27th November 2023 to 18th February 2024, bringing to your attention matters that are relevant to your responsibilities as members of the Authority's Audit and Governance Committee. The report also provides information regarding the performance of the Corporate Assurance Team during the period.

Corporate Assurance Plan Progress

The following table shows the progress of the corporate assurance plan up to the 18th February 2024, analysed by the number of planned assignments and days delivered by Service Area.

To date, we have delivered 73% of the total planned days (84% of the planned days not incl. contingency). The 2023/24 plan (as in previous years) is profiled more heavily towards the end of the financial year and the Corporate Assurance Team has profiled its resources accordingly. As in previous years, there are likely to be a number of pieces of work that will be completed in the new financial year.

Position as at 18th February 2024 - Plan Days Delivered

2023/24 Plan	Original Plan Days	Revised Plan Days	Actual days (% of revised days)
Finance	92	92	79.6 (47%)
Pensions Admin	18	18	19.6 (12%)
Authority Wide	89	69	44.8 (27%)
Investments	10	10	9.2 (5%)
Corporate Services	20	10	14.6 (9%)
Contingency	2	32*	
Chargeable Planned Days	231	231	168 (73%)

* Refer to plan changes below.

Position as at 18th February 2024 – Planned Assignments With Report

	Planned assignments in year	Assignments to be completed in period	Actual assignments completed in period	Actual assignments completed to date
Finance & Resources	8	4	3*	7
Pensions Admin	3	0	0	3
Investments	1	0	0	1
Corporate Services	1	1	0*	0
Service Wide	3	0	0	1
Total	16	5	3	12

* The Training & Development Appraisal Process and Investment Income reviews are currently at draft report stage, for discussion and agreement with management.

Changes to the 2023/24 Corporate Assurance Plan

At the beginning of the year provision is made in the allocation of audit resources for unplanned work, through a contingency. As requests for audit work are received, or more time is required for jobs or changes in priorities are identified, time is allocated from this contingency. There have been three plan changes during the period:-

- Deferred - Authority's Risk Management arrangements – a compliance review was planned but the system will not have been implemented and embedded sufficiently in this financial year to enable that review to be undertaken.
- Deferred - Business Continuity Planning (BCP) – a compliance review was planned but the BCP needs to be revised and implemented by Management and then embedded to enable this review to be undertaken.
- Deferred - Staff Payroll & HR System – Design & Implementation – delays in procuring the system.

Final Corporate Assurance Reports

The following reports have been issued during the period.

Assurance Assignment	Assurance Opinion	Number of recommendations raised:			Total	Agreed
		High	Medium	Low		
Finance: Fund Contributions	Substantial	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
Finance: Accounting for Deals	Substantial	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
Finance: UPM Payroll	Substantial	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
Total		0	0	0	N/A	N/A

Other Corporate Assurance work undertaken

Assurance Activity	Description
Follow-up of Agreed Management Actions (AMAs)	Regular work undertaken to follow-up agreed management actions.
Planning, Liaison and Feedback	Meeting and corresponding with Senior Management regarding progress of assurance work, future planning, and general client liaison.
Advice	General advice to services regarding controls, risk, or governance.
Audit and Governance Committee Support	Time taken in the preparation of Audit and Governance Committee reports, Member training (as required), general support and development.
National Fraud Initiative	Time allocated to provide assurance that the NFI data matching exercises have been undertaken.
Pentana Risk System – Design & Implementation	Time allocated to provide advice, support and guidance to management during the design and implementation stages of the internal control framework for the risk management system.
Data Protection / UK GDPR – Advisory	To provide advice in a critical friend role that the Authority is complying with the Data Protection and UK GDPR regulatory

Assurance Activity	Description
	requirements.
Performance Management Framework	To provide advice, support and guidance to management during the design and implementation of the Performance Management Framework.
Project / Programme Management	To provide advice, support and guidance to the newly appointed Project Manager, during the development and implementation of a project / project management framework and to provide assurance with regards to the project management arrangements of one project to be delivered during 2023/24 to ensure lessons learned are identified and considered for future projects.

Work in Progress

The following table provides a summary of the audits in progress at the time of producing this report:

Directorate- Assurance Assignment	Pre Planning	Work in Progress	Draft Report
Finance: Investment Income			✓
Finance: Purchase to Pay		✓	
Service Wide: Training & Development Appraisal Process			✓
Service Wide: Cybersecurity		✓	

Follow-up of Corporate Assurance Report Management Actions

The following table shows the status of agreed management actions due for completion during the period:

Management Action Classification	Followed up	Not Yet Due	Closed - Implemented	Revised target date agreed	Awaiting Update From Mgt
High	2	0	1	1	0
Medium	18	2	7	9	0
TOTAL	20	2	8	10	0

The Corporate Assurance Team continues to get good co-operation from management including the Senior Management Team (SMT) and as such is able to closely monitor any implications that may arise from a delay in the implementation of management actions.

Corporate Assurance Team performance indicators and performance feedback for 2023/24 (Quarter 3)

The Corporate Assurance Team's performance against a number of indicators is summarised below. The Service uses a range of performance indicators to monitor operational efficiency. Quarterly performance of the function is satisfactory and all PIs for the year are either on or exceed target levels.

Ref.	Indicator	Frequency of Report	Target 2023/24	This Period	Year to Date
1.	<u>Customer Perspective:</u>				
1.1	Percentage of questionnaires received noted "good" or "very good" relating to work concluding with an assurance report.	Quarterly	95%	100%	100%
2.	<u>Business Process Perspective:</u>				
2.1	Percentage of final assurance reports issued within 10 working days of completion and agreement of the draft assurance report.	Quarterly	80%	100%	100%
2.2	Percentage of chargeable time against total available.	Quarterly	73%	60%	62%*
2.3	Average number of days lost through sickness per FTE	Quarterly	6 days	7 days	12.7 days*
3.	<u>Continuous Improvement Perspective:</u>				
3.1	Personal development plans for staff completed within the prescribed timetable.	Annual	100%	100%	100%
4.	<u>Financial Perspective:</u>				
4.1	Total costs v budget.	Quarterly	Within budget	Yes	Yes

* The chargeable time indicator in Q1, Q2 & Q3 has been impacted upon by the profile of annual and statutory leave, which will level out throughout the year and the impact of sickness absences. These absences have not impacted on the delivery of the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority Plan.

Performance indicator definitions and supporting information

PI Ref	Indicator	Comments
1.1	Percentage of favourable questionnaire responses received (noted "good" or "very good") relating to work concluding with an assurance report.	Client Sponsor and Operational Lead Questionnaires are circulated at the end of each piece of work. The questionnaires ask specific questions covering the effectiveness of pre-planning, communication, timing, and quality of the assurance report/output. An overall assessment is sought as to the overall value of the work. This is the answer used for this PI. All questionnaires are analysed in detail to ensure all aspects of the assurance process are monitored and improved.

PI Ref	Indicator	Comments
2.1	Percentage of final assurance reports issued within 10 working days of completion and agreement of the draft assurance report.	This is an operational PI to ensure the timely issue of final reports. This PI is influenced by the availability of Senior Corporate Assurance staff to clear the report and any issues the Service's quality assessment process highlights along with the availability of the client sponsor.
2.2	Percentage of chargeable time against total available.	A key operational measure of the 'productivity' of the Corporate Assurance Team taking into account allowances for administration, general management, training, and other absences. This PI will reflect the % chargeable time of staff in post, net of vacancies.
2.3	Average number of days lost through sickness per FTE.	A corporate PI to measure the effectiveness of good absence / attendance management.
3.1	Personal development plans for staff completed within the prescribed timetable.	The Corporate Assurance Team place a high level of importance on staff training and continuous development and are committed to ensure all staff have their own training plans derived from the personal development plan process.
4.1	Total costs v budget.	This is a simple overall measure to note whether the Service's expenditure for the year has been kept within the budget.

Head of Corporate Assurance's Opinion

The Head of Corporate Assurance must deliver an annual assurance opinion and report that can be used by the organisation to inform its Annual Governance Statement. The annual corporate assurance opinion must conclude on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's framework of governance, risk management and control.

At this point in the year, based on work completed to date, it is anticipated that a **Reasonable** (positive) overall assurance opinion will be provided.

Corporate Assurance Contacts

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KEY TO CORPORATE ASSURANCE GRADINGS AND CLASSIFICATION OF IMPLICATIONS

1. Classification of Implications (impact)

High	Requires immediate action – imperative to ensuring the objectives of the system under review are met.
Medium	Requiring action necessary to avoid exposure to a significant risk to the achievement of the objectives of the system under review.
Low	Action is advised to enhance control or improve operational efficiency.

2. Assurance Opinions

	Level	Control Adequacy	Control Application
POSITIVE OPINIONS	Substantial	Robust framework of controls exist that are likely to ensure that objectives will be achieved.	Controls are applied continuously or with only minor lapses.
	Reasonable	Sufficient framework of key controls exist that are likely to result in objectives being achieved, but the control framework could be stronger.	Controls are applied but with some lapses.
NEGATIVE OPINIONS	Limited	Risk exists of objectives not being achieved due to the absence of key controls in the system.	Significant breakdown in the application of key controls.
	None	Significant risk exists of objectives not being achieved due to the absence of controls in the system.	Fundamental breakdown in the application of all or most controls.