Objective	Progress in 2025-26
Aligning internal audit coverage to key strategic objectives and risks	
Our work plans will be developed and reviewed in consultation with senior management and the Audit Committees to ensure they are closely aligned to the core objectives and risks of the councils.	Internal Audit Plans are developed through consultation with senior management and a structured risk assessment process (Audit Needs Assessment), ensuring alignment with strategic objectives and key risks for each council. A phased approach was introduced in 2022-23, with Q1-Q2 Plans approved in March and updated Plans for Q3-Q4 agreed in July. This has continued during 2025-26, improving responsiveness and enabling internal audit resources to be targeted at the highest-risk areas. The bi-annual audit planning process includes engagement with Directorate and Divisional Management Teams across both councils, capturing service-level risks and other sources of assurance. This information is used to inform the Audit Needs Assessment, during which all auditable areas are assessed using a structured scoring methodology across six risk categories, namely inherent risk, control risk, reputational risk, financial risk, fraud risk, and strategic priority, with higher-risk areas prioritised for audit coverage. Plans are kept under continuous review to respond to emerging risks, changing priorities and resource availability. Plans, including revisions to previously agreed Plans, are approved by senior management and the respective Audit Committees.
Internal audit services will be scheduled, and the scope defined in consultation with key clients to ensure we focus on the right areas, while maintaining independence and objectivity.	Internal Audit Plans focus on high-risk areas identified through the Audit Needs Assessment, while also considering service impact. Details of proposed audits are shared with services to identify and avoid peak operational periods and minimise disruption. A high-level scope for each audit is established during the bi-annual audit planning process, with detailed Terms of Reference agreed with services at the start of each audit, following a more detailed risk assessment of the specific activity under review. This ensures audits remain focused on key risks while maintaining independence and objectivity.
Internal audit will lead an assurance mapping exercise to identify gaps and/or overlaps in assurance provision, and coordinate services to ensure adequate coverage, while minimising duplication of effort with other providers of assurance and optimise the use of the internal audit resource.	Progress has been limited due to competing priorities, including finalising a backlog of legacy audits from 2024-25 arising from previous staffing shortages, as well as the Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud undertaking organisation-wide assessments linked to the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 and the new offence of failure to prevent fraud. Assurance mapping remains a priority. Targeted training has been identified, and a structured programme of work will follow its completion.

Optimizing our workforce planning and talent management processes, ensuring we can attract, develop, and retain internal audit staff	
We will employ and develop a strong mix of people with different skills, technical expertise and we will match those people to the work plans to make the best use of our staff.	Staff turnover during 2024-25 was exceptionally high and included two retirements and a resignation from the Internal Audit team, resulting in a loss of experience. However, introduction of the Internal Audit Career Progression Framework and creation of a pathway for the development of Trainee Internal Auditors, has enabled the team to return to its full establishment. The team brings a diverse range of skills and experience, supported by apprenticeships / professional qualifications and structured on-the-job training. Individual audits are allocated to ensure the most effective use of available resources, with careful consideration given to both technical capability and development needs, as well as any declared conflicts of interest. This approach supports the delivery of the Internal Audit Plans while also enabling staff progression and capacity building within the team.
We will be a great place to work with a motivated, productive, and aspirational workforce.	Flexible working and a supportive team culture continue to aid wellbeing and productivity. Staff are supported individually through regular one-to-one meetings, performance appraisals and supervision of work, with additional opportunities for wider team engagement through regular team meetings and established communication channels. Recent changes in staffing have brought renewed energy and contributed to improved performance. This is evidenced by plan delivery outturns reaching 87% (Medway) and 94% (Gravesham) in 2025-26, compared to 63% and 71% in 2024-25. These improvements have been achieved alongside finalisation of legacy audits, demonstrating increased capacity, motivation, and productivity within the team.
We will work to embed the Internal Audit Career Progression Framework and are committed to investing in staff development through training and other opportunities, including professional qualification training and continuing professional development.	The Internal Audit Career Progression Framework has significantly improved recruitment and retention, with applications for advertised vacancies increasing substantially following its introduction (by 717%). The Framework supports staff to develop at their own pace through apprenticeships / professional qualifications, practical experience and structured on-the-job training. Staff are actively progressing through the Framework, strengthening capability and resilience within the team.
We will create succession plans to promote talent development through targeted training, mitigate risks associated with the departure of key staff and identify paths for leadership transition.	Initial succession planning arrangements have been established, including the identification of key roles and succession routes within the existing team. These arrangements will be developed further using HR tools to identify additional training needs and/or opportunities to enhance the development pathways already defined in the Internal Audit Career Progression Framework. This will help strengthen resilience and mitigate the risks associated with future staff turnover.

Delivering a positive impact	
We will build strong, positive, professional relationships with senior management, the Audit Committees and other key stakeholders across both councils and engage them in the development of our strategies and work plans.	The Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud continues to engage with senior management and Members to strengthen visibility and input into strategic and audit planning. Engagement with services underpins both bi-annual and individual audit planning. Attendance at Directorate and Divisional Management Team meetings supports identification of emerging risks and reinforces the role of internal audit. Service managers are also invited to team meetings, improving understanding of service activity and informing audit planning.
We will raise the profile of the work of internal audit to ensure senior management other key stakeholders are aware of the services available.	The role of the internal audit continues to be promoted through engagement with services and clear reporting to senior management and Members. Survey results in 2025 showed a slight dip in satisfaction, reflecting the impact of staffing shortages in 2024-25. However, this was accompanied by increased qualitative positive feedback. In 2025-26, actions have included delivering regular training sessions for operational managers, and updating the information available on the staff intranet, including the Internal Audit Charter, and promoting this as part of Internal Audit Awareness Month. The 2026 survey (10 responses) showed improved satisfaction, with an average score of 8.7 compared to 7.71 in 2025.
We will seek to be involved in key projects and working groups at both councils to provide advice on governance, risk management and control matters and also to promote our work and the services we can provide to a wider audience.	Representatives from the team continue to participate in a number of corporate working groups across both councils, including the Security Information Governance Group (Medway), the Information Governance Group (Gravesham), and the Risk Management Working Groups of both councils. The Head of Internal Audit also attends the Climate Change Advisory Board at Medway, supporting governance and oversight in these key areas. The team has also provided independent validation of key actions within Medway's Financial Improvement and Transformation (FIT) Plan, offering Corporate Management Team assurance over completion, and has been represented on Gravesham's Corporate Improvement Team. In addition, the team continues to promote and deliver advisory services, including providing advice, insight and foresight on governance, risk management, and control matters in relation to both corporate initiatives and specific projects. This proactive involvement supports the councils in managing risks effectively and further enhances the value and impact of internal audit. As both councils prepare for local government reorganisation, there will be an increased emphasis on the provision of advisory services to support the design and transition of governance, risk management and control arrangements.
We will embrace the use of new and advancing technology to improve the efficiency of our work processes and provide deeper	The team is using Microsoft Copilot to improve efficiency in audit planning and reporting, including conducting research, carrying out risk assessments, drafting scopes and summarising findings. Use in audit testing is also being explored.

insights, to produce greater assurance.	Copilot has also been used to analyse audit work programmes and findings, supporting the development of standardised control frameworks and identification of common themes. Additional tools are being explored, including in-house meeting transcription software. Implementation of a new audit management system has been delayed but is planned for completion by the end of 2026–27.
We will share our outputs with senior management, the Audit Committees and other key stakeholders through high quality reports to maximise the positive impact of our work.	The initial findings of each audit are shared with services in a wash-up meeting on conclusion of the fieldwork, before being communicated more widely in a formal report, which is subject to robust supervisory review before issue. Timescales between fieldwork completion and report issuance remain longer than desired, due to workload pressures on senior staff. While report quality remains high, this has caused frustration for some services. Finalisation of the backlog of legacy audits has resulted in average turnaround times improving, though the volume of audits that are completed just before year-end has been identified as a pressure point, with further improvement required. Both Audit Committees continue to receive regular progress and performance reports.
We will take a balanced and pragmatic approach to our work and our reports will emphasise positive assurance alongside areas for improvement.	The team continues to emphasise balanced reporting, highlighting strengths alongside areas for improvement. There has been a shift from recommendations to agreeing management actions, supporting service engagement and the identification of practical and cost-effective improvements. Feedback from recent surveys confirms this approach is recognised positively by services. “The team are always helpful and understanding of the day-to-day work pressures, being flexible where there are competing work priorities” “I have worked at Medway for many years - and have noticed a shift from an internal audit being "feared" to being welcomed as an opportunity to improve” “My experience of the team is that they are objective, helpful and positive”
Our performance measurement and monitoring arrangements will be focussed on the aspects of the service most valued by senior management, the Audit Committees and key stakeholders of both councils.	A new approach was taken at the beginning of 2025-26 with performance measures specific to each council, such as plan delivery and action implementation, included within the Internal Audit Plans. Progress against these measures is included in update reports presented to senior management and the respective Audit Committees, with final outturns included in annual reports. Additional measures designed to evaluate the overall performance of the internal audit function, progress toward achieving the strategic objectives identified in the Internal Audit Strategy 2025-28, and the internal audit function’s pursuit of continuous improvement are contained within the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP), with performance against those measures reported annually. The QAIP, including its performance measures, were approved by senior management and the Audit Committees of both councils and remain under review to adapt to changing requirements.

We will take steps to ensure we are able to demonstrate full compliance with the Global Internal Audit Standards for our next external quality assurance (EQA) review.	The 2023 External Quality Assessment resulted in a ‘green’ opinion, indicating general conformance with the then standards. Following introduction of the Global Internal Audit Standards in January 2025, a self-assessment identified that the team were fully conformant with 46 of the 52 standards, with an action plan developed to address gaps. 11 of 14 actions have now been completed, with conformance now achieved across 49 standards and partial conformance with the remaining three. Work will continue to address outstanding and newly identified actions, including those linked to Topical Requirements. The team remains on track to achieve a ‘generally conforms’ opinion at the next external assessment.