

Title of report	Audit and Assurance Committee report to Council
Public	Public
Summary/purpose of report	To make recommendations from the Audit and Assurance Committee
Recommendations	<p>The Committee recommends that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the Council accepts that the assurance report presents a true and fair view of the SSSCs performance towards achievement of strategic objectives, financial management and risk identification and management. In particular that <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. operational performance as measured by strategic key performance indicators give confidence that the SSSC is delivering as forecasted to meet strategic objectives agreed with the Sponsor Department b. financial performance is consistent with forecasted spend and this does not present concern relating to year-end outturn of approved budget c. operational delivery and financial expenditure are consistent 2. the Council approves <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the revised Risk Register and the revised Risk Appetite Statement, effective from 1 April 2024 (at Appendices 2 and 3) 3. the Council notes <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the Committee approved the draft internal audit plan for 2024/25 b. the Committee approved the remit for the review of the rewards review project subject to some changes to discussions with Members and inclusion of matters raised by the Committee

	c. the recently appointed Members Sharon Ballingall and Edel Harris observed the meeting.
Author	Alan Baird, Chair, Audit and Assurance Committee
Link to Strategic Plan	<p>The information in this report links to:</p> <p>Outcome 1: Trusted People who use services are protected by a workforce that is fit to practise.</p> <p>Outcome 2: Skilled Our work supports the workforce to deliver high standards of professional practice.</p> <p>Outcome 3: Confident Our work enhances the confidence, competence and wellbeing of the workforce.</p> <p>Outcome 4: Valued The social work, social care and children and young people workforce is valued for the difference it makes to people's lives.</p>
Link to Risk Register	Risk 3: We fail to meet corporate governance, external scrutiny and legal obligations.
Impact assessments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was not required. 2. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) was not required. 3. A Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) was not required.
Documents attached	<p>Apx 1 - Assurance report at 31 December 2023</p> <p>Apx 2 - Revised Risk Register</p> <p>Apx 3 - Revised Risk Appetite Statement</p>
Background papers	Draft minutes of meeting of the Audit and Assurance Committee of 1 February 2024

INTRODUCTION

1. As set out in the Executive Framework Document and Scheme of Delegation, accountability for strategic oversight remains with the SSSC Council. The Council has delegated responsibility for oversight and scrutiny of achievement of operational key performance indicators, monitoring of Financial Performance and Strategic Risk Management to the Audit and Assurance Committee.
2. This report records the recommendations of the Audit and Assurance Committee to SSSC Council following the Committee's meeting of 1 February 2024.

ASSURANCE REPORT

3. The Committee reviewed the assurance report as of 31 December 2023 relating to the activities of the SSSC. Appendix 1 to this report is the assurance report considered by the Committee.

Finance

4. The Committee was advised that budget pressures continued to be a concern. The proposed pay award would affect the projected underspend and the ongoing tribunal against the Nursing and Midwifery Council is a risk factor, depending on the outcome.
5. Laura Shepherd reported on the overspends in the Digital budget amounting to £231k. These were due to a number of individual issues: Unbudgeted expenditure of £92k; Inflationary increases £51k; demand for licences £30k; increased Azure costs £29k; purchasing digital kit for Fitness to Practise panel members (brought forward).
6. It was noted that the draft budget would be presented to Council on 26 February 2024.

Strategic Performance Indicators

7. Laura Lamb advised Members that the sector 'leavers survey' due to be launched would ingather data which would assist in looking at the reasons for students leaving the sector and therefore supporting students to remain.
8. Members discussed the way in which RAG (Red, Amber, Green) status was applied to various forms of measurements and Laura Shepherd agreed to look at this as a whole across the data shared.

HR data

9. Committee noted that the staff absence data showed that absence numbers had dropped and were closer to the target rate than the previous few months.

Risk Register

10. There were no proposed changes to the Risk Register at this time and the Committee recommends approval of the Risk Register to the Council.

Assurance Map

11. Members noted the Assurance Map and noted this would be presented for review and comment quarterly as part of the assurance report.

AUDIT REPORTS

12. The Committee was presented with the audit report on Internal Workforce Planning Management Information which provided the Committee with a good level of assurance. The auditors made one recommendation concerning documenting of processes and procedures, which was agreed by management to be completed by 30 August 2024.
13. Committee was presented with a progress report from the internal auditors as well as an updated extract from the internal/external audit tracker. The audit on phase 2 of the Future Proofing Programme has been pushed back, due to the delay in legislative changes resulting in a delay of the programme launch date.
14. The Committee noted that one outstanding action from the audit on Debtors and Income was awaiting information on progress with the action required from Shared Services.
15. Committee considered the remit of the review of the governance audit on the rewards review project, which was agreed to be stopped at the Council meeting in November 2023 following a number of issues being identified and discussed. Committee Members raised a number of areas they requested to be addressed in the audit and also requested that changes be made to the audit approach to allow all Members who had any connection with the rewards review to be given an opportunity to meet with the auditor. The discussions could be both as part of a group discussion but also in individual meetings if wanted. The remit was approved subject to the changes suggested being incorporated.
16. The Committee took assurances from the auditor's reports and management's updated responses which show that action is being taken

where there are recommendations from the auditors. It also took assurance from the discussion on the rewards review project that a full review of the governance processes would be carried out resulting in a report on lessons learned and information which would be shared with staff.

DRAFT INTERNAL ANNUAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/2025

17. Committee was presented with the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25. There was discussion over priorities and after noting that travel and subsistence was an area of possible risk of fraud, approved the plan, with the provision that it may be revised should different priorities arise throughout the year.

RISK REGISTER AND RISK APPETITE STATEMENT

18. The Committee reviewed the revised Risk Register and revised Risk Appetite Statement. Committee noted that there were no changes proposed and recommended that the Council approve the Risk Register and the Risk Appetite Statement.

BENEFITS REALISATION REPORT APRIL 2023 TO JANUARY 2024

19. Committee noted and approved the benefits realised from projects which had closed between April 2023 and January 2024.
20. The Committee took assurances from the report noting that the return on investment in this reporting period was £195,976. Committee also noted that some projects provided soft benefits.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF APPROVED PROGRAMMES - ANNUAL UPDATE

21. The Committee considered a report which set out the approval and quality assurance activities carried out in the last year. The report also contained a list of the 43 programmes currently approved along with identified risks to the viability and sustainability of the courses and mitigating actions.
22. The Committee took assurances from the report that the programmes approved by the SSSC were quality assured regularly and risks identified.

CONSULTATION

23. No specific stakeholder engagement was necessary in the preparation of this report.

RISKS

24. We have an averse risk appetite to governance matters. This report gives assurances to Council that the Committee is carrying out its remit.

IMPLICATIONS

Resourcing

25. There are no resource implications arising from this report.

Compliance

26. There are no compliance implications arising from this report.

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Equalities

27. An EIA was not necessary as this report relates to internal governance matters. It is not therefore a new proposal and has no impact on people with protected characteristics.

CONCLUSION

28. This report, appendices and background minutes give assurances to Council that the Audit and Assurance Committee is carrying out its remit in accordance with the terms of reference contained in the Code of Corporate Governance.
29. The Committee requests that Council takes assurance, following consideration of the documents, that the Committee has been presented with a fair view of the operational and financial performance and risk facing the SSSC. Council is also asked to approve the Risk Register and Risk Appetite Statement and otherwise note the actions taken by Committee.