

STAFFORDSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

Internal Audit Strategy 2024/25

Presented at the ETAP meeting of: 27 February 2024 & 30 May 2024

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To the fullest extent permitted by law, RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP will accept no responsibility or liability in respect of this report to any other party.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In preparing our Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 we have worked closely with management to produce an audit programme which remains mindful of the continuing developments and challenges facing your organisation. Whilst this plan is presented for consideration by the Finance Panel, Strategic Governance Board and ETAP, we will continue to hold regular meetings with management, during the year, to deliver an internal audit programme which remains flexible and 'agile' to ensure it meets your needs in these ever changing circumstances.

The key points to note from our plan are:



2024/25 Internal Audit priorities: Internal audit activity for 2024/25 is based on analysing your corporate objectives, risk profile and risk registers as well as other factors affecting you in the year ahead, including changes within the sector. Our detailed plan for 2024/25 is included at Section 1.



Level of Resource: The level of resource required to deliver the plan is consistent with other Fire Authority clients of a similar size and with the daily rates in accordance with contract with you. We will continue to complement our audits with the use of technology when undertaking operational audits in 2024/25. This will strengthen our sampling, increasing the level of assurance provided. Refer to Appendix A.



Core Assurance: As well as reviews specifically linked to your risks, we have assigned a number of days to undertake core audit reviews linked to fundamental financial and operational systems.



'Agile' approach: Our approach to working with you has always been one where we will respond to your changing assurance needs. By employing 'agile' or a 'flexible' approach to our service delivery, we are able to change the focus of audits / audit delivery; keeping you informed of these changes in our progress papers to ETAP during the year.

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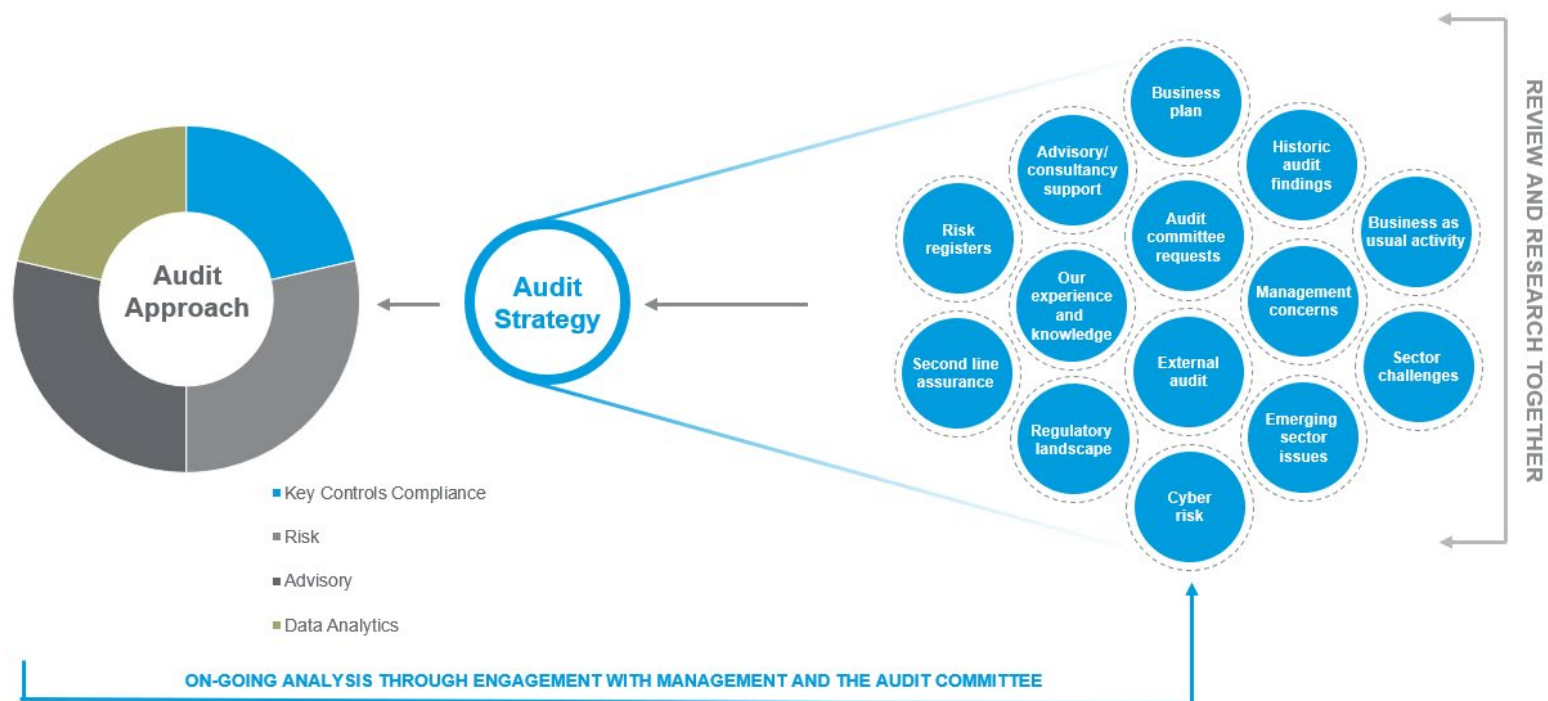
1. YOUR INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

Our approach to developing your internal audit plan is based on analysing your corporate objectives, risk profile and risk registers as well as other factors affecting Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services in the year ahead, including changes within the sector.

Risk management processes

We have evaluated your risk management processes and consider that we can place reliance on your risk registers to inform the internal audit strategy. We have used various sources of information (see Figure A below) and discussed priorities for internal audit coverage with senior management and the ETAP.

Figure A: Audit considerations – sources considered when developing the Internal Audit Strategy.



Based on our understanding of the organisation, the information provided to us by stakeholders, and the regulatory requirements, we have developed an annual internal plan for the coming year and a high level strategic plan (see Section 2 and Appendix B for full details).

2. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

The table below shows each of the reviews that we propose to undertake as part of the internal audit plan for 2024/25. The table details the strategic risks / strategic objectives which may warrant internal audit coverage. This review of your risks allows us to ensure that the proposed plan will meet the organisation's assurance needs for the forthcoming and future years. As well as assignments designed to provide assurance or advisory input around specific risks, the strategy also includes: time for tracking the implementation of actions and an audit management allocation.

	Audit approach	Fee (£)	Proposed timing	Proposed ETAP
Strategic objective: Planning, Resilience & Response				
IT Controls – Third Party A cyber risk assessment review was completed in 2022/23 based on the the 10 Steps to Cyber Security guidance from the National Cyber Security Centre. The exact nature of the scope of this review will be determined closer to the time of audit following discussion with management. Risk: Failure to prevent or recover from a Cyber-attack including targeted ransomware, malware, and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks.	Risk based	£7,500	June 2024	September 2024
Procurement Specific scope will be determined closer to date of the audit but it will focus on procurement processes across the Group and compliance with the controls in place to ensure suppliers are being appointed in line with procedural guidance and tenders completed when thresholds have been met.	System based – Joint with Force	£3,850	June 2024	September 2024
Protection Audits That there is a detailed risk based inspection programme (RBIP) in place to deal with high risk premises based upon the new methodology adopted by the Service as drafted by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). To review progress made by the Service to deliver the RBIP audits and reduce the backlog of very high and high risk premises.	System based	£4,400	August 2024	December 2024
Key Financial Controls Annual coverage of key financial controls. The exact nature of the scope will be determined nearer the time of audit, however the audit will consider the impact of staff changes taking place within the Finance Department during 2024/25. Risk: Failure to secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective service delivery against the Safety Plan	System based	£3,850	February 2025	May 2025

		Audit approach	Fee (£)	Proposed timing	Proposed ETAP
HR - Absence Management		System based	£3,800	September 2024	December 2024
<p>This review will consider the framework in place for managing staff absences. We will ensure that policies and procedures are being consistently applied with supporting documentation maintained on file.</p> <p>Risk: Loss of Key Staff</p>					
Capital Framework		Risk based	£4,000	January 2025	March 2025
<p>This will focus on the revised Framework for capital spend and monitoring and to consider its overall effectiveness.</p> <p>Risk: Failure to secure financial sustainability that ensures and maintains effective service delivery against the Safety Plan</p>					
Other Internal Audit Activity					
Follow Up	To meet internal auditing standards, and to provide assurance on action taken to address recommendations previously agreed by management.	Follow Up	£1,700	January 2025	May 2025
Driver Training – Follow Up	A follow up audit will be completed of the 2023/24 Driver Training review. The audit will ensure the agreed management actions have been implemented.	Follow Up	£2,700	January 2025	May 2025
Management	<p>This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual planning • Preparation for, and attendance at ETAP • Regular liaison and progress updates • Liaison with external audit and other assurance providers • Preparation of the annual opinion 	Not applicable	£8,625	Throughout the year	July 2024

A detailed planning process will be completed for each review, and the final scope will be documented in an Assignment Planning Sheet. This will be issued to the key stakeholders for each review.

2.1 Working with other assurance providers

The Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel (ETAP) is reminded that internal audit is only one source of assurance and through the delivery of our plan we will not, and do not, seek to cover all risks and processes within the organisation.

We will however continue to work closely with other assurance providers, such as HMICFRS and external audit to ensure that duplication is minimised, and a suitable breadth of assurance obtained.

APPENDIX A) YOUR INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE

Your internal audit service is provided by RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP. The team will be led by Dan Harris, Partner, as your Head of Internal Audit, supported by Angela Ward as your client manager.

Fees

Our fee to deliver the plan is £40,425 (excluding VAT).

Core team

The delivery of the 2024/25 audit plan will be based around a core team. However, we will complement the team with additional specialist skills where required, for example specialist IT auditors.

Conformance with internal auditing standards

RSM affirms that our internal audit services are designed to conform to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

Under PSIAS, internal audit services are required to have an external quality assessment every five years. Our risk assurance service line commissioned an external independent review of our internal audit services in 2021 to provide assurance whether our approach meets the requirements of the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), and the Internal Audit Code of Practice, as published by the Global Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and the Chartered IIA, on which PSIAS is based.

The external review concluded that RSM 'generally conforms*' to the requirements of the IIA Standards' and that 'RSM IA also generally conforms with the other Professional Standards and the IIA Code of Ethics. There were no instances of non-conformance with any of the Professional Standards'.

*The rating of 'generally conforms' is the highest rating that can be achieved, in line with the IIA's EQA assessment model.

Conflicts of interest

We are not aware of any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the team, and which are required to be disclosed under internal auditing standards.

Corporate responsibility

At RSM we believe it is our responsibility to positively impact on our society and the environment. We have three pillars of corporate responsibility: environment, charity and community. For more details on RSM's commitment visit our website: [Corporate responsibility | RSM UK](#).

APPENDIX B) INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY 2020/21 – 2025/26 (INCLUDING 2024/25 COVERAGE)

The table below shows an overview of the audit coverage to be provided through RSM's delivery of the internal audit strategy. This has been derived from the process outlined in Section 1 above, as well as our own view of the risks facing the sector as a whole.

Assurance Provided		Internal Audit – Third Line of Assurance (Independent review / assurance)						
Assurance Provided		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	
Red - Minimal Assurance / Poor Progress								
Amber/red - Partial Assurance / Little Progress								
Amber/green - Reasonable Assurance / Reasonable Progress								
Green - Substantial Assurance / Good Progress								
Advisory / AUP								
IDEA								
Audit Area		Risk	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Human Resources	Risk S1 - Loss/unavailability of employees within Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service	✓	✓		✓	✓		
		Absence Mgmt	Training & Development		Driver Training	Driver Training – Follow Up	Absence Mgmt	
Safeguarding	Risk S5 – Failure of the SF&RS to raise awareness and be prepared in all respects, to work closely with our strategic partners over issues concerning the wellbeing and protection of vulnerable adults, young people and children in our communities	✓			✓			
		Health and Wellbeing						

Assurance Provided	
	Red - Minimal Assurance / Poor Progress
	Amber/red - Partial Assurance / Little Progress
	Amber/green - Reasonable Assurance / Reasonable Progress
	Green - Substantial Assurance / Good Progress
	Advisory / AUP
	IDEA

Internal Audit – Third Line of Assurance (Independent review / assurance)						
Risk	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26

Audit Area

Financial Management / Key Financial Controls

Risk S2 - Failure to deliver a sustainable plan for effective service delivery as a result of continued funding pressures

✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

Risk Driven Coverage

Business Continuity

Risk S1 - Loss/unavailability of employees within Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service

✓

Cyber Security & GDPR

Risk S4 - Failure to implement and effective Protective Security Strategy which fully encompasses the management, use, security and retention of data, particularly with the constant risk of cyber attack

✓

ICT / System Ownership

Risk S4 - Failure to implement and effective Protective Security Strategy which fully encompasses the management, use, security and retention of data, particularly with the

✓

✓

Assurance Provided	
	Red - Minimal Assurance / Poor Progress
	Amber/red - Partial Assurance / Little Progress
	Amber/green - Reasonable Assurance / Reasonable Progress
	Green - Substantial Assurance / Good Progress
	Advisory / AUP
	IDEA

Internal Audit – Third Line of Assurance (Independent review / assurance)						
Risk	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26

Audit Area

constant risk of cyber attack

Procurement	Risk S2 - Failure to deliver a sustainable plan for effective service delivery as a result of continued funding pressures				✓	
Collaboration / Partnerships	Risk S7 - that collaboration between the Fire Service and Police may impact on Service Delivery and business as usual.				✓	(Estates)
Payroll	Risk S2 - Failure to deliver a sustainable plan for effective service delivery as a result of continued funding pressures.				✓	✓

Core Assurance and other coverage						
Legal Requirements – FOI/GDPR			✓			
Estates / Protection Equipment			✓		✓	
Insurance						✓
Capital Framework					✓	

Assurance Provided	
	Red - Minimal Assurance / Poor Progress
	Amber/red - Partial Assurance / Little Progress
	Amber/green - Reasonable Assurance / Reasonable Progress
	Green - Substantial Assurance / Good Progress
	Advisory / AUP
	IDEA

Risk	Internal Audit – Third Line of Assurance (Independent review / assurance)					
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26

Audit Area

Community Safety Plan			✓			
Fleet Management		✓	✓			
Governance		✓		✓	✓	
				(Whistleblowing)		
Risk Management / Assurance		✓		✓		
Environmental Plan / ESG					✓	
					(c/fwd from 23/24)	
Transformation Plan						✓
Making Tax Digital (MTD)						✓
Follow Up		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

APPENDIX C) INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER

Need for the charter

This charter establishes the purpose, authority and responsibilities for the internal audit service for Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services. The establishment of a charter is a requirement of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and approval of the charter is the responsibility of the audit committee.

The internal audit service is provided by RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP (“RSM”).

We plan and perform our internal audit work with a view to reviewing and evaluating the risk management, control and governance arrangements that the organisation has in place, focusing in particular on how these arrangements help you to achieve its objectives. The internal audit function is required to comply with the mandatory elements of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) as follows:

- Core principles for the professional practice of internal auditing;
- Definition of internal auditing;
- Code of ethics; and
- The Standards.

Mission of internal audit

As set out in the PSIAS, the mission articulates what internal audit aspires to accomplish within an organisation. Its place in the IPPF is deliberate, demonstrating how practitioners should leverage the entire framework to facilitate their ability to achieve the mission.

“To enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight”.

Independence and ethics

To provide for the independence of internal audit, its personnel report directly to the Partner, Dan Harris (acting as your head of internal audit). The independence of RSM is assured by the internal audit service reporting to the Director of Finance, with further reporting lines to the ETAP Chair

The head of internal audit has unrestricted access to the chair of ETAP to whom all significant concerns relating to the adequacy and effectiveness of risk management activities, internal control and governance are reported.

Conflicts of interest may arise where RSM provides services other than internal audit to Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services. Steps will be taken to avoid or manage transparently and openly such conflicts of interest so that there is no real or perceived threat or impairment to independence in providing the internal audit service. If a potential conflict arises through the provision of other services, disclosure will be reported to the audit committee.

The nature of the disclosure will depend upon the potential impairment and it is important that our role does not appear to be compromised in reporting the matter to the audit committee. Equally we do not want the organisation to be deprived of wider RSM expertise and will therefore raise awareness without compromising our independence.

Responsibilities

In providing your outsourced internal audit service, RSM has a responsibility to:

- Develop a flexible and risk based internal audit strategy with more detailed annual audit plans. The plan will be submitted to the audit committee for review and approval each year before work commences on delivery of that plan.
- Implement the internal audit plan as approved, including any additional tasks requested by management and the audit committee.
- Ensure the internal audit team consists of professional audit staff with sufficient knowledge, skills, and experience.
- Establish a quality assurance and improvement program to ensure the quality and effective operation of internal audit activities.
- Perform advisory activities where appropriate, beyond internal audit's assurance services, to assist management in meeting its objectives.
- Bring a systematic disciplined approach to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of risk management, internal control and governance processes.
- Highlight control weaknesses and required associated improvements together with corrective action recommended to management based on an acceptable and practicable timeframe.
- Undertake follow up reviews to ensure management has implemented agreed internal control improvements within specified and agreed timeframes.
- Report regularly to the audit committee to demonstrate the performance of the internal audit service.

For clarity, we have included the definition of 'internal audit', 'senior management' and 'board'.

- Internal audit – a department, division, team of consultant, or other practitioner (s) that provides independent, objective assurance and consulting services designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. The internal audit activity helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes.
- Senior Management are the team of individuals at the highest level of organisational management who have the day-to-day responsibilities for managing the organisation.
- Fire Authority - the highest level governing body charged with the responsibility to direct and/or oversee the organisation's activities and hold organisational management accountable. Furthermore, "board" may refer to a committee or another body to which the governing body has delegated certain functions (eg an ETAP).

Client care standards

In delivering our services we require full cooperation from key stakeholders and relevant business areas to ensure a smooth delivery of the plan. We proposed the following KPIs for monitoring the delivery of the internal audit service:

- Discussions with senior staff at the client take place to confirm the scope six weeks before the agreed audit start date.
- Key information such as: the draft assignment planning sheet are issued by RSM to the key auditee six weeks before the agreed start date.
- The lead auditor to contact the client to confirm logistical arrangements at least 15 working days before the commencement of the audit fieldwork to confirm practical arrangements, appointments, debrief date etc.
- Fieldwork takes place on agreed dates with key issues flagged up immediately.
- A debrief meeting will be held with audit sponsor at the end of fieldwork or within a reasonable time frame.
- Draft reports will be issued within 10 working days of the debrief meeting and will be issued by RSM to the agreed distribution list / Huddle.
- Management responses to the draft report should be submitted to RSM.
- Within three working days of receipt of client responses the final report will be issued by RSM to the assignment sponsor and any other agreed recipients of the report.

Authority

The internal audit team is authorised to:

- Have unrestricted access to all functions, records, property and personnel which it considers necessary to fulfil its function.
- Have full and free access to the audit committee.
- Allocate resources, set timeframes, define review areas, develop scopes of work and apply techniques to accomplish the overall internal audit objectives.
- Obtain the required assistance from personnel within the organisation where audits will be performed, including other specialised services from within or outside the organisation.

The head of internal audit and internal audit staff are not authorised to:

- Perform any operational duties associated with the organisation.
- Initiate or approve accounting transactions on behalf of the organisation.
- Direct the activities of any employee not employed by RSM unless specifically seconded to internal audit.

Reporting

An assignment report will be issued following each internal audit assignment. The report will be issued in draft for comment by management, and then issued as a final report to management, with the executive summary being provided to the audit committee. The final report will contain an action plan agreed with management to address any weaknesses identified by internal audit.

The internal audit service will issue progress reports to the ETAP and management summarising outcomes of audit activities, including follow up reviews.

As your internal audit provider, the assignment opinions that RSM provides the organisation during the year are part of the framework of assurances that assist the board in taking decisions and managing its risks.

As the provider of the internal audit service we are required to provide an annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's governance, risk management and control arrangements. In giving our opinion it should be noted that assurance can never be absolute. The most that the internal audit service can provide to the board is a reasonable assurance that there are no major weaknesses in risk management, governance and control processes. The annual opinion will be provided to the organisation by RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP at the financial year end. The results of internal audit reviews, and the annual opinion, should be used by management and the Board to inform the organisation's annual governance statement.

Data protection

Internal audit files need to include sufficient, reliable, relevant and useful evidence in order to support our findings and conclusions. Personal data is not shared with unauthorised persons unless there is a valid and lawful requirement to do so. We are authorised as providers of internal audit services to our clients (through the firm's terms of business and our engagement letter) to have access to all necessary documentation from our clients needed to carry out our duties.

Quality Assurance and Improvement

As your external service provider of internal audit services, we have the responsibility for maintaining an effective internal audit activity. Under the standards, internal audit services are required to have an external quality assessment every five years. In addition to this, we also have in place an internal quality assurance and improvement programme, led by a dedicated team who undertake these reviews. This ensures continuous improvement of our internal audit services.

Any areas which we believe warrant bringing to your attention, which may have the potential to have an impact on the quality of the service we provide to you, will be raised in our progress reports to the audit committee.

Fraud

The audit committee recognises that management is responsible for controls to reasonably prevent and detect fraud. Furthermore, the audit committee recognises that internal audit is not responsible for identifying fraud; however internal audit will be aware of the risk of fraud when planning and undertaking any assignments.

Approval of the internal audit charter

By approving this document, the internal audit strategy, the audit committee is also approving the internal audit charter.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during the course of our review and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist or all improvements that might be made. Actions for improvements should be assessed by you for their full impact. This report, or our work, should not be taken as a substitute for management's responsibilities for the application of sound commercial practices. We emphasise that the responsibility for a sound system of internal controls rests with management and our work should not be relied upon to identify all strengths and weaknesses that may exist. Neither should our work be relied upon to identify all circumstances of fraud and irregularity should there be any.

Our report is prepared solely for the confidential use of Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Services, and solely for the purposes set out herein. This report should not therefore be regarded as suitable to be used or relied on by any other party wishing to acquire any rights from RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP for any purpose or in any context. Any third party which obtains access to this report or a copy and chooses to rely on it (or any part of it) will do so at its own risk. To the fullest extent permitted by law, RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP will accept no responsibility or liability in respect of this report to any other party and shall not be liable for any loss, damage or expense of whatsoever nature which is caused by any person's reliance on representations in this report.

This report is released to you on the basis that it shall not be copied, referred to or disclosed, in whole or in part (save as otherwise permitted by agreed written terms), without our prior written consent.

We have no responsibility to update this report for events and circumstances occurring after the date of this report.

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