

Proposed Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee

Composition of the Committee

The Audit Committee comprises seven members of the Council and two independent members. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee shall be confirmed by the Audit Committee as per Committee Procedure rules. A minimum of three Councillor members of the Audit Committee will be present for the meeting to be deemed quorate.

The Audit Committee shall be entitled to appoint up to two people as independent members of the Committee.

The Committee may not appoint any person as an independent member who is an active member of any political party, defined as any person who engages in political activities which would not be permissible if that person was an officer holding a politically-restricted post within the Council. Independent membership may only be made if the person has particular knowledge or expertise in the functions for which the Committee is responsible.

The Committee will meet at least five times a year and will maintain the technical capability to discharge the Audit Committee responsibilities of the Council. The Chair of the Committee may convene additional meetings, as deemed necessary.

The Audit Committee may hold separate meetings with External / Internal Auditors without officer or executive representation. The Committee should hold at least one such meeting annually with External and Internal Auditors.

Objectives or Purpose

- To provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the authority's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects governance, the authority's exposure to risk and weakness of the control environment, and to oversee the financial reporting process.
- To review matters relating to Internal Audit, external audit, risk management, governance, assurance statements, anti-fraud and anti-corruption arrangements.
- To enhance and promote the profile, status and authority of the Internal Audit function and to demonstrate its independence.
- To contribute towards making the authority, its committees and departments more responsive to the audit function.
- To review compliance with the relevant standards, codes of practice and corporate governance policies of the Council.

1. Audit Activity

- 1.1 To approve the Internal Audit Charter and Strategy and monitor its progress.
- 1.2 To approve the Internal Audit annual plan of work and monitor unscheduled work that could potentially divert audit resources away from a plan, and monitor performance against those plans, ensuring that there are no inappropriate scope or resource limitations.
- 1.3 To suggest work for Internal and External Audit.
- 1.4 To consider the Annual Report and opinion of the Head of Internal Audit and a summary of Internal Audit activity and the level of assurance it can give over the Council's corporate governance arrangements prior to approving the Annual Accounts.
- 1.5 To oversee and provide assurance to the Council on the provision of an effective internal audit service and consider the main issues arising from summary Internal Audit reports, and seek assurance that action has been taken where necessary, particularly in areas of high risk.
- 1.6 To consider reports dealing with the management and performance of the Internal Audit function, including the external peer review and reports on the results of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme in order to gain assurance on the effectiveness of the Internal Audit function.
- 1.7 To monitor the implementation of agreed actions within reasonable timescales.
- 1.8 To consider the External Auditor's Annual Inspection Letter, relevant reports and the reports to those charged with governance in the process for the approval of the Annual Accounts.
- 1.9 To consider specific reports as agreed with the External Auditor to ensure agreed action is taken within reasonable timescales.
- 1.10 To comment on the scope and depth of the external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
- 1.11 To liaise with Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited over the appointment of the Council's External Auditor.
- 1.12 To consider the reports of inspection agencies relevant to the Council.
- 1.13 To undertake an annual review of the effectiveness of the system of Internal Audit.
- 1.14 To oversee the appointment / dismissal of the Chief Internal Auditor.

2. Regulatory Framework

- 2.1 To receive assurance reports on the effectiveness of the Council's Constitution in respect of contract procedure rules, financial regulations, codes of conduct and behaviour.
- 2.2 To review any issue referred to it by the Head of Paid Service or Executive Director or any Committee of the Council.
- 2.3 To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management and corporate governance throughout the Council.
- 2.4 To monitor Council policies on whistleblowing and anti-fraud and anti-corruption policies, including the Council's complaints process.
- 2.5 To review the Council's Annual Governance Statement prior to approval, considering whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, and recommend its adoption for publication with the annual accounts, together with associated plans for addressing areas of improvement and advising the Council as appropriate.
- 2.6 To review the arrangements for corporate governance, including the Code of Corporate Governance, to agree necessary actions to ensure compliance with best practice and to recommend to Full Council as appropriate.
- 2.7 To review the Council's framework of assurance, for example Assurance maps, and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the Council.
- 2.8 To review the Council's compliance with its own and published national standards and controls.
- 2.9 To review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements to secure value for money.
- 2.10 To review the assessment of fraud risk and potential harm to the Council from fraud and corruption and to monitor the use of resources to address fraud risk.
- 2.11 To report as appropriate to Full Council on issues which require their attention or further action.

3 Accounts

- 3.1 To approve the annual Statement of Accounts. Specifically to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the Council.
- 3.2 To consider, in the context of approving the Accounts, the External Auditor's report to those charged with the governance issues arising from the audit of the accounts.
- 3.3 To review the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and policies, and make recommendations to Full Council for approval.

4. Risk Management

- 4.1 To consider the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements including reviewing the Risk Management Policy and the Corporate Risk Register.
- 4.2 To provide assurance to the Council, in the Committee's Annual Report, on the effectiveness of risk management arrangements in place.
- 4.3 To seek assurances that action is being taken on risk-related issues.
- 4.4 To be satisfied that the Council's assurance statements, including the Annual Governance Statement, properly reflect the risk environment and any actions required to improve it.

5. Accountability Arrangements

- 5.1 To report to Full Council on an annual basis on assurances received, significant control issues, the Committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the Committee in meeting its purpose.

NOTE: This proposed Terms of Reference does not incorporate the following Standards related functions referred to in the existing Terms for the Audit Committee, i.e.:

- *“Assist the council in its statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members.*
- *Advise the council on the adoption or revision of the Code of Conduct for Members and any associated codes or protocols and monitoring their operation.*
- *Advise and training members on the Code of Conduct.*
- *Consider and determine any allegations of misconduct by a member of council (which could be a breach of the code of conduct) if the Monitoring Officer requests assistance.*
- *Consider recommendations made by Group Whips for the conferring of the title “Honorary Alderman” and “Honorary Alderwoman” and making recommendations to Full Council thereon.*
- *To monitor the register of member interests.*
- *To grant dispensations pursuant to section 33(2) of the Localism Act 2011 where:*
 - (i) Without the dispensation, the representation of different political groups on the body transacting the business would be so upset as to alter the outcome of any vote on the matter.*
 - (ii) That the authority considers that the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in its area; or*
 - (iii) Where the Committee considers that it is appropriate to grant a dispensation.”*

Standards related functions are being considered within the review of the Constitution, which should determine whether such functions are addressed separately from the business of an Audit Committee.

Current Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

Overview

The Audit Committee is a non-statutory committee independent of the council's executive and scrutiny and it reports to full council. Its purpose is to provide independent assurance to the council in relation to:-

1. The effectiveness of the council's governance arrangements, risk management framework and internal control environment including overseeing:
 - risk management strategies
 - anti-fraud arrangements
 - whistle-blowing strategies
 - internal and external audit activity;
2. The effectiveness of the council's financial and non-financial performance to the extent it affects exposure to risk and poor internal control;
3. The annual governance statement;
4. The review and approval of the annual statement of accounts, confirming the appropriate accounting policies have been followed, including the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

Functions

Full Council has delegated the following functions to the Audit Committee:

- Duty to review and consider the effectiveness of the council's system of internal control and approve the annual governance statement; review and consider the effectiveness of the council's internal audit; consider and approve the statement of accounts (Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 S.I. 2011/817).
- Assist the council in its statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members and co-opted members.
- Advise the council on the adoption or revision of the Code of Conduct for Members and any associated codes or protocols and monitoring their operation.
- Advise and training members on the Code of Conduct.

- Consider and determine any allegations of misconduct by a member of council (which could be a breach of the code of conduct) if the Monitoring Officer requests assistance.
- Consider nominations made by Group Whips for the conferring of the title “Honorary Alderman” and “Honorary Alderwoman” and making recommendations to Full Council thereon.
- To monitor the register of members interests.
- To advise and assist as required in the selection of the Lord Mayor.
- To grant dispensations pursuant to section 33(2) of the Localism Act 2011 where:
 - (i) without the dispensation, the representation of different political groups on the body transacting the business would be so upset as to alter the outcome of any vote on the matter.
 - (ii) that the authority considers that the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in its area; or
 - (iii) where the Committee considers that it is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation.
- Responsibility for ensuring effective scrutiny of the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy and policies.
- Involvement in the appointment/dismissal of the Chief Internal Auditor.
- Involvement in monitoring the performance of the Chief Internal Auditor