

Audit and Governance Committee
Terms of Reference

Audit and Governance Committee

Membership: 9 Councillors (excluding the Leader and Deputy and Chairs of the service Committees) and 2 co-opted independent members.

Governance

The success of the Audit and Governance Committee depends upon its ability to remain apolitical. It must adopt a non-political approach to its meetings and discussions at all times. Remaining political also places a duty on Councillors not to make inappropriate use of information provided to the Committee for other purposes.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee should not be appointed as the Chair and Vice Chair to service Committees.

Members may not review decisions as part of the Audit and Governance Committee that they have made as a member of another Committee.

Members who hold senior positions in political groups should not be appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee. A delay of 12 months should be followed before Members who have previously held senior positions in the Council are appointed to the Audit and Governance Committee.

Co-opted independent members are appointed for a four-year period and may vote on advisory matters.

To ensure that the Committee remains focussed on its assurance role, all members of the Committee, and any designated substitute, must be appropriately trained.

Statement of Purpose

1) The Audit and Governance Committee is a key component of the Council's corporate governance.

It provides:

- a) promotes high standards of ethical behaviour by developing, maintaining and monitoring Codes of Conduct for Councillors and co-opted Members (including other persons acting in a similar capacity).
- b) an independent and high-level focus on audit, (internal and external) assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards;
- c) independent review and focus on the adequacy of the Council's governance, risk management, and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting and annual governance processes.

2) The Committee receives reports and assurances from across the organisation. In doing so the Committee will consider the effectiveness of the arrangements described, identifying further information needed and/or making recommendations for improvements and additional action required, which can include further reporting on matters to those charged with governance.

3) Its role in ensuring that there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and control gives greater confidence to those charged with governance (Council) that those arrangements are effective. The Committee's oversight of these areas ensures that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

4) The Committee will report to full Council on a regular basis on the Committee's performance and effectiveness in meeting its purpose.

5) Committee members can request items for consideration by the Committee for inclusion on the Work Programme agenda or referral to the relevant service committee.

Governance, risk and control

6) To consider the Council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework, including the ethical framework, local code of governance, and annual governance reports and assurances.

7) To review and approve the Annual Governance Statement and consider whether it properly reflects the risk environment and supporting assurances, taking into account internal audit's opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control, including an agreed action plan for improvements where necessary.

8) To consider the effectiveness of the system of risk management arrangements by receiving regular reports on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management and reporting arrangements.

- 9) To consider reports, both internal and external, on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.
- 10) To consider reports on the effectiveness of financial management arrangements, including compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code.
- 11) To consider the council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements
- 12) To review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the Council from fraud and corruption.
- 13) To monitor the counter-fraud strategy, actions and resources.
- 14) To review the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships or collaborations.

Internal Audit

- 15) To approve the internal audit charter.
- 16) To approve the risk-based internal audit plan, including internal audit's resource requirements, the approach to using other sources of assurance and any work required to place reliance upon those other sources.
- 17) To approve significant interim changes to the risk-based internal audit plan and resource requirements.
- 18) To consider reports from the Head of Audit and Risk Management on internal audit's performance during the year, including:
 - a) Updates on the delivery of the audit plan, including key findings, issues of concern and monitoring the actions taken in response to internal audit recommendations.
 - b) reports on Internal Audit's effectiveness and compliance with the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP), including conformance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the Local Government Application Note (LGAN), and the results of the external assessment review of Internal Audit when due. Consider whether non-conformance with PSIAS and LGAN is significant enough that it must be included in the AGS.
- 19) To make appropriate enquiries of both management and the Head of Audit and Risk Management to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.
- 20) To consider any impairments to independence or objectivity arising from additional roles or responsibilities outside of internal auditing of the Head of Audit and Risk Management. To approve and periodically review safeguards to limit such impairments.
- 21) Receive the annual report from the Head of Audit and Risk Management setting out
 - a) internal activity during the year, and an opinion on the level of assurance as to the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for governance, risk management and internal control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion – these will assist the committee in reviewing the AGS.
 - b) The statement of the level of internal audit's conformance with the PSIAS and LGAN and the results of the QAIP that support the statement – these will indicate the reliability of the conclusions of internal audit.
- 22) To consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested.
- 23) To receive reports outlining the action taken where the Head of Audit and Risk Management has concluded that management has accepted a level of risk that may be unacceptable to the authority or there are concerns about progress with the implementation of agreed actions.
- 24) To contribute to the Quality Assurance Improvement Programme and in particular, to the external quality assessment of internal audit that takes place at least once every five years.
- 25) To consider a report on the effectiveness of internal audit to support the AGS, where required to do so by the Accounts and Audit Regulations
- 26) To provide free and unfettered access to the audit committee chair for the head of internal audit, including the opportunity for a private meeting with the committee.

External Audit

- 27) To oversee the process by which the Council's external auditor is appointed.
- 28) To support the independence of external audit through consideration of the external auditor's annual assessment of its independence and review of any issues raised by PSAA or the authority's auditor panel as appropriate.
- 29) To consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance.
- 30) To comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
- 31) To consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor.
- 32) To consider additional commissions of work from external audit.
- 33) To advise and recommend on the effectiveness of relationships between external and internal audit and other inspection agencies or relevant bodies.

Annual Statement of Accounts

- 34) To review and 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.
- 35) To consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.
- 36) Monitor management actions in response to issues raised by the external auditor.
- 37) To monitor the arrangements and preparations for financial reporting to ensure that statutory requirements and professional standards can be met.

Standards Arrangements

- 38) The Committee is responsible for the Council's standards arrangements to:
 - (a) promote high standards of ethical behaviour.
 - (b) develop, maintain and update Codes of Conduct and protocols
 - (c) Training the Audit and Governance Committee
- 39) The Committee is responsible for monitoring and advising Council about the operation of its Code of Conduct for Councillors in the light of best practice and any changes in the law.
- 40) The Committee will approve the arrangements for dealing with allegations that a Councillor or a town/parish Councillor within the borough has failed to comply with the relevant Councillors' Code of Conduct.
- 41) To assist the Council with the appointment of Independent Persons as required by the Localism Act 2011 and any independent persons under other secondary legislation.
- 42) To determine any request for a dispensation under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011, where not determined by the Monitoring Officer or to appeal against a determination by the Monitoring Officer.
- 43) To respond on behalf of the Council to national reviews and consultations on standards related issues.
- 44) To consider and make recommendations to Full Council on any other matter that may be referred to the Standards Committee relating to the conduct and training of Councillors.
- 45) To review, advise, monitor and report to Full Council on member training.
- 46) To recommend proposals to Full Council for changes to the constitution in respect of any governance or standards matters, except where specifically delegated to the Monitoring Officer.
- 47) Council on 19 October 2022 approved a procedure to be followed when considering a complaint that an elected member of the Council or of a town or parish council within its area has failed to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct. The full procedure is available on request.

Hearing Sub-Committee

- 48) The Hearing Sub-Committee is appointed to consider complaints that a Councillor has breached the Code of Conduct under the Council's arrangements adopted under the Localism Act 2011. It has 3 Councillors drawn from the Audit and Governance Committee.
- 49) The standing Chair of the Hearing Sub Committee is the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee; when convened for any individual item, the Chair should be of a different political group to any subject member. Where practicable the Vice Chair will be from a different political group from the Chair.
- 50) An Independent Person is invited to attend all meetings of the Hearing Sub-committee and his/her views will be sought and taken into consideration before the Hearing Sub-committee takes any decision on whether the Councillor's conduct constitutes a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and as to any action to be taken following a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.
- 51) The requirement for political balance under section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 is waived in relation to the subcommittee.
- 52) Before a Councillor can attend a meeting and participate in the business of the meeting, the determination of any Code of Conduct matter, the Councillor must attend a suitable training course dealing with the quasi-judicial nature of the role of the Sub-Committee.
- 53) Where the Committee finds that a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct has occurred, the Hearing Sub-Committee will determine what action, if any, to take and to apply the sanction or recommend to Council to apply an appropriate sanction.