

Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee Terms of Reference

(The Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee shall comprise 8 members with unnamed substitutes *and 1 Independent Member (non-voting)*. Every permanent Committee member ~~or appointed substitute~~ shall undertake appropriate training before being permitted to serve on the Committee. *Substitute Members are not required to undertake such training*)

Statement of Purpose

1. The Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee is a key component of Cherwell District Council's corporate governance framework. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment, the integrity of the financial reporting and governance processes. By overseeing internal and external audit it makes an important contribution to ensuring that effective assurance arrangements are in place.

Governance, risk and control

2. To review the council's corporate governance arrangements against the good governance framework, including the ethical framework and consider the local code of governance.
3. To review the AGS prior to approval 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.
4. To consider the council's arrangements to secure value for money and review assurances and assessments on the effectiveness of these arrangements.
5. To consider the council's framework of assurance and ensure that it adequately addresses the risks and priorities of the council.
6. To monitor the effective development and operation of risk management in the council.
7. To monitor progress in addressing risk-related issues reported to the committee.
8. To consider reports on the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor the implementation of agreed actions.
9. To review the assessment of fraud risks and potential harm to the council from fraud and corruption.
10. To monitor the counter-fraud strategy, actions and resources.
11. To review the governance and assurance arrangements for significant partnerships or collaborations.

Internal Audit

12. To approve the internal audit charter.
13. To review proposals made in relation to the appointment of external providers of internal audit services and to make recommendations.

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14. 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.
15. To approve significant interim changes to the risk-based internal audit plan and resource requirements.
16. To make appropriate enquiries of both management and the head of internal audit to determine if there are any inappropriate scope or resource limitations.
17. To consider any impairments to independence or objectivity arising from additional roles or responsibilities outside of internal auditing of the head of internal audit. To approve and periodically review safeguards to limit such impairments.
18. To consider reports from the head of internal audit on internal audit's performance during the year, including the performance of external providers of internal audit services. These will include:
 - a) updates on the work of internal audit including key findings, issues of concern and action in hand as a result of internal audit work
 - b) regular reports on the results of the QAIP (Quality Assurance Improvement Programme)
 - c) reports on instances where the internal audit function does not conform to the PSIAS (Public Sector Internal Audit Standards), considering whether the non-conformance is significant enough that it must be included in the AGS.
19. To consider the head of internal audit's annual report:
 - a) The statement of the level of conformance with the PSIAS and the results of the QAIP that support the statement – these will indicate the reliability of the conclusions of internal audit.
 - b) The opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control together with the summary of the work supporting the opinion – these will assist the committee in reviewing the AGS.
20. To consider summaries of specific internal audit reports as requested.
21. To receive reports outlining the action taken where the head of internal audit 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.
22. To contribute to the QAIP and in particular, to the external quality assessment of internal audit that takes place at least once every five years.
23. 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

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24. 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 (Public Sector Audit Appointments) or the authority's auditor panel as appropriate.
25. To consider the external auditor's annual letter, relevant reports and the report to those charged with governance.
26. To consider specific reports as agreed with the external auditor.
27. To comment on the scope and depth of external audit work and to ensure it gives value for money.
28. To advise and recommend on the effectiveness of relationships between external and internal audit and other inspection agencies or relevant bodies.
29. Recommend to Full Council whether the external auditors should be selected by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) or whether internal arrangements should be set up to appoint the auditors.

Financial reporting

30. To review 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.
31. To consider the external auditor's report to those charged with governance on issues arising from the audit of the accounts.

Accountability arrangements

32. To report to those charged with governance on the committee's findings, conclusions and recommendations concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of their governance, risk management and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements, and internal and external audit functions.
33. To report to full council on a regular basis on the committee's performance in relation to the terms of reference and the effectiveness of the committee.
34. To publish an annual report on the work of the committee.

Treasury Management

35. To be responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the treasury management strategy and policies. Receiving regular reports of activity, reviewing the treasury risk profile and adequacy of treasury risk management processes.