

## **Audit Committee**

**29 September 2023**

### **Review of the Audit Committee Effectiveness**



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## **Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources**

### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide.

### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To highlights the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022.
- 2 The report sets out proposals for the completion of CIPFA's Audit Committee Arrangement: Self-Assessment of Good Practice document, which will allow the Audit Committee to review its effectiveness.
- 3 The CIPFA Position Statement is included at Appendix 2 and CIPFA's Audit Committee Arrangement: Self-Assessment of Good Practice document is included at Appendix 3 for consideration.

### **Executive Summary**

- 4 CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022 ('the Position Statement') sets out CIPFA's view of the role and functions of an effective audit committee.
- 5 The statement represents CIPFA's view on the audit committee practice and principles that local government bodies in the UK should adopt and has been prepared in consultation with sector representatives.
- 6 CIPFA expects that all local government bodies should make their best efforts to adopt these principles, aiming for effective audit committee arrangements. This will enable those bodies to meet their statutory responsibilities for governance and internal control arrangements, financial management, financial reporting and internal audit.
- 7 CIPFA's Audit Committee Arrangement: Self-Assessment of Good Practice checklist provides a high level review that incorporate the key principles set out in CIPFA's Position Statement on Audit Committees in

Local Authorities which can be utilised to review the Audit Committee's effectiveness.

## **Recommendations**

8 Members are asked to:

- (a) Note the content of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022 and CIPFA's Audit Committee Arrangement: Self-Assessment of Good Practice document
- (b) Consider and endorse that a self-assessment of the Audit Committees effectiveness against the good practice guidance recommended by CIPFA is undertaken. The detail of the self-assessment is attached as Appendix 3;
- (c) Agree that the outcome of the self-assessment undertaken will form the basis of the future annual reporting from Audit Committee, compiled by the Chair of Audit Committee, supported by the Chief Internal Auditor, which will be prepared for presentation to Full Council demonstrating how the Audit Committee meets its Terms of Reference and providing a summary of the work of the committee during the year.

## **Background**

- 9 CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022 ('the Position Statement') sets out CIPFA's view of the role and functions of an audit committee. It replaces the previous 2018 Position Statement and includes all principal local authorities in the UK.
- 10 The statement represents CIPFA's view on the audit committee practice and principles that local government bodies in the UK should adopt and has been prepared in consultation with sector representatives.
- 11 CIPFA expects that all local government bodies should make their best efforts to adopt the principles, aiming for effective audit committee arrangements. This will enable those bodies to meet their statutory responsibilities for governance and internal control arrangements, financial management, financial reporting and internal audit.
- 12 The 2022 Position Statement sets out the purpose, model, core functions and membership of an audit committee. Key details for each of these areas are set out under each heading below.

### **Purpose**

- 13 The Statement defines the purpose of Audit Committees as follows:  
  
*Audit committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. The committee's role in ensuring that there is sufficient assurance over governance, risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective. The committee has oversight of both internal and external audit together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.*

### **Independent and effective model**

- 14 The audit committee should be established so that it is independent of executive decision making and able to provide objective oversight. It should be an advisory committee that has sufficient importance in the authority so that its recommendations and opinions carry weight and have influence with the leadership team and those charged with governance.
- 15 The Position Statement notes that audit committees should include co-opted independent members in accordance with the appropriate legislation. Where there is no legislative direction to include co-opted

independent members, CIPFA recommends that each authority audit committee should include at least two co-opted independent members to provide appropriate technical expertise.

### **Core functions**

- 16 The Position Statement notes that the core functions of an audit committee are to provide oversight of a range of core governance and accountability arrangements, responses to the recommendations of assurance providers and helping to ensure robust arrangements are maintained. Specific responsibilities identified include:
- Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements.
  - Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance
  - Financial and governance reporting

### **Membership**

- 17 The Position Statement sets out guidance regarding the membership of an audit committee. The members need to be of high calibre in order to provide the level of expertise and understanding required of the committee, and to have an appropriate level of influence within the authority. When selecting elected representatives to be on the committee or when co-opting independent members, aptitude should be considered alongside relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

### **Engagement and outputs**

- 18 The audit committee should be established and supported to enable it to address the full range of responsibilities within its terms of reference and to generate planned outputs. To discharge its responsibilities effectively, the committee should:
- Meet regularly, at least four times a year, and have a clear policy on those items to be considered in private and those to be considered in public.
  - Be able to meet privately and separately with the external auditor and with the head of internal audit.
  - Include, as regular attendees, the chief finance officer(s), the chief executive, the head of internal audit and the appointed external auditor; other attendees may include the monitoring officer and the head of resources (where such a post exists).

These officers should also be able to access the committee members, or the chair, as required.

- Have the right to call on any other officers or agencies of the authority as required.
- Support transparency, reporting regularly on its work to those charged with governance
- Report annually on how the committee has complied with the position statement, discharged its responsibilities, and include an assessment of its performance. The report should be available to the public.

19 CIPFA's Audit Committee Arrangement: Self-Assessment of Good Practice checklist provides a high level review that incorporate the key principles set out in CIPFA's Position Statement on Audit Committees in Local Authorities which can be utilised to review the Audit Committee's effectiveness.

20 The Updated CIPFA Position Statement is attached as Appendix 2 and the CIPFA good practice self assessment questions at Appendix 3.

## **Conclusion**

21 CIPFA's Position Statement represents CIPFA's view on the audit committee best practice and principles that local government bodies in the UK should adopt.

22 CIPFA expects that all local government bodies should make their best efforts to adopt the principles, aiming for effective audit committee arrangements. This will enable those bodies to meet their statutory responsibilities for governance and internal control arrangements, financial management, financial reporting and internal audit.

23 CIPFA's Audit Committee Arrangement: Self-Assessment of Good Practice checklist provides a high level review that incorporate the key principles set out in CIPFA's Position Statement on Audit Committees in Local Authorities which can be utilised to review the Audit Committee's effectiveness.

## **Background papers**

- Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA)  
Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and  
Police 2022
- CIPFA's Audit Committee Arrangements: Self-Assessment of  
Good Practice document

## **Other useful documents**

- Previous Committee reports.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

There are no specific legal implications associated with this report. The Audit Committee contributes to the effective corporate and financial governance of the Council and provides relevant and appropriate challenge and oversight where necessary.

### **Finance**

There are no specific financial implications associated with this report.

The Audit Committee has clear terms of reference and directly effects and assists in improving value for money obtained, the probity and propriety of financial administration, and / or the management of operational and strategic risks.

### **Consultation**

Audit Committee and the Corporate Director of Resources.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None.

### **Climate Change**

None.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

None.

### **Accommodation**

None.

### **Risk**

The Audit Committee provides an independent review of the Council's risk management framework and comments on its effectiveness.

## **Procurement**

None.





## CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022

### Scope

This position statement includes all principal local authorities in the UK, corporate joint committees in Wales, the audit committees for PCCs and chief constables in England and Wales, PCCFRAs and the audit committees of fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales.

The statement sets out the purpose, model, core functions and membership of the audit committee. Where specific legislation exists (the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016), it should supplement the requirements of that legislation.

### Status of the position statement

The statement represents CIPFA's view on the audit committee practice and principles that local government bodies in the UK should adopt. It has been prepared in consultation with sector representatives.

CIPFA expects that all local government bodies should make their best efforts to adopt the principles, aiming for effective audit committee arrangements. This will enable those bodies to meet their statutory responsibilities for governance and internal control arrangements, financial management, financial reporting and internal audit.

The 2022 edition of the position statement replaces the 2018 edition.

**The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Home Office support this guidance.**

## CIPFA's Position Statement 2022: Audit committees in local authorities and police

### Purpose of the audit committee

Audit committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. The committee's role in ensuring that there is sufficient assurance over governance risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective.

In a local authority the full council is the body charged with governance. The audit committee may be delegated some governance responsibilities but will be accountable to full council. In policing, the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and chief constable are both corporations sole, and thus are the individuals charged with governance.

The committee has oversight of both internal and external audit together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

### Independent and effective model

The audit committee should be established so that it is independent of executive decision making and able to provide objective oversight. It is an advisory committee that has sufficient importance in the authority so that its recommendations and opinions carry weight and have influence with the leadership team and those charged with governance.

The committee should:

- be directly accountable to the authority's governing body or the PCC and chief constable
- in local authorities, be independent of both the executive and the scrutiny functions
- in police bodies, be independent of the executive or operational responsibilities of the PCC or chief constable
- have rights of access to and constructive engagement with other committees/functions, for example scrutiny and service committees, corporate risk management boards and other strategic groups
- have rights to request reports and seek assurances from relevant officers
- be of an appropriate size to operate as a cadre of experienced, trained committee members. Large committees should be avoided.

The audit committees of the PCC and chief constable should follow the requirements set out in the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice and be made up of co-opted independent members.

The audit committees of local authorities should include co-opted independent members in accordance with the appropriate legislation.

Where there is no legislative direction to include co-opted independent members, CIPFA recommends that each authority audit committee should include at least two co-opted independent members to provide appropriate technical expertise.

## Core functions

The core functions of the audit committee are to provide oversight of a range of core governance and accountability arrangements, responses to the recommendations of assurance providers and helping to ensure robust arrangements are maintained.

The specific responsibilities include:

### Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements

- Support a comprehensive understanding of governance across the organisation and among all those charged with governance, fulfilling the principles of good governance.
- Consider the effectiveness of the authority's risk management arrangements. It should understand the risk profile of the organisation and seek assurances that active arrangements are in place on risk-related issues, for both the body and its collaborative arrangements.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the system of internal control, including arrangements for financial management, ensuring value for money, supporting standards and ethics and managing the authority's exposure to the risks of fraud and corruption.

### Financial and governance reporting

- Be satisfied that the authority's accountability statements, including the annual governance statement, properly reflect the risk environment, and any actions required to improve it, and demonstrate how governance supports the achievement of the authority's objectives.
- Support the maintenance of effective arrangements for financial reporting and review the statutory statements of account and any reports that accompany them.

### Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance

- Consider the arrangements in place to secure adequate assurance across the body's full range of operations and collaborations with other entities.
- In relation to the authority's internal audit functions:
  - oversee its independence, objectivity, performance and conformance to professional standards
  - support effective arrangements for internal audit
  - promote the effective use of internal audit within the assurance framework.

- Consider the opinion, reports and recommendations of external audit and inspection agencies and their implications for governance, risk management or control, and monitor management action in response to the issues raised by external audit.
- Contribute to the operation of efficient and effective external audit arrangements, supporting the independence of auditors and promoting audit quality.
- Support effective relationships between all providers of assurance, audits and inspections, and the organisation, encouraging openness to challenge, review and accountability.

### Audit committee membership

To provide the level of expertise and understanding required of the committee, and to have an appropriate level of influence within the authority, the members of the committee will need to be of high calibre. When selecting elected representatives to be on the committee or when co-opting independent members, aptitude should be considered alongside relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

Characteristics of audit committee membership:

- A membership that is trained to fulfil their role so that members are objective, have an inquiring and independent approach, and are knowledgeable.
- A membership that promotes good governance principles, identifying ways that better governance arrangement can help achieve the organisation's objectives.
- A strong, independently minded chair, displaying a depth of knowledge, skills, and interest. There are many personal skills needed to be an effective chair, but key to these are:
  - promoting apolitical open discussion
  - managing meetings to cover all business and encouraging a candid approach from all participants
  - maintaining the focus of the committee on matters of greatest priority.
- Willingness to operate in an apolitical manner.
- Unbiased attitudes – treating auditors, the executive and management fairly.
- The ability to challenge the executive and senior managers when required.
- Knowledge, expertise and interest in the work of the committee.

While expertise in the areas within the remit of the committee is very helpful, the attitude of committee members and willingness to have appropriate training are of equal importance.

The appointment of co-opted independent members on the committee should consider the overall knowledge and expertise of the existing members.

## Engagement and outputs

The audit committee should be established and supported to enable it to address the full range of responsibilities within its terms of reference and to generate planned outputs.

To discharge its responsibilities effectively, the committee should:

- meet regularly, at least four times a year, and have a clear policy on those items to be considered in private and those to be considered in public
- be able to meet privately and separately with the external auditor and with the head of internal audit
- include, as regular attendees, the chief finance officer(s), the chief executive, the head of internal audit and the appointed external auditor; other attendees may include the monitoring officer and the head of resources (where such a post exists). These officers should also be able to access the committee members, or the chair, as required
- have the right to call on any other officers or agencies of the authority as required; police audit committees should recognise the independence of the chief constable in relation to operational policing matters
- support transparency, reporting regularly on its work to those charged with governance
- report annually on how the committee has complied with the position statement, discharged its responsibilities, and include an assessment of its performance. The report should be available to the public.

## Impact

As a non-executive body, the influence of the audit committee depends not only on the effective performance of its role, but also on its engagement with the leadership team and those charged with governance.

The committee should evaluate its impact and identify areas for improvement.

## Appendix 3

### Audit Committee Arrangements: Self-Assessment of Good Practice

(Extract from CIPFA, Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police, published October 2022)

CIPFA outlines that the checklist below provides a high-level review that incorporates the key principles set out in CIPFA's Position Statement on Audit Committees in Local Authorities, and broader practical guidance referred to above. Within the practical guidance CIPFA specifically states:

*“Where an audit committee has a high degree of performance against the good practice principles, it is an indicator that the committee is soundly based and has in place a knowledgeable membership. These are the essential factors in developing an effective audit committee. A regular self-assessment should be used to support the planning of the audit committee work programme and training plans. It will also inform the annual report.”*

Good Practice Question		Does not comply	Partly Complies and extent of improvement needed			Fully Complies	Comment
			Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement		
Weighting of Answers		0	1	2	3	5	
<b>Audit Committee Purpose and Governance</b>							
1	Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee that is not combined with other functions (e.g., standards, ethics, scrutiny)?						
2	Does the Audit Committee report directly to the governing body ( <del>pcc and chief constable / full council / fire authority etc</del> )						
3	Has the audit committee maintained its advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers?						

Good Practice Question		Does not comply	Partly Complies and extent of improvement needed			Fully Complies	Comment
		Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement	Minor improvement	No further improvement	
Weighting of Answers		0	1	2	3	5	
4	Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFAs 2022 Position Statement?						
5	Do all those charged with governance and in leadership roles have a good understanding of the role and purpose of the committee?						
6	Does the audit committee escalate issues and concerns promptly to those in governance and leadership roles?						
7	Does the governing body hold the audit committee to account for its performance at least annually?						
8	Does the audit committee publish an annual report in accordance with the 2022 guidance, including:						
	• Compliance with the CIPFA position statement 2022						
	• Results of the annual evaluation, development work undertaken and planned improvements						
	• How has it fulfilled its terms of reference and the key issues escalated in the year?						
9	Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's position statement as follows:						
	Governance arrangements						
	Risk management arrangements						
	Internal control arrangements, including						
	• Financial management						
	• Value for money						

Good Practice Question		Does not comply	Partly Complies and extent of improvement needed			Fully Complies	Comment
			Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement		
Weighting of Answers		0	1	2	3	5	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethics and standards</li> <li>Counter fraud and corruption</li> </ul>						
	Annual governance statement						
	Financial reporting						
	Assurance framework						
	Internal Audit						
	External Audit						
10	Over the last year, has adequate consideration been given to all core areas?						
11	Over the last year, has the committee only considered agenda items that align with its core functions, as set out in the 2022 guidance?						
12	Has the committee met privately with the external auditors and head of internal audit in the last year?						
13	Has the committee been established in accordance with the 2022 guidance as follows?						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Separation from executive</li> </ul>						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A size that is not unwieldy and avoids use of substitutes</li> </ul>						
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusion of lay/co-opted independent members in accordance with legislation or CIPFA's recommendation</li> </ul>						



Good Practice Question		Does not comply	Partly Complies and extent of improvement needed			Fully Complies	Comment
			Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement		
Weighting of Answers		0	1	2	3	5	
14	Have all committee members been appointed or selected to ensure a committee membership that is knowledgeable and skilled?						
15	Has an evaluation of knowledge, skills and the training needs of the chair and committee members been carried out within the last two years?						
16	Have regular training and support arrangements been put in place covering the areas set out in the 2022 guidance?						
17	Across the committee membership, is there a satisfactory level of knowledge, as set out in the 2022 guidance?						
18	Is adequate secretariat and administrative support provided to the committee?						
19	Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the CFO?						
20	Has the committee obtained positive feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?						
21	Are meetings well chaired, ensuring key agenda items are addressed with a focus on improvement?						
22	Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?						

Good Practice Question		Does not comply	Partly Complies and extent of improvement needed			Fully Complies	Comment
			Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement		
Weighting of Answers		0	1	2	3	5	
23	Has the committee maintained a non-political approach to discussions throughout?						
24	Does the committee engage with a wide range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?						
25	Does the committee make recommendations for the improvement of governance, risk and control arrangements?						
26	Do audit committee recommendations have traction with those in leadership roles?						
27	Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?						
28	Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?						
29	Has this assessment been undertaken collaboratively with the audit committee members?						
	<b>Subtotal Score</b>						
	<b>Total Score</b> (max score is 200 – 40 questions multiplied by 5)						