

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee - Terms of Reference

The Ombudsman has established an Audit & Risk Assurance Committee whose role is to support the Ombudsman in relation to responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Accounting Officer's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances.

Membership

The members of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee are:

- an independent external Chair
- up to five other independent external members (who offer specific skills and experience sought by the Ombudsman and one of whom may be from another ombudsman office).

The Chief Operating Officer/Director of Investigations will act as Secretary to the Committee; other Management Team members, as determined by the Ombudsman, may be in attendance at the Committee's meetings.

The term of office for Independent members will be three years. The Ombudsman has the option to extend a term for one further year.

The meetings will be Chaired by one of the independent external members. The Ombudsman will appoint an independent member of the Panel to the position of Chair on the recommendation of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. Should the Ombudsman decide not to follow the recommendation of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee the Ombudsman's decision will be recorded in the minutes of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee's meeting.

Reporting

- Each Audit & Risk Assurance Committee shall be recorded in minutes that will be approved at the next meeting.
- The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will provide the Accounting Officer with an Annual Report, timed to support finalisation of the accounts and the Annual Governance Statement, summarising its conclusions from the work it has done during the year.

Responsibilities

The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will advise the Accounting Officer on:

- the strategic processes for risk, control and governance and the Annual Governance Statement;
- the draft Strategic and Business plans from a compliance, economy, efficiency and effectiveness basis in recognition of the requirement with the annual audit to account for the use of funds;
- the accounting policies, the accounts, including the process for review of the accounts prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified, and management's letter of representation to the external auditors;
- the planned activity and results of both internal and external audit;
- adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including external audit's management letter;
- assurances relating to the corporate governance requirements for the organisation;
- (where appropriate) proposals for tendering for Internal Audit services or for purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services;
- anti-fraud policies, whistle-blowing processes, and arrangements for special investigations;
- the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will also periodically review its own effectiveness.

Rights

The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee may:

- co-opt additional members for a period not exceeding a year to provide specialist skills, knowledge and experience;
- procure specialist ad-hoc advice subject to being within budget.

Access

- The representative of Internal Audit and the representative of External Audit will have free and confidential access to the Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.

Meetings

- The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will meet at least four times a year. The Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee or the Ombudsman may convene additional meetings, as they deem necessary.
- A minimum of three independent members of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will be present for the meeting to be deemed quorate.
- In the event of the Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee being unable to attend a meeting, one of the independent members will take the chair.

- Audit & Risk Assurance Committee meetings will normally be attended by the Ombudsman, Chief Operating Officer & Director of Investigations, Director of Policy, Legal & Governance, Corporate Services Manager, the Financial Accountant, the representatives from Internal Audit, and representatives of External Audit.
- The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee may ask any other officials of the office to attend to assist it with its discussions on any particular matter.
- The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee may invite other persons or bodies to attend meetings to provide professional advice or information on any matters that the Committee deems relevant to the proper discharge of its functions.
- The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee may ask any or all of those who normally attend but who are not members to withdraw to facilitate open and frank discussion of particular matters.

Information Requirements

For each meeting the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will be provided with:

- a report summarising any significant changes to the organisation's Risk Register, together with a list of High and Medium risk items;
- a progress report from Internal Audit representative summarising:
- work performed (and a comparison with work planned);
- key issues emerging from Internal Audit work;
- management response to audit recommendations;
- changes to the Periodic Plan;
- any resourcing issues affecting the delivery of Internal Audit objectives;
- a progress report from the External Audit representative summarising work done and emerging findings;
- a report or reports on any significant breaches of the organisation's control framework, frauds, losses, disposal of assets, write-offs, procurement outside of the normal arrangements and any other matters that the Committee ask to be reported to it at each of its meetings.

As and when appropriate the Committee will also be provided with:

- proposals for the Terms of Reference of Internal Audit;
- the Internal Audit Strategy;
- a copy of all internal audit reports issued;
- Internal Audit's Annual Opinion and Report;
- quality assurance reports on the Internal and External Audit functions;
- the draft accounts of the organisation;
- the draft Annual Governance Statement;
- a report on any changes to accounting policies;
- External Audit's ISA 260 report and associated management letter;
- a (verbal) report on co-operation between Internal and External Audit;
- proposals for tendering for either Internal or External Audit services or for purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services;

- any changes to the risk management policy and strategy;
- any changes to anti-fraud policies, whistle-blowing processes, and arrangements for special investigations;
- proposals for any significant changes to any elements of the control framework.
