

Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item no.
Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer)	Audit Committee	8 November 2016	4

Annual Review of Audit Committee's Performance

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To consider CIPFA's Self-Assessment of Good Practice contained within the CIPFA publication 'Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police 2013' and identify the actions necessary to ensure that the Audit Committee meets best practice guidance and provides value to the authority.

2. Outcomes

- 2.1 The determination of an improvement plan.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Audit Committee considers CIPFA's Self-Assessment of Good Practice at Appendix 1 and agree those areas where further improvement is considered beneficial.

4. Background

- 4.1 Audit committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their function is to provide a high-level focus on assurance and the organisation's arrangements for governance, managing risk, maintaining an effective control environment, and reporting on financial and non-financial performance.
- 4.2 An Audit Committee's effectiveness should be judged by the contribution it makes to, and the beneficial impact it has on the authority's business.
- 4.3 Evidence of effectiveness will usually be characterised as 'influence', 'persuasion' and 'support'. A good standard of performance against recommended practice, together with a knowledgeable and experienced membership, are essential for delivering effectiveness.

4.4 Authorities are encouraged not to regard meeting the recommended practice as a tick box activity and are reminded that achieving recommended practice does not mean necessarily that the committee is effective. To help give a more rounded opinion of the committee's effectiveness, further guidance has been provided in the publication in respect of a knowledge and skills framework which can be used to guide members on their training needs.

4.5 At the last review in November 2015 the self-assessment was discussed at the meeting and an improvement plan was agreed. All actions from the assessment in November 2015 have now been implemented.

5. Key issues and proposals

5.1 The self-assessment at Appendix 1 has been completed by the Head of Governance and ratified by the Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer). Members will be asked to contribute to a discussion at the meeting with a view to ensuring the committee are still meeting the requirements of CIPFA's 'Self-Assessment of Good Practice' and agree the areas that require attention highlighted in bold.

Financial and legal implications	
Finance	There are no specific financial implications arising from the agreement of the improvement plan.
Legal	There are no specific legal implications arising from the agreement of the improvement plan.

Other risks / implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	x
equality and diversity	x
sustainability	x
health and safety	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
climate change	x
data protection	x

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List of background papers:		
name of document	date	where available for inspection

List of appendices

Appendix 1 – CIPFA Self-Assessment of Good Practice

arm/audit/cr/16/0811jb2

CIPFA self-assessment of Good Practice – November 2016

Good practice questions		Yes	Partly	No	Comments
Audit committee purpose and governance					
1	Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee?	✓			The Audit Committee has been in place since December 2005.
2	Does the audit committee report directly to full council?	✓			<p>A periodic report is submitted to Full Council with the last report being considered September 2016.</p> <p>In previous years, attendance figures were included to highlight low attendance and encourage members to attend. However it is no longer felt that the figures are required due to high attendance figures.</p> <p>Action: Attendance figures will be removed from the periodic report submitted to Full Council. However this will be reviewed annually.</p>
3	Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's Position Statement?	✓			The terms of reference sets out the purpose of the Audit Committee in accordance with CIPFA's Position Statement.
4	Is the role and purpose of the audit committee understood and accepted across the authority?	✓			The terms of reference are reviewed annually by the Committee in March and also form part of the Council's Constitution.
5	Does the audit committee provide support to the authority in meeting the requirements of good governance?	✓			The Audit Committee provide assurance on the adequacy of internal control, risk management

					and the integrity of financial reporting and the annual governance processes.
6	Are the arrangements to hold the committee to account for its performance operating satisfactorily?	✓			A review of effectiveness is completed annually.
Functions of the committee					
7	Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA'S Position Statement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ good governance ▪ assurance framework ▪ internal audit ▪ external audit ▪ financial reporting ▪ risk management ▪ value for money or best value ▪ counter-fraud and corruption 	✓			The terms of reference address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement.
8	Is an annual evaluation undertaken to assess whether the committee is fulfilling its terms of reference and that adequate consideration has been given to all core areas?	✓			The annual review of effectiveness gives the Audit Committee the opportunity to assess if it is fulfilling the terms of reference.
9	Has the audit committee considered the wider areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement and whether it would be appropriate for the committee to undertake them?	✓			The Audit Committee already participate by considering governance and risk. The Code of Practice on Treasury Management requires a body to be nominated and responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the Treasury Management Strategy and policies. The Council has nominated the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (Cabinet 25/03/2015).
10	Where coverage of core areas has been found to be limited, are plans in place to address this?	N/A	N/A	N/A	There have been no instances where coverage of core areas has been

					found to be limited.
11	Has the committee maintained its non-advising role by not taking on any decision-making powers that are not in line with its core purpose?	✓			The Committee does not take on any decision making powers that are not documented within its terms of reference.
Good practice questions		Yes	Partly	No	
Membership and support					
12	<p>Has an effective audit committee structure and composition of the committee been selected? This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ separation from the executive ▪ an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills among the membership ▪ a size of committee that is not unwieldy ▪ where independent members are used, that they have been appointed using an appropriate process. 	<p>✓ ✓ ✓ N/A</p>			<p>Whilst individual Members of the Audit Committee may also serve on overview and scrutiny the audit committee is independent of the scrutiny function. The Audit Committee Chairman is not a member of the Executive.</p> <p>The Council has agreed that all Members will complete a Councillor Development Plan and a Development Needs Analysis. These are compiled by the Member Development Officer and appropriate training sessions are provided.</p> <p>The Cross-Party Councillor Development Group meets quarterly to identify training needs with the Member Development Officer, who arranges training as required.</p>
13	Does the chair of the committee have appropriate knowledge and skills?	✓			The Audit Committee Chairman was appointed in May 2015. She holds an Associate Chartered Accountants qualification (ACA) and has previously worked in managerial roles within the audit

					environment.
14	Are arrangements in place to support the committee with briefings and training?	✓			Training is provided to the Audit Committee in accordance with their scheduled Audit Committee Work Programme. In addition, the Committee members will receive briefings as part of the Audit Committee agenda as and when required.
15	Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the <u>core</u> knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?	✓			The induction training in May 2015 covered the core areas of the knowledge and skills framework. In addition on-going regular attendance will ensure members complete the work programme thereby continually enhancing their knowledge and skills.
16	Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the chief financial officer?	✓			Both the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the Head of Governance (Chief Internal Auditor) attend every Audit Committee and a representative from our External Auditors is frequently in attendance. Following on from the Senior Management restructure in July 2016 the new CFO and Service Directors are developing their relationships with Audit Committee and members more generally and this will continue to evolve over the next 12 months.
17	Is adequate secretariat and	✓			

	administrative support to the committee provided?				
Effectiveness of the committee					
18	Has the committee obtained feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?	✓			Feedback is sought annually from the External Auditor.
19	Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?	✓			<p>Members have completed a questionnaire in respect of their qualifications, specific knowledge and experience which may assist when adding value to the committee and/or the organisation.</p> <p>Action: One-to-one meetings will be held with members to explore the questionnaires in more depth to identify any gaps in knowledge and skills with the view to developing a training and development action plan. Meetings will be scheduled for early January 2017.</p>
20	Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?	✓			Actions contained within this checklist are highlighted in bold and will be implemented prior to the next annual review.