
Report To:	Audit Committee	Date:	10 January 2023
Report By:	Interim Director Finance and Corporate Governance	Report No:	AC/04/23/AP/APr
Contact Officer:	Andi Priestman	Contact No:	01475 712251
Subject:	CIPFA AUDIT COMMITTEE GUIDANCE – 2022 UPDATE		

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to advise members of the updated CIPFA guidance on Audit Committees within Local Authorities.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that members note the updated guidance for Audit Committees and agree to complete the self-evaluation questionnaire, the results of which will, together with officers' review of the updated guidance, inform an action plan which will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration and approval.

Alan Puckrin
Interim Director
Finance and Corporate Governance

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

3.1 CIPFA guidance for Audit Committees was updated in October 2022 in the publication “Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police” (2022 Edition). This publication represents CIPFA’s view of best practice for audit committees in local authorities throughout the United Kingdom. The 2022 version contains some appendices, including:

- Self-Assessment of Good Practice; and
- Evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the Audit Committee.

3.2 These appendices set out key areas for self-assessment and evaluation including Audit Committee Purpose and Governance; Functions of the Audit Committee; Membership and Support; and Effectiveness of the audit committee.

3.3 This CIPFA publication also includes a 2022 Position Statement on Audit Committees in local authorities which sets out roles and responsibilities and good practice principles for audit committees. In particular, CIPFA is clear that Audit Committees are a key component of an authority’s governance framework, their purpose being to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. The Position Statement also sets out the core functions of an audit committee being as follows:

- Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements;
- Financial and governance reporting; and
- Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance.

3.4 CIPFA expects that all local government bodies should make their best efforts to adopt the principles, aiming for effective Audit Committee arrangements.

3.5 It is important that the Council’s Audit Committee demonstrates a high level of compliance with best practice guidance on Audit Committees in order to ensure that it can evidence its effectiveness as a scrutiny body and as a foundation for strong corporate governance.

4.0 PROPOSALS

4.1 It is recommended that Members note the updated guidance for Audit Committees and agree to complete the self-evaluation questionnaire, the results of which will, together with officers’ review of the updated guidance, inform an action plan which will be reported to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration and approval. A copy of the self-assessment questionnaire is annexed to this report. A copy of the updated CIPFA guidance will be shared with Members of the Committee in advance of the meeting.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation is agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO	N/A
Financial		X	
Legal/Risk	X		
Human Resources		X	
Strategic (LOIP/Corporate Plan)	X		
Equalities & Fairer Scotland Duty		X	
Children & Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing		X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X	
Data Protection		X	

5.2 **Legal/Risk**

The review of the updated guidance will ensure that the Audit Committee will maximise the opportunity for effective scrutiny and to fulfil its governance role.

5.3 **Strategic**

This report relates to strong corporate governance.

6.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

6.1 Relevant Officers were asked to provide updates to the report as appropriate.

7.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1 CIPFA Guidance on Audit Committees 2022. Copies circulated to Audit Committee Members.

Self-assessment of good practice

This appendix provides a high-level review that incorporates the key principles set out in CIPFA's Position Statement and this publication. 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 questions	Does not comply	Partially complies and extent of improvement needed*			Fully complies
	Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement	Minor improvement	No further improvement
Weighting of answers	0	1	2	3	5

Audit committee purpose and governance

- 1 Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee that is not combined with other functions (eg standards, ethics, scrutiny)?
- 2 Does the audit committee report directly to the governing body (PCC and chief constable/full council/full fire authority, etc)?
- 3 Has the committee maintained its advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers?
- 4 Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's 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?

* Where the committee does not fully comply with an element, three options are available to allow distinctions between aspects that require significant improvement and those only requiring minor changes.

Good practice questions	Does not comply					Partially complies and extent of improvement needed					Fully complies														
	Major improvement					Significant improvement					Moderate improvement					Minor improvement					No further improvement				
Weighting of answers	0					1					2					3					5				
8 Does the committee publish an annual report in accordance with the 2022 guidance, including:																									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement 2022 																									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> results of the annual evaluation, development work undertaken and planned improvements 																									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how it has fulfilled its terms of reference and the key issues escalated in the year? 																									
Functions of the committee																									
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:																									
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> financial management value for money ethics and standards counter fraud and corruption 																									
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 or selected wider 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?																									

Good practice questions	Does not comply					Partially complies and extent of improvement needed			Fully complies
	Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement	Minor improvement	No further improvement				
Weighting of answers	0	1	2	3	5				

Membership and support

<p>13 Has the committee been established in accordance with the 2022 guidance as follows?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation from executive • A size that is not unwieldy and avoids use of substitutes • Inclusion of lay/co-opted independent members in accordance with legislation or CIPFA's recommendation 								
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?								

Effectiveness of the committee

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?								
23 Has the committee maintained a non-political approach to discussions throughout?								

Good practice questions	Partially complies and extent of improvement needed				Fully complies	
	Does not comply	Major improvement	Significant improvement	Moderate improvement	Minor improvement	No further improvement
Weighting of answers	0	1	2	3	5	
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?						
Subtotal score						
Total score						
Maximum possible score						200**

** 40 questions/sub-questions multiplied by five.