

**Epping Forest District Council Audit and Governance Committee self-assessment of good practice:** This appendix provides a high-level review that incorporates the key principles set out in CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police and this publication.

Where an audit committee has a high degree of performance against the good practice principles then 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 can be used to support the planning of the audit committee work programme and training plans. It can also inform an annual report.

Good Practice Questions		Yes	Partly	No
<b>Audit committee purpose and governance</b>				
1	Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee?	The Committee meets five times a year.		
2	Does the audit committee report directly to full council?	Council receives all minutes from the Audit and Governance Committee.		
3	Do the terms of reference (ToR) clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's Position Statement?	The Committee reviews its ToR on an annual basis to ensure it remains up to date. The ToR was reviewed in November 2020 and is on the November 2021 agenda.		
4	Is the role and purpose of the audit committee understood and accepted across the authority?	The Audit and Governance Committee forms part of the Council's committee structure. Its role and function are set out in the Council's Constitution.		

Good Practice Questions		Yes	Partly	No
5	Does the audit committee provide support to the Authority in meeting the requirements of good governance?	Through its Terms of Reference, reports it receives, member training, review and challenge of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), annual accounts, representation by members and officers.		
6	Are the arrangements to hold the committee to account for its performance operating satisfactorily?	There are arrangements for holding the committee to account through its reporting to Council (including annual report and effectiveness review).		
<b>Functions of the committee</b>				
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"> <li>• good governance</li> <li>• assurance framework including partnerships and collaboration arrangements</li> <li>• Internal and external audit</li> <li>• financial reporting</li> <li>• risk management</li> <li>• value for money or best value</li> <li>• counter fraud and corruption</li> <li>• supporting the ethical framework</li> </ul>	These are covered in the Committee's Terms of Reference and review of the Annual Governance Statement.		

Good Practice Questions		Yes	Partly	No
8	<p>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?</p>	<p>The committee produces an annual report and on an annual basis reviews its Terms of Reference and undertakes an effectiveness review.</p> <p>The Committee's annual report 2020/21 was approved in July 2021.</p>		
9	<p>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?</p> <p><i>Note: CIPFA guidance states that Audit Committees can also support their authorities by undertaking a wider role in other areas including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>considering governance, risk or control matters at the request of other committees or statutory officers</i></li> <li>• <i>working with the local standards and ethics committees to support ethical values</i></li> <li>• <i>reviewing and monitoring treasury management arrangements</i></li> <li>• <i>providing oversight of other public reports, such as the annual report.</i></li> </ul>	<p>The Committee includes treasury management as evidenced in their Terms of Reference.</p> <p>The Committee considered merging with Standards in 2019 but decided to maintain separation. This decision was endorsed by the 12 March 2020 Constitution Working Group.</p> <p>Other roles as suggested by CIPFA are adequately covered by other committees, Cabinet and the full Council.</p>		
10	<p>Where coverage of core areas has been found to be limited, are plans in place to address this?</p>	<p>Various reports received by the Committee throughout the year ensure the majority of core areas are covered. This includes the Annual Governance Statement</p>		

Good Practice Questions		Yes	Partly	No
		(AGS), Internal Audit's annual report and its regular progress reports, External Audit reports (including the Statement of Accounts), and risk management reports.		
11	Has the committee maintained its advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers that are not in line with its core purpose?	Yes.		
<b>Membership and support</b>				
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"> <li>• separation from the executive</li> <li>• an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills among the membership</li> <li>• a size of committee that is not unwieldy</li> <li>• where independent members are used, that they have been appointed using an appropriate process.</li> <li>• consideration has been given to the inclusion of at least one independent member</li> </ul>	The Committee comprises five councillors and two Independent Members (with one position currently vacant), with the main political parties represented. Each brings to the Committee a range of experiences and skills. This is supplemented with periodic member training.		
13	Have independent members appointed to the committee been recruited in an open and transparent way and approved by the full council as appropriate for the organization?	An Independent Member was appointed in October 2020 and recruitment of the other Independent Member is in progress.		
14	Does the chairman of the committee have appropriate	Yes		

Good Practice Questions		Yes	Partly	No
	knowledge and skills?			
15	Are arrangements in place to support the committee with briefings and training?	The formal work programme for the Committee is reviewed at each meeting. Periodic training opportunities (internal and external) are made available to members including joint events with Broxbourne and Harlow Councils.		
16	Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the core knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?	Member requirements and core knowledge and skills framework are taken into account when developing the training programme.  A formal knowledge and skills analysis was undertaken and reported to the December 2020 Audit and Governance Committee meeting.		
17	Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the chief financial officer?	Yes, and is the opinion of the Section 151 Officer and Chief Internal Auditor.		
18	Is adequate secretariat and administrative support to the committee provided?	Yes.		
<b>Effectiveness of the committee</b>				

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19	Has the committee obtained feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?	The Chairman meets regularly with the Chief Internal Auditor and the S151 Officer with access to External Audit. The Committee's annual report is approved by Council.		
20	Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?	Yes. Attendance levels are high; discussion and debate actively encouraged by the Chairman.		
21	Does the committee engage with a wider range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?	Officers are held to account through the Committee's review of audit reports (internal and external) and progress being made to implement recommendations. The Committee can request Officers to attend if appropriate and has done so on occasion.		
22	Does the committee make recommendations for the improvement of governance, risk and are these acted on?	This is undertaken through the Committee's work programme.		
23	Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?	The Committee looks at itself by way of assessing its effectiveness and governance arrangements. The annual report assists		

Good Practice Questions		Yes	Partly	No
		with the process. In addition, the Committee adds value by ensuring audit recommendations are acted upon which assist Officers to spend more time doing audits.		
24	Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?	An action plan to address relevant issues is reported to the Committee as part of the review of effectiveness.		
25	Does the committee publish an annual report to account for its performance and explain it works?	Yes, and is approved by Council.		