

### Audit Committee Terms of Reference

<b>Document Change Control</b>				
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April 2018	1	Approved version	Approved by the Trust Board of Directors	
February 2019	2	Major	All sections revised	Director of Corporate Governance
March 2020	2.1	Minor	Annual Revision	Director of Corporate Governance
March 2021	2.2	Nil changes	Annual Revision	Director of Corporate Governance
Dec 2021	2.3	Nil changes	Annual Revision	Director of Integrated Governance

<b>Date Adopted</b>	7 <sup>th</sup> April 2022TBC
<b>Review Frequency</b>	Annual
<b>Terms of Reference Drafting</b>	Director of Integrated Governance
<b>Review and Approval</b>	Audit Committee
<b>Adoption and ratification of changes</b>	Board of Directors

## **1) Purpose and function**

The purpose and function of the Committee is to:

- 1.1. Monitor the integrity of the financial statements of the Trust, any formal announcements relating to the Trust's financial performance, and reviewing significant financial reporting judgements contained in them
- 1.2. Assist the Board of Directors with its oversight responsibilities and independently and objectively monitor, review and report to the Board on the adequacy of the processes for governance, assurance, and risk management, and where appropriate, facilitate and support through its independence, the attainment of effective processes
- 1.3. Review the effectiveness of the Trust's internal audit and external audit function; and in discharging its role and function, the Committee shall provide assurance to the Board of Directors that an appropriate system of internal control is in place to ensure that business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards.
- 1.4. Report to the Board as to how it is discharging its responsibilities as a Committee

## **2) Authority**

- 2.1. The Board of Directors hereby resolves to establish a Committee of the Board to be known as the Audit Committee.
- 2.2. The Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Directors (the Board).
- 2.3. The Committee is authorised by the Board to investigate any activity within its terms of reference. It is authorised to seek any information it requires from any employee and any such employee will be directed to co-operate with any request made by the Committee.
- 2.4. The Committee is authorised by the Board to obtain outside legal or other independent professional advice and to secure the attendance of outsiders with relevant experience or expertise. Should the projected cost of any such external advice exceed £50k, consent of the CEO and Director of Finance should be sought in advance of engagement.
- 2.5. A Non-Executive Committee of the Trust Board of Directors has no executive powers, other than those specifically delegated in these Terms of Reference

## **3. Membership and Attendance**

### **Membership**

- 3.1. The Committee shall be appointed by the Board of Directors and shall consist of four Non-Executive Directors, with at least one of whom shall have recent and relevant financial experience.
- 3.2. A Non-Executive Director shall be appointed as Chair of the Committee.
- 3.3. The Chairman of the Board of Directors shall not be a member of the Committee.
- 3.4. The Chair of the Committee shall not be the Senior Independent Director of the Board of Directors.

### **Quorum**

- 3.5. The quorum necessary for the transaction of business shall be two members of the Committee
- 3.6. In the absence of the Chair of the Committee, the Secretary will invite one of the other Committee members to chair the meeting.

### **Attendance**

- 3.7. Meetings of the Committee shall normally be attended by:

- The Chief Executive
- The Chief Finance Officer, or a nominated Deputy
- Representatives from the External (Appointed) Auditors, Internal Auditors and Counter Fraud advisors
- The Director of Corporate Governance, or nominated deputy, will act as Secretary to the Committee and will therefore attend all meetings
- Financial Controller
- Others by invitation – this may include executive sponsors in the case of audit reports Executive and Non-Executive Directors can attend any Board Committee in order to exercise their functions.

#### **4. Roles and Responsibilities (not delegated unless otherwise stated)**

##### **4.1 Financial reporting**

The Committee shall:

- a) Ensure the integrity of the annual report and financial statements of the Trust, and any other formal announcements relating to its financial performance, reviewing significant reporting issues and judgements which they contain
- b) Review summary financial statements, significant financial returns to regulators and any financial information contained in other official documents, including the Annual Governance Statement, focusing in particular on:
  - Any changes in accounting policies and practices
  - Major judgmental areas
  - Value for Money considerations
  - Significant adjustments arising from the audit
  - The going concern basis
  - Compliance with accounting standards
  - Major risks to the Trust
- c) Review the consistency of, and changes to, accounting policies both on a year-on-year basis and across the Trust.
- d) Review the methods used to account for significant or unusual transactions where different approaches are possible (including unadjusted mis-statements in the financial statements)
- e) Review whether the Trust has followed appropriate accounting standards and made appropriate estimates and judgements, taking into account the views of both the Trust Executive and the External Auditor
- f) Review the clarity of disclosure in the Trust's financial reports and the context within which statements are made
- g) The Committee Chair shall report formally to the Board on its proceedings after each meeting on all escalation matters
- h) The Committee shall make whatever recommendations to the Board it deems appropriate on any area within its remit where action or improvement is needed.

##### **4.2 Governance, Risk Management and Internal Control**

The Committee shall:

- a) Review the establishment and maintenance of an effective system of integrated governance, risk management and internal control, across the whole of the Trust's activities (both clinical and non-clinical), that supports the achievement of the organisation's objectives
- b) Review the adequacy of risk and control related disclosure statements, in particular the Annual Governance Statement, together with the Head of Internal Audit statement, External Audit opinion or other appropriate independent assurances, prior to endorsement by the Board

- c) Review the Trust's processes to establish and maintain an effective Board Assurance Framework and processes that indicate the degree of the achievement of corporate objectives, the effectiveness of the management of principle risks and the appropriateness of the above disclosure statements
- d) Review the policies for ensuring compliance with relevant regulatory, legal and code of conduct requirements, any related reporting and self-certifications, and work related to counter fraud and security as required by the NHS Counter Fraud Authority
- e) Receive assurance from Internal Audit, External Audit, Directors and managers, including evidence of compliance with systems of governance, risk management and internal control, together with indicators of their effectiveness.

### **4.3 Internal Audit and Counter Fraud**

The Committee shall:

- a) Ensure that there is an effective Internal Audit function that meets the aspirations of the Trust's Executive, *Government Internal Audit Standards* and provides appropriate independent assurance to the Committee, Chief Executive and Board of Directors
- b) Consider and approve the Internal Audit Strategy and annual plan recommended by the Chief Finance Officer and ensure there are adequate resources and access to information, including the Board Assurance Framework, to enable it to perform its function effectively and in accordance with the relevant professional standards. The Committee shall also ensure the function has adequate standing and is free from management or other restrictions
- c) Review promptly all reports on the Trust from the Internal and External Auditors, review and monitor the Executive Management's responsiveness to the findings and recommendations of reports, and ensure coordination between Internal and External Auditors to assist the Executive to optimise use of audit resource
- d) Meet the Head of Internal Audit at least once a year, without management being present, to discuss their remit and any issues arising from the internal audits carried out. The Head of Internal Audit shall be given the right of direct access to the Chair of the Committee, Chief Executive, Board of Directors and to the Committee
- e) Conduct a review of the Executive's use of internal audit and counter fraud consultancy resources, including an assessment of the effectiveness of these services.

### **4.4 External Audit**

The Committee shall:

- a) In conjunction with the Chief Finance Officer, consider and make recommendations to the Council of Governors, in relation to the appointment, re-appointment and removal of the Trust's External Auditor
- b) Work with the Chief Finance Officer and the Council of Governors to manage the selection process for new auditors and, if an auditor resigns, the Committee shall investigate the issues leading to this, and make any associated recommendations to the Council of Governors
- c) Receive assurance of External Auditor compliance with the Audit Code for NHS Foundation Trusts
- d) Approve the External Auditor's remuneration and terms of engagement including fees for audit or non-audit services and the appropriateness of fees, to enable an adequate audit to be conducted
- e) Review and monitor the External Auditor's independence and objectivity and the effectiveness of the audit process. In particular, the Committee will review the work and findings of the External Auditors and consider the implications and management's responses to their work
- f) Meet the external auditor at least once a year, without management being present, to discuss their remit and any issues arising from the audit

- g) Discuss and agree with the External Auditors, before the audit commences, the nature and scope of the audit, and the impact on the audit fee
- h) Review all external audit reports, including the report to those charged with governance (before its submission to the Board of Directors) and any work undertaken outside the annual audit plan, together with the appropriateness of management responses

#### **4.5 Other Board Assurance Functions**

- a) The Committee will initiate investigations or reviews of any matters within its scope of authority in response to any indicators or matters of concern arising at the Committee or raised elsewhere and referred to the Committee.
- b) The Committee shall review the findings of other significant assurance functions, both internal and external to the Trust and consider the implications to the governance of the Trust. These will include, but not be limited to, any reviews undertaken by the Department of Health Arms-Length Bodies, Regulators and professional bodies with responsibility for the performance of staff or functions
- c) The Committee shall review the work of other Committees within the organization, whose work can provide relevant assurance to the Audit Committee's own scope of work and in relation to matters of quality affecting the Board Assurance Framework, including the Clinical Governance Committee and the Finance and Performance Committee. In reviewing the work of the Clinical Governance Committee, and issues around clinical risk management, the Audit Committee will satisfy itself on the assurance that can be gained from the clinical audit function.

#### **5). Reporting and Accountability**

- a) The Committee Chair shall report formally to the Trust Board of Directors through the template escalation report, and make recommendations the Committee deems appropriate on any area within its remit where action or improvement is needed
- b) The Committee shall report to the Trust Board annually on its work in support of the Annual Governance Statement and Accounts
- c) The Committee shall make necessary recommendations to the Council of Governors on areas relating to the appointment, re-appointment and removal of External Auditors, the level of remuneration and terms of engagement as it deems appropriate
- d) The Chair of the Committee shall write to the Independent Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts (NHS Improvement) in those instances where the services of the External Auditor are terminated in disputed circumstances
- e) Where exceptional, serious and improper activities have been revealed by the Committee, the Chair of the Committee shall write to NHS Improvement, if insufficient action has been taken by the Board of Directors after being informed of the situation
- f) The Committee shall produce a statement to be included in the Trust's Annual Report which describes how the Committee has fulfilled its terms of reference and discharged its responsibilities throughout the previous year
- g) The Committee shall review its own terms of reference annually.

#### **6) Conduct of Business**

##### **Administration**

- a) The Director of Corporate Governance shall be Secretary to the Committee and shall attend to take minutes of the meeting and provide appropriate support to the Chairman and Committee members.
- b) The Committee shall be supported administratively by the Director of Corporate Governance, whose duties in this respect will include:
  - agreement of agendas with Chair and attendees and collation of papers

- minute the proceedings of all Committee meetings, and draft minutes of Committee meetings shall be made available promptly to all members of the Committee
- keeping a record of actions, matters arising and issues to be carried forward
- advising the Committee on pertinent issues/areas

Enabling the development and training of Committee members

- c) The Committee must consider the frequency and timing of meetings needed to allow it to discharge all of its responsibilities.
- d) Meetings will be held at least quarterly, an additional meeting to review the draft annual report and accounts, with additional meetings where necessary.

Notice of meetings

- e) An agenda of items to be discussed will be forwarded to each member of the Committee and any other person required to attend, no later than five working days before the date of the meeting. Supporting papers will be sent to Committee members and to other attendees as appropriate, at the same time.
- f) In normal circumstances, a minimum notice period of two weeks must be given for any other meetings of the Committee. Emergency meetings can be arranged, at shorter notice, if this is approved and evidenced as such, by the majority of the members of the Committee.

**Approved 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022 – Trust Board**