

Adopted by COUNCIL: 17 OCTOBER 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

The Wollongong City Council (Council) Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (the Committee) has been established in accordance with section 428A of the *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021*. This Charter sets out the Committee's objectives, authority, composition, tenure, roles and responsibilities, reporting and administrative arrangements.

2. COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES

The objective of Council's Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee is to provide independent assurance to Council by monitoring, reviewing and providing advice about the Council's governance processes, compliance, risk management and control frameworks, external accountability obligations and overall performance.

3. INDEPENDENCE

- 3.1 The Committee is to be independent to ensure it has no real or perceived bias or conflicts of interest that may interfere with its ability to act independently and provide Council with robust, objective and unbiased advice and assurance.
- 3.2 The Committee is to provide an advisory and assurance role only and is to have no administrative function, delegated financial responsibility or any management functions of the Council. The Committee will provide independent advice to the Council that is informed by the Council's internal audit and risk management activities and information and advice provided by Council staff, relevant external bodies and subject matter experts.
- 3.3 The Committee must at all times ensure it maintains a direct reporting line to and from the Council's internal audit function and act as a mechanism for internal audit to report to the governing body and General Manager on matters affecting the performance of the internal audit function.

4. AUTHORITY

- 4.1 Council authorises the Committee, for the purposes of exercising of its role and responsibilities, to:
 - access any information it needs from the Council
 - use any Council resources it needs
 - have direct and unrestricted access to the General Manager and Executive of the Council
 - seek the General Manager's permission to meet with any other Council staff member or contractor
 - discuss any matters with the external auditor or other external parties
 - request the attendance of any employee at Committee meetings
 - obtain external legal or other professional advice, as considered necessary to meet its responsibilities. Details of any costs incurred shall be included in the annual report of the Chairperson provided to the Council in accordance with clause 7.2.
- 4.2 Information and documents pertaining to the Committee are confidential and are not to be made publicly available. The Committee may only release Council information to external parties that are assisting the Committee to fulfil its responsibilities with the approval of the General Manager, except where it is being provided to an external investigative or oversight agency for the purpose of informing that agency of a matter that may warrant its attention.

5. COMPOSITION AND TENURE

- 5.1 The Committee consists of one independent voting Chair, two independent voting members and two voting councillor members.
- 5.2 The governing body is to appoint the Chair and members of the Committee. The Chair is counted as one member of the Committee.
- 5.3 The Lord Mayor shall not be a member of the Committee.
- 5.4 All committee members are required to meet the independence and eligibility criteria prescribed in the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit in local councils in NSW*.
- 5.5 Members will be appointed for a four-year period. Members can be reappointed for a further term, but the total period of continuous membership cannot exceed eight years and extension is at the discretion of Council. This includes any term as Chair of the Committee. Members who have served an eight-year term (either as member or Chair) must have a two-year break from serving on the Committee before being appointed again.
- 5.6 To preserve the Committee's knowledge of Council, ideally, no more than one member should leave the Committee because of rotation on any one year.
- 5.7 Notwithstanding Clause 5.5, Council may determine that a member serve a term of less than 4 years to ensure that membership renewal dates are staggered so knowledge of the council's operations, financial reporting structure and other important aspects are not lost to the audit, risk and improvement committee when members change.
- 5.8 Specific member terms and conditions are to be disclosed in a letter of appointment. New members will be thoroughly inducted to their role and receive relevant information and briefings on their appointment to assist them to meet their committee responsibilities.
- 5.9 Prior to approving the reappointment or extension of the Chair's or an independent member's term, the governing body is to undertake an assessment of the Chair's or committee member's performance. Reappointment of the Chair and members is also to be subject to the individual continuing to meet independence and eligibility requirements. The General Manager will advise relevant members in a timely manner of the proposed timetable for assessment and possible reappointment.
- 5.10 Members of the Committee are to possess and maintain a broad range of skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the operations, governance and financial management of Council, the environment in which Council operates, and the contribution that the Committee makes to the Council.
- 5.11 At least one member of the Committee must have accounting or related financial management experience with an understanding of accounting and auditing standards in a local government environment. All members should have sufficient understanding of the Council's financial reporting responsibilities to be able to contribute to the Committee's consideration of the Council's annual financial statements.

6. ROLE

- 6.1 In accordance with section 428A of the Local Government Act 1993, the role of the Committee is to keep under review the following aspects of Council's operations:
 - compliance
 - risk management
 - fraud control
 - financial management
 - governance
 - implementation of the strategic plan, delivery program and strategies
 - service reviews
 - collection of performance measurement data by the Council, and
 - internal audit.
- 6.2 The Committee may provide advice to the Council in relation to any of the matters referenced in 6.1.

- 6.3 The Committee may, if requested, provide advice to the Council in relation to the process for the annual review of performance of General Manager.
- 6.4 The Committee may also provide information to the Council for the purpose of improving Council's performance of its functions.
- 6.5 The Committee's specific audit, risk and improvement responsibilities under section 428A are outlined in **Schedule 1** to this charter.
- 6.6 The Committee will act as a forum for the Council's internal audit function and oversee its planning, monitoring and reporting to ensure it operates effectively.
- 6.7 The Committee will have no power of direction over external audit or the manner in which the external audit is planned or undertaken but will act as a forum for the consideration of external audit findings.
- 6.8 The Committee is directly responsible and accountable to the Council for the exercise of its responsibilities. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Committee must at all times recognise that primary responsibility for management of the Council rests with the governing body and the General Manager. The responsibilities of the Committee may be revised or expanded in consultation with, or as requested by Council from time to time.

7 RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

Independent members

- 7.1 The Chair and members of the Committee are expected to understand and observe the requirements of the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*. Members are also expected to:
 - make themselves available as required to attend and participate in meetings
 - contribute the time needed to review and understand information provided to it
 - apply good analytical skills, objectivity and judgement
 - act in the best interests of the Council
 - have the personal courage to raise and deal with tough issues, express opinions frankly, ask questions that go to the fundamental core of the issue and pursue independent lines of inquiry
 - maintain effective working relationships with the Council
 - have strong leadership qualities (Chair)
 - lead effective committee meetings (Chair), and
 - oversee the Council's internal audit function (Chair).

Specific responsibilities of the chairperson

- 7.2 The chairperson will manage the Committee with the following specific duties and responsibilities:
 - i Act as chair, unless absent, at all meetings of the Committee
 - ii act in an advisory capacity to the General Manager in all matters relating to the Committee
 - iii assist the Committee in the discharge of its mandate and responsibilities
 - iv Ensure the Committee reviews its Charter as required by Section 10
 - v Prepare and present regular, and at least annual, reports to the Council on the activities of the Committee and make recommendations as required
 - vi Any other duties and responsibilities set by the Council.

Councillor members

- 7.3 Councillor members of the Committee have the following specific duties and responsibilities:
 - relay to the Committee any concerns the governing body may have regarding the Council issues being considered by the Committee.
 - provide insights into local issues and the strategic priorities of the Council that would add value to the Committee's consideration of agenda items.
 - advise the governing body (as necessary) of the work of the Committee and any issues arising from it, and
 - assist the governing body to review the performance of the Committee.

- 7.4 Issues or information the Councillor members raise with or provides to the Committee must relate to the matters listed in Schedule 1 and issues being considered by the Committee.
- 7.5 The Councillor members of the Committee must conduct themselves in a non-partisan and professional manner. The Councillor members of the Committee must not engage in any conduct that seeks to politicise the activities of the Committee or the internal audit function or that could be seen to do so.
- 7.6 If a Councillor member of the Committee engage in such conduct or in any other conduct that may bring the Committee and its work into disrepute, the Chair of the Committee may recommend to the Council, that the Councillor member be removed from membership of the Committee. Where the Council does not agree to the Committee Chair's recommendation, the Council must give reasons for its decision in writing to the Chair.

Conduct

- 7.7 Independent committee members are required to comply with Council's Code of Conduct and be held to the same ethical, behavioural and conduct standards as officials of the council.
- 7.8 Complaints or breaches of Councils Code of Conduct by an independent committee member are to be dealt with in accordance with the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*. The General Manager must consult with the governing body before taking any disciplinary action against an independent committee member in response to a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 7.9 If an independent member is Prequalified on the NSW Government *Audit and Risk Committee Independent Chairs and Members Prequalification Scheme* they should also be guided by the code of conduct governing the NSW Government *Audit and Risk Committee Independent Chairs and Members Prequalification Scheme*.
- 7.10 Members of the Committee must be respectful and courteous in all dealings with council staff.

Conflict of interests

- 7.11 Once a year, Committee members will provide written declarations to the Council stating that they do not have any conflicts of interest that would preclude them from being members of the Committee. Independent committee members are 'designated persons' and must also complete and submit returns of interest.
- 7.12 Committee members and observers must declare any pecuniary or non-pecuniary conflicts of interest that may have at the start of each meeting, before discussion of the relevant agenda item or issue, and when the issue arises. Where committee members and observers are deemed to have a pecuniary or a significant non-pecuniary conflict of interest, they are to remove themselves from Committee deliberations on the issue. Details of any conflicts of interest should also be appropriately minuted.

Standards

- 7.13 Committee members are to conduct their work in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors and the current Australian risk management standard, where applicable.

8 WORKPLANS

- 8.1 The work of the Committee is to be thoroughly planned and executed to ensure that all Council activities and functions are reviewed. The Committee must develop a strategic plan every four years to ensure that all matters listed in Schedule 1 are reviewed by the Committee and the internal audit function over each Council term. The strategic plan must be reviewed at least annually to ensure it remains appropriate.
- 8.2 The Committee may vary the strategic work plan at any time to address new or emerging risks. The governing body of the Council may also, by resolution, request the Committee to approve a variation to the strategic work plan. However, any decision to vary the strategic work plan must be made by the Committee.

- 8.3 The Committee must also develop an annual workplan to guide its work, and the work of the internal audit function, over the forward year.
- 8.4 The Committee may vary the annual work plan to address new or emerging risks. The governing body of the Council may also, by resolution, request the Committee to approve a variation to the annual work plan. However, any decision to vary the annual work plan must be made by the Committee.
- 8.5 When considering whether to vary the strategic or annual work plans, the Committee must consider the impact of the variation on the internal audit function's existing workload and the completion of pre-existing priorities and activities identified under the workplan.

9 ASSURANCE REPORTING

- 9.1 The Committee may inform the governing body of any emerging issues that may influence the strategic direction of the Council or the achievement of the Council's goals and objectives. The Committee may provide an update to the governing body and General Manager of its activities and opinions after a Committee meeting.
- 9.2 The Committee will provide an annual assessment to the governing body and General Manager each year on the Committee's work and its opinion on how Council is performing.
- 9.3 The Committee will provide a comprehensive assessment every council term of all the matters listed in Schedule 1 to the governing body and General Manager.
- 9.4 The Committee may at any time report to the governing body or General Manager on any other matter it deems of sufficient importance to warrant their attention. The Lord Mayor and Chair of the Committee may also meet at any time to discuss issues relating to the work of the Committee.
- 9.5 Should the governing body require additional information, a request for the information may be made to the Chair by resolution. The Chair may only provide the information requested by the governing body where the Chair is satisfied that it is reasonably necessary for the governing body to receive the information for the purposes of performing its functions under the Local Government Act. Individual Councillors are not entitled to request or receive information from the Committee.

10 ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Meetings

- 10.1 The Committee will meet at least four times per year, and where required, hold a special meeting to review the Council's financial statements.
- 10.2 The Committee can hold additional meetings when significant unexpected issues arise, or if the Chair is asked to hold an additional meeting by a committee member, the General Manager or the governing body.
- 10.3 Committee meetings can be held in person, by telephone or videoconference. Proxies are not permitted if a member is unable to attend a meeting.
- 10.4 A quorum will consist of a majority of independent voting members. Where the vote is tied, the Chair has the casting vote.
- 10.5 The Chair of the Committee will be consulted on items for inclusion on the agenda for each committee meeting. Each committee meeting is to be minuted to preserve a record of the issues considered and the actions and decisions taken by the Committee.
- 10.6 The following officers are to attend committee meetings as non-voting observers:
 - General Manager
 - Director Corporate Services
 - Chief Financial Officer
 - Manager Governance and Customer Service
 - Governance and Risk Manager

- Internal Auditors

- 10.7 The external auditor (or their representative) is to be invited to each committee meeting as an independent observer.
- 10.8 The Chair can request any Councillor, employee/contractor of the council and any subject matter expert to attend committee meetings. These individuals must attend and provide any information requested, where possible. Observers have no voting rights and can be excluded from a meeting by the Chair at any time.
- 10.9 The Committee can hold closed meetings whenever it needs to discuss confidential or sensitive issues with only voting members of the committee present.
- 10.10 The Committee must meet separately with both the head of the internal audit function and the Council's external auditor at least once per year.
- 10.11 The Professional Conduct Coordinator will attend a closed session with no staff or observers present, prior to the commencement of each meeting of the Committee to present a report on all known instances of actual, suspected or alleged fraud affecting Council and how Council responded to such instances. The report must include any changes made to the control environment. The report must also address how Council has fulfilled its fraud reporting obligations in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations.
- 10.12 The Committee members may invite the General Manager to attend closed sessions with the Professional Conduct Coordinator as required.

Dispute resolution

- 10.13 Members of the Committee and Council management should maintain an effective working relationship, and seek to resolve differences they may have in an amicable and professional way via discussion and negotiation.
- 10.14 In the event of a disagreement between the Committee and General Manager or other senior managers, the dispute is to be resolved by the governing body of the Council.
- 10.15 Unresolved disputes regarding compliance with statutory or other requirements are to be referred to the Secretary of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment in writing.

Administrative Support

- 10.16 The General Manager will appoint a Council employee to provide administrative support to the Committee. The appointed employee will ensure the agenda for each meeting and supporting papers are circulated at least five calendar days before the meeting and ensure that the minutes of the meeting are prepared and maintained. Minutes must be approved by the Chair and circulated within one week of the meeting to each member. All correspondence and papers provided to the Committee will be in electronic form.

Resignation and dismissal of members

- 10.17 Where the Chair or a Committee member is unable to complete their term, or does not intend to seek reappointment after the expiry of their term, they should give 3 months notice to the Chair and governing body prior to their resignation to enable the Council to ensure a smooth transition to a new committee member.
- 10.18 The governing body can terminate via resolution the engagement of any Chair or independent committee member before the expiry of their term where the individual has:
- breached the council's Code of Conduct
 - performed unsatisfactorily or not to expectations
 - been declared bankrupt or found to be insolvent
 - experienced an adverse change in business status
 - been proven to be in a serious breach of their obligations under any legislation,
 - If a participant of the NSW Government's *Audit and Risk Committee Independent Chairs and Members Prequalification Scheme*, being found to have breached the code of conduct for the scheme or become ineligible to continue to participate in the scheme, or
 - declared, or is found to be in, a position of a conflict of interest which is unresolvable

- 10.19 The position of a Councillor member on the Committee can be terminated at any time by the governing body via resolution.
- 10.20 Permanent independent member vacancies that occur on the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee will be filled by invitations for Expressions of Interest, in accordance with the *Recruitment of External Members to Committees Policy* for independent members.

Review arrangements

- 10.21 At least once every Council term the governing body must conduct an external review of the effectiveness of the Committee.
- 10.22 These terms of reference can be reviewed at any time by the Committee and will be reviewed once each Council term by the governing body. Any substantive changes are to be approved by the governing body.

11 REMUNERATION

- 11.17 The independent members of the Committee will be entitled to remuneration on the basis of a fee determined by Council.
- 11.18 The fee will include all expenses incurred by the independent members in relation to their responsibilities as members of the Committee, including travel costs, attendance at inductions, training and personal development opportunities.
- 11.19 The fee will be payable following each meeting of the Committee, and upon receipt of an invoice.
- 11.20 In the absence of the Council appointed chairperson at a meeting, the Committee member who chairs the meeting will be paid the usual Committee member fee.

SCHEDULE 1 – AUDIT, RISK AND IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Audit

Internal Audit

- Provide overall strategic oversight of internal audit activities
- Act as a forum for communication between the governing body, General Manager, senior management, the internal audit function and external audit
- Oversee, as far as is practicable, the work programs of internal audit and assurance and review functions
- Review and advise the Council:
 - on whether the Council is providing the resources necessary to successfully deliver the internal audit function
 - if the Council is complying with internal audit requirements, including conformance with the International Professional Practices Framework
 - if the Council's Internal Audit Charter is appropriate and whether the internal audit policies and procedures and audit/risk methodologies used by the Council are suitable
 - of the strategic four-year plan and annual work plan of internal audits to be undertaken by the Council's internal audit function
 - if Council's internal audit activities are effective, including the performance of the head of the internal audit function and internal audit function
 - of the findings and recommendations of internal audits conducted, and corrective actions needed to address issues raised
 - of the implementation by Council of these corrective actions
 - on the appointment of the head of the internal audit function and external providers, and
 - if the internal audit function is structured appropriately and has sufficient skills and expertise to meet its responsibilities

External Audit

- Act as a forum for communication between the governing body, General Manager, senior management, the internal audit function and external audit
- Oversee as far as is practicable, the work programs of internal audit and external audit
- Provide input and feedback on the financial statement and performance audit coverage proposed by external audit and provide feedback on the audit services provided
- Review all external plans and reports in respect of planned or completed audits and monitor council's implementation of audit recommendations
- Provide advice to the governing body and/or General Manager on action taken on significant issues raised in relevant external audit reports and better practice guides

Risk

Risk management

Review and advise the Council:

- if the Council has in place a current and appropriate risk management framework that is consistent with the Australian risk management standard
- whether the resources necessary to successfully implement the risk management framework are provided
- whether the Council's risk management framework is adequate and effective for identifying and managing the risks the Council faces, including those associated individual projects, programs and other activities
- if risk management is integrated across all levels of the Council and across all processes, operations, services, decision-making, functions and reporting
- of the adequacy of risk reports and documentation, for example, the Council's risk register and risk profile
- whether a sound approach has been followed in developing risk management plans for major projects or undertakings
- whether appropriate policies and procedures are in place for the management and exercise of delegations
- if Council has taken steps to embed a culture which is committed to ethical and lawful behaviour

- if there is a positive risk culture within the Council and strong leadership that supports effective risk management
- of the adequacy of staff training and induction in risk management
- how the Council's risk management approach impacts on the Council's insurance arrangements
- of the effectiveness of Council's management of its assets, and
- of the effectiveness of business continuity arrangements, including business continuity plans, disaster recovery plans and the periodic testing of these plans.

Internal controls

Review and advise the Council:

- whether Council's approach to maintaining an effective internal audit framework, including over external parties such as contractors and advisors, is sound and effective
- whether Council has in place up to date policies and procedures and that these are periodically reviewed
- whether appropriate policies and procedures are in place for the management and exercise of delegations
- whether staff are informed of their responsibilities and processes and procedures to implement controls are complied with
- if the Council's monitoring and review of controls is sufficient, and
- if internal and external audit recommendations to correct internal control weaknesses are implemented appropriately

Compliance

Review and advise the Council of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's compliance framework, including:

- if the Council has appropriately considered legal and compliance risks as part of the Council's risk management framework
- how the Council manages its compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policies, procedures, codes, and contractual arrangements, and
- whether appropriate processes are in place to assess compliance.

Fraud and corruption

Review and advise the Council of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's fraud and corruption framework and activities, including whether the Council has appropriate processes and systems in place to capture and effectively investigate fraud-related information.

Financial management

Review and advise the Council:

- if Council is complying with accounting standards and external accountability requirements
- of the appropriateness of Council's accounting policies and disclosures
- of the implications for Council of the findings of external audits and performance audits and Council's responses and implementation of recommendations
- whether the Council's financial statement preparation procedures and timelines are sound
- the accuracy of the Council's annual financial statements prior to external audit, including:
 - management compliance/representations
 - significant accounting and reporting issues
 - the methods used by the Council to account for significant or unusual transactions and areas of significant estimates or judgements
 - appropriate management signoff on the statements
- if effective processes are in place to ensure financial information included in the Council's report is consistent with signed financial statements
- if the Council's financial management processes are adequate
- the adequacy of cash management policies and procedures
- if there are adequate controls over financial processes, for example:
 - appropriate authorisation and approval of payments and transactions

- adequate segregation of duties
- timely reconciliation of accounts and balances
- review of unusual and high value purchases
- if policies and procedures for management review and consideration of the financial position and performance of the Council are adequate
- if Council's grants and tied funding policies and procedures are sound.

Governance

Review and advise the Council regarding its governance framework, including the Council's:

- decision-making processes
- implementation of governance policies and procedures
- reporting lines and accountability
- assignment of key role and responsibilities
- committee structure
- management oversight responsibilities
- human resources and performance management activities
- reporting and communication activities
- information and communications technology (ICT) governance, and
- management and governance of the use of data, information and knowledge

Improvement

Strategic planning

Review and advise the Council:

- of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's IP&R processes
- if appropriate reporting and monitoring processes are in place to measure progress against objectives, and
- whether the Council is successfully implementing and achieving its IP&R objectives and strategies.

Service reviews and business improvement

- Act as a forum for communication and monitoring of any audits conducted by external bodies and the implementation of corrective actions (for example, NSW government agencies, Commonwealth government agencies, insurance bodies)
- Review and advise the Council:
 - if Council has robust systems to set objectives and goals to determine and deliver appropriate levels of service to the community and business performance
 - if appropriate reporting and monitoring mechanisms are in place to measure service delivery to the community and overall performance, and
 - how the Council can improve its service delivery and the Council's performance of its business and functions generally

Performance data and measurement

Review and advise the Council:

- if Council has a robust system to determine appropriate performance indicators to measure the achievement of its strategic objectives
- if the performance indicators Council uses are effective, and
- of the adequacy of performance data collection and reporting.

SUMMARY SHEET

Responsible Division	Governance and Customer Service
Date endorsed by Committee	New
Date adopted by Council	17 October 2022
Date of next review	17 October 2024
Legislative or other requirement for review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Regular review by Committee → Review for adoption by each Term of Council (policy)
Responsible Manager	Governance and Risk Manager
Authorised by	Manager Governance and Customer Service