

RISK MANAGEMENT AND INTERNAL AUDIT for local government in NSW

Guidelines

December 2022



GUIDELINES FOR RISK MANAGEMENT AND INTERNAL AUDIT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NSW

2022

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Background

Background

The *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021* and these Guidelines require each council in NSW to have an audit, risk and improvement committee, a robust risk management framework, and an effective internal audit function

Background

The *Local Government Act 1993* ('Local Government Act'), the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021* ('Local Government Regulation') and these Guidelines require each council in NSW to have:

- an audit, risk and improvement committee that continuously reviews and provides independent advice to the council on how it is functioning and managing risk
- a robust risk management framework that accurately identifies and mitigates the risks facing the council and its operations, and
- an effective internal audit function that provides independent advice as to whether the council is functioning effectively and the council's internal controls to manage risk are working.

These three mandatory governance mechanisms are key to ensuring that councils are doing things the best way they can for their communities and are on track to delivering their community's goals and objectives.

Communities themselves will ultimately be the greatest beneficiaries.

If implemented effectively, audit, risk and improvement committees, risk management and internal audit will lead to councils:

- achieving their strategic objectives in the most efficient, effective and economical manner
- having better and more efficient levels of service delivery
- having increased accountability and transparency
- achieving better decision-making and having the confidence to make difficult decisions
- having increased financial stability
- achieving and maintaining compliance with all laws, regulations, internal policies and procedures, and
- better safeguarding their public assets.

Purpose

These guidelines have been developed to assist councils, county councils and joint organisations to comply with statutory requirements under the Local Government Act and Local Government Regulation.

They also seek to strengthen risk management and internal audit practices in NSW councils by setting a minimum standard that reflects a 'best practice' approach.

The Guidelines have been issued under section 23A of the Local Government Act which confers on the "Departmental Chief Executive" of the Office of Local Government the power to prepare, adopt or vary guidelines relating to the exercise by a council of any of its functions.

Councils are required to consider these Guidelines when implementing the requirements prescribed under the Act and the Regulation relating to audit, risk and improvement committees, risk management and internal audit.

These Guidelines replace the NSW Government's *Internal Audit Guidelines for Local Government in NSW* issued in 2010.

The three core requirements outlined in the Guidelines reflect international standards and the recommendations and opinions of internal audit practitioners, councils, councillors, audit, risk and improvement committee members, risk management practitioners, government agencies, experts and community members.

They are also informed by practices in other Australian jurisdictions and give effect to the recommendations of the:

- Independent Commission Against Corruption in its inquiries into Burwood Council (2011) and Botany Bay Council (2017)
- Local Government Acts Taskforce in its review of the *Local Government Act 1993* (2013)
- Independent Local Government Review Panel in its *Revitalising Local Government inquiry* (2013), and
- various performance audits and other reviews conducted by the NSW Auditor-General since 2010.

Based on these recommendations:

- the core requirements outlined in the Guidelines relating to the operation of a council's audit, risk and improvement committee have been modelled on the *Internal Audit and Risk Management Policy for the General Government Sector (TPP 20-08)* developed by NSW Treasury and best practice in the public and private sectors
- the core requirements relating to risk management have been modelled on the current Australian risk management standard, *AS/NZS ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management – Guidelines*, and
- the core requirements relating to a council's internal audit function have been modelled on the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* (the 'International Professional Practices Framework') and best practice in the public and private sectors.

The framework balances these professional standards and best practice approaches with the unique structure, needs and operating environments of metropolitan, regional and rural councils, county councils and joint organisations across NSW.

The release of these Guidelines follows an extensive consultation process. The Office of Local Government thanks all the individuals, councils and bodies involved in the development of these Guidelines and the risk management and internal audit regulatory framework.

Further resources

There has been a wide range of information and guidance developed in recent times by government agencies, experts, practitioners and other bodies to help organisations establish effective audit, risk and improvement committees, risk management frameworks and internal audit functions.

As a starting point, a list of further resources has been included at the end of each core requirement. These resources provide practical information and tools such as examples, templates, checklists and sample documents that councils may find useful when implementing these Guidelines.

Terminology

When a joint organisation is applying these Guidelines, it should substitute the term "council" for "joint organisation", "governing body" for "board", "chairperson" for "mayor". "voting representative" for "councillor" and "executive officer" for "general manager" and "annual report" for "annual performance statement", where appropriate.

Where a county council is applying these guidelines, it should substitute the terms "county council" for "council", "chairperson" for "mayor". and "member" for "councillor", where appropriate.

References to the "Departmental Chief Executive" in these Guidelines refers to the person exercising the functions of the Departmental Chief Executive of the Office of Local Government under the Local Government Act and Regulation.

Statutory framework

The Local Government Act and Local Government Regulation provide the statutory foundations and prescribe the desired outcomes for councils' audit, risk and improvement committees, risk management frameworks and internal audit functions.

Relevant provisions of the Local Government Act and Local Government Regulation are detailed below.

Guiding principles of local government

The guiding principles of the Local Government Act (sections 8A, 8B and 8C) require each council to carry out its functions in a way that provides the best possible value for residents and ratepayers.

The guiding principles also specify that councils are to:

- spend money responsibly and sustainably, and align general revenue and expenses

- invest in responsible and sustainable infrastructure for the benefit of the local community
- effectively manage their finances and assets and have sound policies and processes for performance management and reporting, asset maintenance and enhancement, funding decisions, and risk management practices
- ensure the current generation funds the cost of its services and achieves intergenerational equity, and
- manage risks to the local community, area or council effectively and proactively.

Role of the governing body

To achieve these guiding principles, the Local Government Act (section 223) provides that the role and responsibilities of the governing body include:

- directing and controlling the affairs of the council in accordance with the Local Government Act
- ensuring, as far as possible, the financial sustainability of the council
- ensuring, as far as possible, that the council complies with the guiding principles of the Local Government Act
- keeping the performance of the council under review
- making the decisions necessary to ensure the council properly exercises its regulatory functions, and
- being responsible for ensuring that the council acts honestly, efficiently and appropriately.

Role of the general manager

The Local Government Act (section 335) provides that the general manager is responsible for:

- conducting the day-to-day management of the council in accordance with the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council – this includes establishing the council's organisational structure and appointing and dismissing council staff (section 332)

- implementing, without undue delay, the lawful decisions of the council
- advising the governing body on the development and implementation of the council's plans, programs, strategies and policies, and
- ensuring that the mayor and other councillors are given timely information and advice and the administrative and professional support necessary to effectively discharge their functions.

The Local Government Regulation (section 209) also requires the general manager to ensure that:

- the council complies with all legal financial obligations, including the keeping of accounting records
- effective measures are taken to secure the effective, efficient and economical management of financial operations within each division of the council's administration
- authorised and recorded procedures are established to provide effective control over the council's assets, liabilities, revenue and expenditure and secure the accuracy of the accounting records, and
- lines of authority and the responsibilities of members of the council's staff for related tasks are clearly defined.

Role of a joint organisation

The Local Government Act establishes joint organisations as a strategic regional body of councils.

The role and responsibilities of a joint organisation under the Local Government Act (section 400R) are to:

- establish regional priorities for the joint organisation area and strategies and plans to deliver these priorities
- provide regional leadership for the joint organisation area and advocate for strategic regional priorities, and
- identify and take-up opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation.

Joint organisations also deliver services and provide assistance to, or on behalf of, councils, and councils are able to delegate certain functions to their joint organisation (sections 355, 379 and 400S).

The Local Government Act (section 400Y) provides that the executive officer of a joint organisation is to:

- conduct the day-to-day management of the joint organisation in accordance with the strategic regional priorities and other plans, programs, strategies and policies of the organisation, and
- appoint, direct and dismiss staff.

Audit, risk and improvement committee

The Local Government Act (section 428A) requires each council to establish an audit, risk and improvement committee to continuously review and provide independent advice to the general manager and the governing body of the council on:

- whether the council is complying with all necessary legislation, regulations and other legal requirements
- the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's risk management framework, fraud and corruption prevention activities, financial management processes, and the council's financial position and performance
- the council's governance arrangements
- the achievement by the council of the goals set out in the council's community strategic plan, delivery program, operational plan and other strategies
- how the council delivers local services and how it could improve the performance of its functions more generally
- the collection of performance measurement data by the council, and
- any other matters prescribed by the Local Government Regulation (including internal audit).

The Local Government Act (section 428B) allows councils to establish a joint audit, risk and improvement committee with other councils including through joint or regional

organisations of councils to function as a shared committee.

The requirements for shared committees in these Guidelines are detailed in core requirement 1.

The Local Government Regulation prescribes the following requirements in relation to the membership and operations of councils' audit, risk and improvement committees:

- Councils must by resolution appoint an audit, risk and improvement committee comprising of a chair and at least two or more other persons as voting members of the committee.
- Commencing 1 July 2024, the chair and other voting members of a council's audit, risk and improvement committee must satisfy the independence and eligibility criteria specified in these Guidelines. Councils must not appoint a person to be the chair or a voting member of the council's audit, risk and improvement committee unless they satisfy the independence and eligibility criteria specified in these Guidelines.
- Councils may appoint one councillor as a non-voting member of its audit risk and improvement committee. Councillors appointed as a non-voting member of an audit, risk and improvement committee must satisfy the eligibility criteria for councillor members of committees specified in these Guidelines.
- For the purposes of section 428A(2)(i) of the Local Government Act, councils' audit, risk and improvement committees are to keep under review internal audit activities.
- The Departmental Chief Executive may approve model terms of reference for councils' audit, risk and improvement committees.
- Councils must adopt by resolution, terms of reference for their audit, risk and improvement committees that are consistent with the model terms of reference for committees approved by the Departmental Chief Executive contained in these Guidelines.

- A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must exercise its functions in accordance with the terms of reference adopted by the council.
- Councils must provide their audit, risk and improvement committee with such access to the general manager and other senior management staff of the council, and any information and resources of the council as may be necessary for the committee to exercise its functions.

The requirements for audit, risk and improvement committees in these Guidelines are detailed in core requirement 1.

Risk management

The Local Government Regulation prescribes the following requirements in relation to risk management:

- Commencing on 1 July 2024, councils must adopt and implement a framework for identifying and managing risk that is consistent with the requirements specified by these Guidelines.
- A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must keep the implementation of the council's risk management framework under review and provide advice to the council on its implementation.

The requirements for risk management in these Guidelines are detailed in core requirement 2.

Internal audit

The Local Government Regulation prescribes the following requirements in relation to internal audit:

- Commencing 1 July 2024, councils must have an internal audit function to keep under review the council's operations and risk management and control activities.
- Councils' internal audit functions must operate in accordance with the requirements specified in these Guidelines.
- The Departmental Chief Executive may approve a model internal audit charter for councils to guide the performance of their internal audit function.

- Councils must adopt by resolution, an internal audit charter that is consistent with the model internal audit charter approved by the Departmental Chief Executive contained in these Guidelines.
- A council's internal audit function must be undertaken in accordance with the internal audit charter adopted by the council.
- Commencing 1 July 2024, councils' general managers must appoint a member of staff of the council to direct and coordinate internal audit activities for the council.
- Councils are not required to appoint a member of staff to direct and coordinate their internal audit activities if the council has entered into an agreement with other councils to share the internal audit function and one of the participating councils has appointed a member of staff to direct and coordinate internal audit activities on behalf of all the participating councils.
- A council's internal audit activities are to be undertaken under the oversight and direction of the council's audit, risk and improvement committee.
- The member of staff appointed by the general manager to direct and coordinate internal audit activities is to report to the audit, risk and improvement committee on those activities.
- The member of staff of a council appointed to direct and coordinate internal audit activities is not to be subject to direction in the performance of internal audit activities by anyone other than the audit, risk and improvement committee.
- All internal audit personnel must have direct and unrestricted access to council staff, the audit, risk and improvement committee and council information and resources necessary to undertake their role and responsibilities.
- The general manager must consult with the chair of the council's audit, risk and improvement committee on any decision affecting the employment of the staff member appointed to direct and coordinate the council's internal audit activities and must consider the chair's views before making the decision.

- The audit, risk and improvement committee must review the performance and efficacy of the council's internal audit activities once in each term of the council and report to the governing body of the council on the outcome of its review and make recommendations.

The requirements for internal audit in these Guidelines are detailed in core requirement 3.

Annual attestation

Commencing with the 2024-2025 annual report, general managers will be required under the Local Government Regulation to publish an attestation statement each year in the council's annual report indicating whether, during the preceding financial year, the council's audit, risk and improvement committee, risk management framework and internal audit function complied with these Guidelines.

The Local Government Regulation prescribes the following requirements in relation to attestation:

- Commencing with the 2024-2025 annual report, the general manager must cause to be published in the council's annual report an attestation statement in the form specified in these Guidelines on the council's compliance with the Guidelines with respect to the membership and operations of its audit, risk and improvement committee, its risk management framework and internal audit function.
- The general manager must consult with the chair of the council's audit, risk and improvement committee on the content of the attestation statement and must consider the chair's views when preparing the statement.
- If the committee chair disagrees with the content of the attestation statement prepared by the general manager, they may prepare their own attestation statement and submit this to the Departmental Chief Executive.

An attestation certificate template is provided at Appendix 1 and attestation requirements are highlighted with this symbol throughout these Guidelines.



The details of each member of the council's audit, risk and improvement committee must also be included in the attestation statement.

Attestation operates to ensure that the council takes independent assurance and risk management seriously and is accountable to the community for how it has implemented these requirements.

As noted above, the council's compliance status is to be self-assessed by the general manager, in consultation with the audit, risk and improvement committee.

The general manager must consider the views of the chair of the council's audit risk and improvement committee on the content of the attestation statement when preparing the statement.

If the chair disagrees with the content of the attestation statement prepared by the general manager, they may prepare their own report and submit this to the Departmental Chief Executive.

Exemptions

There may be times where a council may not be able to comply with all requirements relating to the audit, risk and improvement committee, risk management framework or internal audit function.

In these circumstances, the Local Government Regulation confers on the Departmental Chief Executive the power to exempt councils from compliance with a requirement under these Guidelines where the council or joint organisation requests such an exemption.

The Regulation provides that the Departmental Chief Executive may, on an application by a council, exempt the council from compliance with a requirement under these Guidelines for such a period specified by the Departmental Chief Executive where they are satisfied that:

- the council cannot comply with the requirement because of temporary extenuating circumstances or resourcing constraints that will significantly impact the council's budget,
- the council cannot enter into an agreement with another council to share the performance of activities necessary to satisfy the requirement, **and**
- current or proposed alternative arrangements will achieve outcomes equivalent to the requirement under these Guidelines.

A council's application to the Departmental Chief Executive for an exemption must be in the form and contain the information specified in these Guidelines.

The Regulation provides that where the Departmental Chief Executive exempts a council from compliance with a requirement under these Guidelines, the council must publish the Departmental Chief Executive's approval of the exemption in their annual report.

A council is not prevented from applying for a further exemption when a previous exemption expires.

Accountability

Councils that do not comply with these Guidelines and are not granted an exemption may face enforcement action under the Local Government Act.

Monitoring

Councils' compliance with the core requirements of the Local Government Act, Local Government Regulation and these Guidelines will be monitored by the Office of Local Government.

The NSW Auditor-General may also undertake an assurance role in monitoring councils' compliance. This may include conducting sector-wide performance audits, or compliance audits of individual councils and undertaking reviews of exemptions granted by the Departmental Chief Executive.

Core requirement 1:

Audit, risk and improvement committee

- Each council and joint organisation has an audit, risk and improvement committee that reviews the matters referred to in section 428A of the Local Government Act

Guiding principles for audit, risk and improvement committees

- ❖ The audit, risk and improvement committee is independent of the council.
- ❖ The committee is equipped with the relevant expertise and has access to the council resources and information necessary to fulfil its role and responsibilities effectively.
- ❖ Each council receives relevant and timely advice and assurance from the committee on the matters listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act.
- ❖ The work of the committee is thoroughly planned and executed, risk-based and linked to the council's strategic goals.
- ❖ The committee adds value to the council and is accountable to the governing body for its performance.
- ❖ The council is accountable to the community for complying with statutory requirements and these Guidelines relating to the committee.

Role and functions

Under section 428A of the Local Government Act, each council (including county councils and joint organisations) must have an audit, risk and improvement committee to independently review and advise on the following aspects of the council's operations:

- (a) compliance
- (b) risk management
- (c) fraud control
- (d) financial management
- (e) governance
- (f) implementation of the strategic plan, delivery program and strategies
- (g) service reviews

- (h) collection of performance measurement data by the council, and
- (i) any other matters prescribed by the regulation.

The committee must also provide information to the council for the purpose of improving the council's performance of its functions.

The Local Government Regulation (section #tbc) also requires a council's audit, risk and improvement committee to review and provide advice on the council's internal audit activities.

The audit, risk and improvement committee's role also extends to any entities established by or operated by the council.

The exact nature of each audit, risk and improvement committee's role and the specific activities it reviews on behalf of a council under section 428A of the Local Government Act will vary depending on the council's needs, risks and business functions.

These activities are to be agreed between the audit, risk and improvement committee and the council during the development of the committee's terms of reference. Suggested activities are provided in **Appendix 2**.

Level of assurance

Audit, risk and improvement committees are to have an advisory and assurance role only. They are to exercise no administrative functions, delegated financial responsibilities or any management functions for a council.

It is expected that each audit, risk and improvement 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 other subject matter experts.

Terms of Reference

It is important that each audit, risk and improvement committee has clear guidance on how it should serve the council, and that the

council has input into how the committee will operate given its investment.

This will ensure clarity in the relationship between the council and the audit, risk and improvement committee, and that the council can measure the committee's performance.

The Local Government Regulation (section 428C) requires a council's audit, risk and improvement committee to operate according to terms of reference that are consistent with the approved Model Terms of Reference provided at Appendix 3.



The audit, risk and improvement committee's terms of reference can include additional provisions that are not inconsistent with the approved Model Terms of Reference or other requirements.

The terms of reference are to be approved by resolution of the governing body and reviewed annually by the audit, risk and improvement committee, and once each council term (i.e. four years) by the governing body.

Structure

Each council will have different audit, risk and improvement committee requirements depending on the council's size, needs, budget and the complexity of its operations.

For this reason, councils can either:

- establish an audit, risk and improvement committee for their exclusive use, or
- share their committee with another council, county council or joint organisation under section 428B of the Local Government Act.

When deciding the most appropriate way to structure a council's audit, risk and improvement committee, the council should consider the viability and capacity of a shared committee to achieve its terms of reference given the:

- size of the council in terms of both staffing levels and budget

- geographical and functional distribution of the council's operations
- complexity of the council's core business
- risk profile of the council
- expectations of stakeholders, and
- likely demands placed on the committee by other councils in the shared arrangement.

Shared committees

As noted above, under the Local Government Act (section 428B) councils can share an audit, risk and improvement committee. Councils can:

- share their committee with another council/s, county council/s and/or joint organisation/s as part of an independent shared arrangement
- utilise a committee established by their joint organisation that is shared with all member councils
- for county councils - share their committee with a member council where possible or another council
- for joint organisations - share their committee with a member council where possible or another council or joint organisation.

These options allow councils to establish and operate their audit, risk and improvement committee in a more cost-effective way.

For all shared audit, risk and improvement committees:

- the committee must operate as an individual committee for each council in any shared arrangement and exercise their functions for each council individually
- a shared committee should only be established and utilised by councils where the committee can maintain a strong understanding of each participating council's assurance needs and is able to meet these needs
- a shared committee should only be established and utilised by councils where the committee can maintain an effective working and reporting relationship with

the general manager and governing body of each participating council

- councils that share their internal audit function can, but are not required to, also share their committee
- councils that share their committee can, but are not required to, also share the committee's secretariat, and
- councils should develop and sign a formal agreement with the other councils in the shared arrangement which outlines how the shared arrangement will operate and costs shared.

Where a joint organisation establishes an audit, risk and improvement committee to serve its member councils, it is at each member council's discretion whether they utilise the shared committee.

Shared councillor members

It is important to note that where an audit, risk and improvement committee is shared between councils as part of an independently established shared arrangement, or an arrangement established by a joint organisation, and the councils elect to have a councillor member on the committee, the councillor member will not be shared by councils.

To maintain the confidentiality of the business of each council in the shared arrangement considered by the shared committee:

- the governing body of each council is to appoint one councillor member to serve on the audit, risk and improvement committee for that council only
- the councillor member is to only attend committee meetings for their council, and
- the councillor member is to receive information pertaining to their council only.

For joint organisations, the elected councillor member will be a voting representative of the board.

Shared independent members

Unlike councillor members, the independent chair and members of shared audit, risk and improvement committees will serve all councils participating in the shared arrangement.

For audit, risk and improvement committees appointed as part of an independent shared arrangement, the councils in the shared arrangement are to mutually agree to the independent members that will be appointed to these roles, and each council is to confirm their appointment by resolution.

For audit, risk and improvement committees appointed as part of an arrangement established by a joint organisation by its member councils, the board of the joint organisation will appoint the chair and independent members of the committee by resolution on behalf of member councils under delegation from the member councils.

Size and composition

Each council, county council and joint organisation is required to have an audit, risk and improvement committee that is appropriate for the council's size, risk profile, operational complexity, resources, and its ability to attract suitably qualified committee members.

Each council is required to appoint an audit, risk and improvement committee that comprises of an independent chair and at least two independent members that meet the independence and eligibility criteria in these Guidelines.



At a minimum, audit risk and improvement committees **must** comprise of the following:

- **an independent chair** who meets the independence criteria **and** the eligibility criteria for committee chairs set out below, **and**
- **at least two independent members** who meet the independence criteria **and** the

eligibility criteria for independent committee members set out below

Councils also have the option of appointing one non-voting councillor member to their committee who meets the eligibility criteria for councillor members of committees set out below. The mayor cannot be appointed as a councillor member of a council's audit, risk and improvement committee.

The size and composition requirements of a committee are the same whether the committee is established by a council for its exclusive use or as part of a shared arrangement.

Councils can establish larger committees and appoint more committee members than the minimum required should they choose to do so but may only appoint one non-voting councillor member.

The governing body is to determine the exact size of the audit, risk and improvement committee in consultation with the chair of the committee and general manager, taking into account the needs and risk profile of the council, and likely workload of the committee.

County councils

Whilst a county council can establish an audit, risk and improvement committee for its own exclusive use, for administrative and cost efficiency, it is recommended that county councils utilise the committee of a member council/s under an independent shared arrangement (see above).

Joint organisations

Where a joint organisation has not established an audit, risk and improvement committee for its member councils as part of a joint organisation led shared arrangement, for administrative and cost efficiency, it is recommended that, where possible, a joint organisation utilise a committee established by one of its member councils as part of an independent shared arrangement (see above).

To ensure the audit, risk and improvement committee has an understanding of the interrelationships and needs of the joint

organisation and its member councils, and of wider regional priorities, ideally joint organisations should enter into an independent shared arrangement with a member council/s. If this is not possible, it is open to joint organisations to enter into a shared arrangement with another joint organisation or a council from outside of its area.

Roles of committee members

Chair

The position of the chair of an audit, risk and improvement committee is pivotal to the committee's effectiveness and is the focal point for the committee's relationship with the council, the internal audit function and external auditor.

The chair acts as the interface between the audit, risk and improvement committee and the general manager and other staff, the governing body, the external auditor, and the internal audit function.

Any individual audit, risk and improvement committee member who wishes to meet with the general manager or governing body of the council to discuss any issues relating to the committee's responsibilities is to do so through the chair of the committee, and vice versa.

To be successful in their role, a chair must:

- have strong leadership qualities
- have the personal courage to raise and deal with tough issues and express opinions frankly, and to support other committee members to do the same
- be able to recommend the appointment of committee members to the governing body
- maintain effective working relationships between committee members and with the council
- keep the governing body and general manager informed and brief them on the

- strategic and technical aspects of internal audits and risk and control issues
- lead effective committee meetings including:
 - planning for and setting agendas for meetings, ensuring committee members are adequately informed of matters to be considered prior to meetings and allowing sufficient time for discussion of those matters at the meeting
 - ensuring the meeting runs smoothly and that the views of members are heard
 - focus the committee's deliberations on the most important issues
 - seek the input of advisers, observers and other experts to maximise committee deliberations
 - summarise discussion outcomes and actions, including assigning responsibility and timeframes for actions
- maintain an effective working relationship with the council's external auditor
- oversee the internal audit function and be alert to external accountability and internal audit concerns
- arrange for all committee members to maintain an up-to-date knowledge of the council and its activities, including any financial or regulatory developments, and
- know the strengths and weaknesses of the committee, and individual committee members and how this may affect the opinions of the committee.

Independent members

Independent audit, risk and improvement committee members are expected to be able to assess information provided to them about the council and to identify and assess key risks and issues.

Each member should be capable of making a valuable contribution to the committee.

To be successful in their role, a member must:

- take a professional approach to their responsibilities, including an appropriate commitment of time and effort

- know the business, culture and values of the council and take the time to understand changes that affect how the council operates and its risks
- have sufficient understanding of the council's financial reporting responsibilities to be able to contribute to the committee's consideration of the annual financial statements
- understand the role of the committee and the expectations of the council
- act in the best interests of the council
- take a professional approach
- be a good communicator and build effective relationships with the council and other committee members, and
- 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.

Councillor members

Councillor members of audit, risk and improvement committees are non-voting members of committees. This is to ensure that decision making by the committee is independent of the council.

Councillor members of committees act as an important link between the governing body and the committee.

Their role is to:

- relay to the committee any concerns the governing body may have regarding the council and 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 each council term.

Issues or information councillor members raise with or provide the audit, risk and improvement committee must relate to the

matters listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act, the committee's terms of reference and issues being considered by the committee.

Councillor members of audit, risk and improvement committees are not entitled to receive information about audit, risk and improvement committee activities outside of established reporting requirements.

Councillor members of audit, risk and improvement committees must conduct themselves in a non-partisan and professional manner.

Councillor members of committees 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.

Where a councillor member of an audit, risk and improvement committees engages in such conduct or in any other conduct that may bring the committee and its work into disrepute, the chair may recommend to the council, that the councillor member be removed from membership of the committee.

Where the council does not agree to the chair's recommendation, it must give reasons for its decision in writing to the chair.

Independence criteria for committee chairs and independent members

The chair and all independent voting members of audit, risk and improvement committees must be independent to ensure they have no real or perceived bias or conflicts of interest that may interfere with their ability to act independently and can provide the council with robust, objective and unbiased advice about how the council is functioning.

Each council must ensure that the chair and independent members of the council's audit, risk and improvement



committee meet the following independence criteria.

The chair and independent voting committee members **must not**:

- currently be a councillor of any NSW council
- be a non-voting representative of the board of the joint organisation
- be a candidate at the last election of the council
- be a person who has held office in the council during its previous term
- be currently employed by the council or joint organisation, or been employed during the last 12 months
- conduct audits of the council on behalf of the Audit Office of NSW
- have a close personal or business relationship with a councillor or a person who has a senior role in the council that may lead to a real or perceived conflict of interest
- currently, or within the last three years, provided any material goods or services (including consultancy, legal, internal audit and advisory services) to the council which directly affect subjects or issues considered by the audit, risk and improvement committee
- be (or have a close family member who is) a substantial shareholder, owner, officer or employee of a company that has a material business, contractual relationship, direct financial interest or material indirect financial interest with the council or a related entity which could be considered a real or perceived conflict of interest, or
- currently or have previously acted as an advocate of a material interest on behalf of the council or a related entity which could be considered a real or perceived conflict of interest.

Current staff of councils may serve as an independent member of another council's audit, risk and improvement committee but not as its chair. Current council staff may only serve on another council's audit, risk and improvement committee if they meet the independence and eligibility criteria for membership of the committee and their

employer is not participating in a shared arrangement with the other council in relation to the audit, risk and improvement committee or the internal audit function.

General managers will require the approval of their council under section 353 of the Local Government Act before they can serve as an independent member of another council's audit, risk and improvement committee. Other council staff will require the approval of their general manager.

Both the governing body of the council and the general manager must ensure that adequate procedures are in place to preserve the independence of the chair and members of the audit, risk and improvement committee.

Likewise, the chair and members must notify the governing body and/or general manager if a real or perceived threat to their independence arises.

Eligibility criteria for committee chairs and members

The persons appointed as a chair or a member of an audit, risk and improvement committee must possess the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to undertake their roles on the committee effectively and to ensure the committee can operate appropriately and effectively to support the council.

A poorly skilled audit, risk and improvement committee may not be able to provide the assurance needed by the council and may lead to sub-optimal outcomes that jeopardise the council's capacity to achieve its strategic objectives.

The following eligibility criteria for audit, risk and improvement committee chairs and members reflect the minimum standards persons must meet to be appointed as the chair or member of a council's audit, risk and improvement committee. Councils may require audit, risk and improvement committee chairs

and members to satisfy more onerous eligibility criteria if they choose to do so.

Councils must ensure that the chair and other members of the council's audit, risk and improvement committee meet the below minimum eligibility criteria.



Eligibility criteria for committee chairs

In addition to meeting the independence requirements specified above, the chair of an audit, risk and improvement committee must satisfy the following minimum eligibility criteria to be appointed as a chair. Ideally, they will also be able to demonstrate the desirable criteria.

Essential criteria

Audit, risk and improvement committee chairs must demonstrate the following:

- leadership qualities and the ability to promote effective working relationships in complex organisations
- an ability to communicate complex and sensitive assessments in a tactful manner to the head of the council's internal audit function, senior management and the mayor and councillors
- a sound understanding of:
 - the principles of good organisational governance and capacity to understand local government accountability, including financial reporting
 - the business of the council or the environment in which it operates
 - internal audit operations, including selection and review of the head of the council's internal audit function, and
 - risk management principles
- extensive senior level experience in governance and management of complex organisations, an ability to read and understand financial statements and a capacity to understand the ethical requirements of government (including potential conflicts of interest)

- functional knowledge in areas such as risk management, performance management, human resources management, internal and external auditing, financial reporting, accounting, management control frameworks, internal financial controls, governance (including planning, reporting and oversight), or business operations
- a capacity to form independent judgements and a willingness to constructively challenge/question management practices and information, and
- a professional, ethical approach to the exercise of their duties and the capacity to devote the necessary time and effort to the responsibilities of the chair of an audit, risk and improvement committee.

Desirable criteria

Possession of a relevant professional qualification or membership (e.g., Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), CPA Australia (CPA) and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA)) is desirable.

Eligibility criteria for independent committee members

In addition to meeting the independence requirements specified above, independent members of an audit, risk and improvement committee must satisfy the following eligibility criteria to be appointed as an independent committee member. Ideally, they will also be able to demonstrate the desirable criteria.

Essential criteria

Independent members of audit, risk and improvement committee members must demonstrate the following:

- an ability to read and understand financial statements and a capacity to understand the ethical requirements of government (including potential conflicts of interest)
- functional knowledge in areas such as risk management, performance management, human resources management, internal

and external auditing, financial reporting, accounting, management control frameworks, internal financial controls, governance (including planning, reporting and oversight), or business operations

- a capacity to form independent judgements and willingness to constructively challenge/question management practices and information
- a professional, ethical approach to the exercise of their duties and the capacity to devote the necessary time and effort to the responsibilities of an independent member of an audit, risk and improvement committee, and
- preparedness to undertake any training on the operation of audit, risk and improvement committees recommended by the chair based on their assessment of the skills, knowledge and experience of the independent member.

Desirable criteria

Ideally, independent members of audit, risk and improvement committees should also meet the following criteria, but these are not essential:

- extensive senior level experience in governance and management of complex organisations, and
- possession of a relevant professional qualification or membership (e.g., Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), CPA Australia (CPA) and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA)).

Criminal record and financial status checks

Councils must undertake a criminal record and a financial status (bankruptcy) check of audit, risk and improvement committee chairs and independent members before their appointment.

Audit, risk and improvement committee chairs and independent members must not be undischarged bankrupts or have been charged with or convicted of a serious criminal offence.

Eligibility criteria for councillor members

To be appointed as a non-voting audit, risk and improvement committee member a councillor must demonstrate the following:

- an ability to read and understand financial statements and a capacity to understand the ethical requirements of government (including potential conflicts of interest)
- a good understanding of one or more of the following: risk management, performance management, human resources management, internal and external auditing, financial reporting, accounting, management control frameworks, internal financial controls, governance (including planning, reporting and oversight), or business operations
- a capacity to form independent judgements and willingness to constructively challenge/question management practices and information
- a professional, ethical approach to the exercise of their duties and the capacity to devote the necessary time and effort to the responsibilities of a councillor member of an audit, risk and improvement committee, and
- preparedness to undertake any training on the operation of audit, risk and improvement committees recommended by the chair based on their assessment of the skills, knowledge and experience of the councillor member.

The mayor cannot be appointed as a councillor member of a council's audit, risk and improvement committee.

Appointment

Audit, risk and improvement committee chairs and members are appointed by a resolution of the governing body of the council.

The governing body should first appoint the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee, who is to then assist in the

selection and appointment of the other independent committee members.

Skills mix

When selecting individual audit, risk and improvement committee members, the council should ensure the committee has the appropriate mix of skills, knowledge and experience necessary to successfully implement its terms of reference and add value to the council.

The audit, risk and improvement committee should have:

- at least one member with financial expertise (for example, a qualified accountant or auditor or other financial professional with experience of financial and accounting matters), and
- a mix of skills and experience in:
 - business
 - financial and legal compliance
 - risk management, and
 - internal audit, and
 - any specialised business operations of the council, where the committee would benefit from having a member with skills or experience in this area (for example, IT skills or experience where IT systems have an important role in the council's business).

All audit, risk and improvement committee members should have sufficient understanding of the council's financial reporting responsibilities to be able to contribute to the committee's consideration of the annual financial statements.

Each committee member should also have sufficient time to devote to their responsibilities as an audit, risk and improvement committee member.

Where possible, the governing body should ensure that at least one other audit, risk and improvement committee member is also qualified to act as the chair if this is ever required.

Letter of appointment

The appointment of chairs and members of audit, risk and improvement committees should be formalised in an official letter of appointment signed by the mayor of the council.

The letter of appointment should set out the terms and conditions of the appointment including:

- duration of appointment
- role and responsibilities
- timing and location of meetings
- time commitment
- remuneration
- the management of conflicts of interest
- confidentiality
- performance appraisal, and
- termination of appointment.

Induction

Induction of all new audit, risk and improvement committee members is vital to ensure they 'hit the ground running' in their role.

The chair is to provide a thorough induction to each new member of the audit, risk and improvement committee to ensure they understand:

- the committee's role, responsibilities and terms of reference
- the business, operations, culture, risks and controls of the council, and
- the expectations of the council about their responsibilities and performance.

This will include providing new members with any background information or documentation necessary to ensure they understand the work of the audit, risk and improvement committee.

It may also be appropriate for more detailed information or presentations to be provided from various senior staff to assist the new member to understand the operations of the council and any key challenges.

New audit, risk and improvement committee members also have an obligation to ensure

that they have an appropriate understanding of the council, including its:

- operations, functions, service delivery
- key areas of risk
- internal controls, and
- financial reporting systems.

The mayor, general manager and existing chair (where appropriate) will induct a new chair.

Membership terms

Voting members

To ensure the audit, risk and improvement committee continues to offer new perspectives and remains independent, it is important that committee members are rotated periodically to maintain a fresh approach and avoid any perceptions of bias or conflicts of interest.

Councils are to ensure that chairs and members serve the following time-limited terms to facilitate a rotation of knowledge and perspectives.



The initial term of membership on an audit, risk and improvement committee is four-years.

Audit, risk and improvement committee members can be reappointed for up to one further term but the total period of continuous membership on the committee cannot exceed eight years (two terms). This includes any term as chair of the committee.

Chairs or members who have served an eight-year term must have a two-year break from serving on the same council's audit, risk and improvement committee before being eligible to be appointed to that council's committee again.

Care is to be taken 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.

Ideally, no more than one member should leave the committee because of rotation in any one year.

Exemptions

If a council is unable to replace the chair or members of its audit, risk and improvement committee when their maximum term limit has been reached, the council can seek the approval of the Departmental Chief Executive to extend their term or to reappoint the chair or committee member for a further term.

The council's request must:

- be in writing
- describe the efforts the council has made to appoint a different member, and
- explain why the council has been unsuccessful.

Exemptions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

Chair

To ensure that the committee maintains a fresh approach, the initial term of a chair of an audit, risk and improvement committee on any one audit, risk and improvement committee is four-years (one term).

The chair can be reappointed as chair for up to one further term, but the total period served by a chair on the same committee cannot exceed eight years (two terms).

Where the chair's term expires and another chair is appointed, it is the responsibility of the outgoing chair to ensure the incoming chair is fully briefed on the ongoing work of the audit, risk and improvement committee.

This includes advising the incoming chair of:

- any activity that may be relevant to the ongoing functioning of the committee, and
- any outstanding matters of high risk to the council and outstanding audit recommendations.

Councillor members

The initial term of a councillor member of an audit, risk and improvement committee is four years, coinciding with the term of the council.

The councillor member can be reappointed for another term (i.e. four-years), if re-elected at the council's next ordinary election, but the total period of continuous membership on the committee cannot exceed eight years (two council terms).

The councillor member is to be appointed by the governing body at the first meeting of the council after the ordinary election.

The councillor member's term ends at the end of the council term.

Reappointment

Prior to approving the reappointment or extension of the chair or an independent member's term, the governing body of the council must undertake an assessment of the chair's or committee member's performance.

The council may engage an external reviewer to undertake this assessment if they choose.

In undertaking the assessment, the council, or any person appointed to undertake the assessment on behalf of the council, must consult with and consider the views of the chair (in the case of the reappointment or extension of the term of a committee member other than the chair), the general manager and any councillor member of the committee.

The council, or any person appointed to undertake the assessment on behalf of the council, should also consider whether the person's skills, knowledge and experience align with the council's requirements, as set out in the committee's terms of reference and four-year strategic work plan (see below), to ensure that they continue to add value to the committee.

The reappointment of the chair or a committee member is also subject to that person still meeting independence and eligibility requirements.

Resignation of committee members

Where the chair or a member of an audit, risk and improvement committee is unable to complete their term or does not intend to seek reappointment after the expiry of their term, they should give sufficient notice to the chair (in the case of a committee member) and the governing body (in the case of the chair) prior to their resignation to enable the council to ensure a smooth transition to a new committee member or chair.

The notice period is to be agreed by the governing body of the council and the committee.

A member of an audit, risk and improvement committee should have the opportunity to have an exit meeting with the chair to discuss their reason for leaving and to provide feedback on their experience serving on the committee as well as any other issues.

Resigning chairs should have the opportunity to have an exit meeting with the mayor and general manager (if appropriate).

Dismissal of committee members

The governing body of a council can terminate the appointment of the chair and any member of the audit, risk and improvement committee by resolution before the expiry of their terms under certain circumstances.

The dismissal of the chair or an independent member of a committee is to be reported to the Office of Local Government.

Dismissal criteria

The chair or an independent member of the audit, risk and improvement committee can be dismissed by the governing body before the expiry of their term where they have:

- breached the council's code of conduct

- performed unsatisfactorily or not to expectations
- declared, or are found to be in, a position of a conflict of interest with is unresolvable
- been declared bankrupt or are found to be insolvent
- experienced an adverse change in business status
- been charged with a serious criminal offence
- been proven to be in serious breach of their obligations under any legislation, or
- experienced an adverse change in capacity or capability.

Councillor members

The appointment of a councillor member to an audit, risk and improvement committee can be terminated at any time by the governing body by resolution.

Fees

The fees a council pays to the chair and independent members of its audit, risk and improvement committee are to be agreed between the council and the chair or member and reflect the time, commitment and responsibility involved in serving on the committee.

Chairs and members can serve on a committee on a voluntary basis if they choose to.

Superannuation

Councils are obliged under the *Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992* to make compulsory superannuation guarantee contributions on behalf of audit, risk and improvement committee chairs and independent members where they are remunerated.

Insurance

Councils should determine whether professional indemnity and public liability

insurance is required for the chair and independent members of their audit, risk and improvement committee.

In some cases, the chair or a member of an audit, risk and improvement committee may already be covered by the council's professional indemnity and public liability insurance policies or by their own insurance.

This will need to be ascertained by the council and chair or member on a case-by-case basis having regard to the terms of any relevant insurance policy.

Where a council determines that professional indemnity or public liability insurance may be required, the chair or member can obtain their own insurance, or the council can consider obtaining it on their behalf.

Learning and development

Audit, risk and improvement committee chairs and members are encouraged to keep informed of current developments and to maintain and develop the skills, knowledge and capabilities necessary to exercise their functions effectively.

Several professional development networks and programs are available, for example, through organisations such as:

- the Institute of Internal Auditors
- the Australian Institute of Company Directors
- Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand
- The Actuaries Institute, and the
- Local Government Professionals Association.

Audit, risk and improvement chairs and members are also encouraged to serve on more than one local government committee to extend the breadth of their experience and understanding of councils and their operations and risks.

Conduct

Audit, risk and improvement committee members are required to observe the same ethical and behavioural standards as other council officials and must comply with the council's code of conduct.

As required under the council's code of conduct, audit, risk and improvement committee members must declare and appropriately manage any conflicts of interest they may have in matters being dealt with by the committee.

Declarations of conflicts of interest and the actions taken to manage them must be recorded in the minutes of meetings.

Councils should identify the chair and independent members of their audit risk and improvement committee as 'designated persons' for the purposes of the council's code of conduct and require them to complete and submit returns of interests.

Complaints of breaches of the council's code of conduct by audit, risk and improvement committee members are to be dealt with in accordance with the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*.

Under the Procedures, the general manager is responsible for managing code of conduct complaints about the chair and independent members of the audit, risk and improvement committee. However, as a safeguard, the general manager should consult with the governing body of the council before taking disciplinary action under the Procedures against the chair or an independent member of the council's audit, risk and improvement committee.

Meetings

The audit, risk and improvement committee must meet at least quarterly over the course of each year.

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee is to decide the frequency and

timing of the committee's meetings and plan them annually in advance to ensure the availability of all members and observers.

Generally, meetings should correspond with major phases of the council's financial reporting, external audit and internal audit cycles.

For example, the audit, risk and improvement committee should meet to review the council's financial statements before they are certified by the council.

Audit, risk and improvement committee meetings should also correspond with meetings of the governing body, and allow sufficient time between audit, risk and improvement committee meetings and council meetings for the committee to action any items and prepare any reports that are to be provided to the governing body at the council meeting.

Special meetings may be held, if needed, to review the council's financial statements prior to them being submitted to the governing body of the council, or to consider the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual or four-yearly assessments (see below).

Audit, risk and improvement committee meetings can be held in person, by telephone or videoconference.

The audit, risk and improvement 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 or the general manager.

The governing body can also resolve to request the audit, risk and improvement committee to hold an additional meeting.

Where such a request is made, the chair can decide whether the additional meeting is required, taking into consideration the issues that the governing body has requested the audit, risk and improvement committee to consider at the meeting.

Proxies

As audit, risk and improvement committee members are appointed on the basis of their

skills, knowledge and personal qualities, proxies are not permitted to attend meetings on behalf of members who are unable to attend.

Quorum and voting

A quorum consists of a majority of audit, risk and improvement committee independent voting members.

Where the vote is tied, the chair has the casting vote.

Agenda

Forward agenda

The chair should prepare a 12-month forward meeting agenda to ensure that the audit, risk and improvement committee covers all its responsibilities at the appropriate time of the year.

For example, the forward agenda will set out, at the appropriate meeting, the various internal and external audit reports and management responses to be tabled and discussed.

It will also allocate appropriate time for a review of the progress of the internal audit function against the annual work plan, and to follow-up the implementation of corrective actions.

Meeting agenda

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee is to determine the agenda for each committee meeting.

It is recommended that the chair consult with other committee members, the general manager, the head of the internal audit function and external auditor prior to setting the agenda so that any urgent issues or risks that arise can be included.

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee is to decide an appropriate timeframe for receiving the final agenda in the lead-up to the meeting.

Papers

The audit, risk and improvement committee is to decide in consultation with the general manager and the head of the internal audit function an appropriate timeframe for receiving papers and other necessary information to support agenda items to be considered at each committee meeting.

Minutes

Each audit, risk and improvement committee meeting must be minuted to preserve a record of the issues considered and the actions and decisions taken by the committee.

Audit, risk and improvement committee meeting minutes must:

- include a record of attendance
- cover each agenda item and document the discussion held and the outcome of discussions, including any recommendations, action points and/or allocation of tasks to relevant people
- be approved by the chair before circulation
- be provided to committee members, the governing body of the council, the general manager, the head of the internal audit function and external auditor
- be provided soon after the meeting date to ensure relevant persons are made aware of any significant issues discussed at the meeting that need to be dealt with. The exact time period is to be determined by the committee and the general manager.

The minutes must be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting at the next meeting of the audit, risk and improvement committee.

If any important details have been incorrectly recorded or omitted, they can be discussed and the minutes amended, prior to confirmation at a subsequent meeting.

After the minutes are confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting, they must be signed by the chair.

All audit, risk and improvement committee members and observers should receive a copy of the minutes of all meetings.

Attendance of observers

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the issues to be discussed, audit, risk and improvement committee meetings should not be open to the public.

In addition to audit, risk and improvement committee members, the general manager and the head of the internal audit function should attend committee meetings as non-voting observers.

The NSW Auditor-General, as council's external auditor, or their representative, is to be invited to each committee meeting as an independent non-voting observer and can choose whether to attend.

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee can request the following people to attend a committee meeting or to meet with the committee to provide additional information relevant to its role:

- council's chief financial officer (or equivalent) given their knowledge of, and responsibility for, council's financial management
- the head of the council's risk management function
- senior managers
- any councillor
- any employee or contractor of the council (with the general manager's permission), and/or
- any external independent expert or external party whose advice is needed (subject to confidentiality considerations).

These persons must attend meetings where requested and must, as far as is practicable, provide the information requested.

Observers have no voting rights at audit, risk and improvement committee meetings and can be excluded from a meeting by the chair of the committee at any time where necessary.

Private meetings

The audit, risk and improvement committee can hold closed meetings whenever it needs to discuss confidential or sensitive issues with

only voting members of the committee present.

In addition to attending audit, risk and improvement committee meetings, the committee can meet privately at any time with the head of the internal audit function and/or external auditor without the general manager present. At least one private meeting must occur annually.

Confidentiality

It is at the discretion of the council to decide whether audit, risk and improvement committee agendas, business papers, minutes and other reports are made publicly available.

Given its potential sensitivity, it is recommended that all information pertaining to the audit, risk and improvement committee and internal audit activities is treated as confidential unless otherwise determined by the committee or a resolution of the council.

Councils and audit, risk and improvement committees should also consider the guiding principles of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* and whether it is in the public interest to proactively disclose or release information and whether there is an overriding public interest against doing so.

Secretariat

The general manager is to appoint a council staff member to provide secretariat support to the audit, risk and improvement committee.

The main functions of this role are:

- liaising with the chair to prepare agendas for audit, risk and improvement committee meetings
- ensure that committee papers are of an appropriate standard and provided with enough time to allow appropriate review and consideration
- recording minutes of meetings
- providing assistance to the chair in arranging meetings and council site visits

- supporting the chair to prepare reports for the council
- arranging appropriate meeting facilities and equipment
- keeping members informed of developments affecting the council that may relate to the work of the committee
- maintaining a record of when member's terms of appointment are due for renewal or termination
- ensuring new members receive appropriate induction, and
- managing expenditures relating to the committee.

Shared arrangements

If the audit, risk and improvement committee has been established by a joint organisation, the executive officer of the joint organisation is responsible for organising secretariat support.

Councils that share their audit, risk and improvement committee can also share their secretariat function if they choose to.

Key relationships

General manager

A key role of audit, risk and improvement committees is to act as an independent source of advice and opinion to both the governing body and the general manager, and to act as a forum for the resolution of any disagreements between the council and internal audit function.

The general manager, in turn, also has a key role in supporting the work and effectiveness of the audit, risk and improvement committee.

To be effective, audit, risk and improvement committees need to maintain a positive working relationship with the general manager (and vice versa) and view them as a valuable source of advice and information about the council and its operations.

Chairs of audit, risk and improvement committees should meet regularly with general

managers to discuss key issues and review performance.

External audit

There are strong linkages between the work of councils' audit, risk and improvement committees and their external auditor and committees should actively engage with the external auditor.

Councils' external auditor can offer valuable insights on issues such as the effectiveness of the council's risk, controls, financial reporting, and compliance frameworks.

For the external auditor, communication with the audit, risk and improvement committee can in turn facilitate an effective and efficient audit and assist the communication of matters arising from the external audit to the council.

Audit, risk and improvement committees should:

- provide input on, and discuss, planned financial and performance audit coverage
- monitor councils' responses to financial statement management letters and performance audit reports, including the implementation of audit recommendations
- provide advice to the council on action taken on significant issues raised in relevant external auditor reports or better practice guides, and
- have a voting-members only meeting with the external auditor at least once per year so that the committee can obtain the views of the external auditor without internal audit or management advisers being present.

Internal audit

The audit, risk and improvement committee should maintain a strong, positive relationship with the council's internal audit function and view it as a significant source of information about what is going on in the council.

The internal audit function can also assist the audit, risk and improvement committee to develop the annual work plan and four-year strategic work plan that will guide the

committee's and internal audit function's work (see below).

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee should routinely meet with council staff undertaking internal audit activities to discuss key issues and review performance if needed.

At least one private meeting should be held each year and any potential compromises to the internal audit activity's independence reported.

More information about this is provided in core requirement 3.

Access to council, staff, resources and information

It is essential for the audit, risk and improvement committee to be able to access the staff and information about the council it needs to review the matters listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act and the resources necessary to undertake its other responsibilities.

Council staff

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must have direct and unrestricted access to the general manager and senior management of the council in order to fulfil its responsibilities.



Should the audit, risk and improvement committee need to meet with another council staff member or contractor to obtain information to undertake its role, the chair of the committee is to obtain permission from the general manager before inviting the staff member or contractor to meet with the committee.

Subject to the general manager's permission being given, the staff member or contractor must attend.

Any disputes between the general manager and audit, risk and improvement committee regarding access to council staff are to be resolved by the governing body.

Council resources and information

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must have direct and unrestricted access to any council resources or information it needs to fulfil its responsibilities.



In its dealings with the council, the audit, risk and improvement committee should be mindful of the environment the council is operating in and the priorities that the general manager needs to manage.

The audit, risk and improvement committee should therefore keep to a minimum the demands it places on the council and utilise as far as is practicable, existing information to obtain the necessary level of assurance in relation to its responsibilities.

The audit, risk and improvement 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 when it is being provided to an external investigative, audit or oversight agency for the purpose of informing that agency of a matter that may warrant its attention.

After their engagement ends with a council, a chair or member of an audit, risk and improvement committee must not disclose or make use of any confidential information acquired in the course of their engagement with the council without the approval of the council.

External advice

The audit, risk and improvement committee can obtain any external legal or other professional/expert advice it needs to exercise its responsibilities. For example, where a council has implemented a specialised IT system, the committee can seek the expert

opinion of an IT specialist to assist its review of its implementation.

To minimise the potential costs to the council, the governing body and the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee must agree at the start of each council term how costs are to be met, i.e.:

- the governing body will set a fixed budget at the start of each council term for external expenses, or
- the committee will seek the governing body's permission prior to engaging external advice.

Disputes

Members of an audit, risk and improvement committee should maintain an effective working relationship with each other and the council and try to resolve any differences they may have professionally.

In the event of a disagreement between the audit, risk and improvement committee and the general manager or other senior managers (for example, about findings or recommendations of audits), the dispute is to be resolved by the governing body of the council.

Unresolved disputes regarding compliance with these Guidelines are to be referred to the Departmental Chief Executive in writing.

Workplans

Strategic work plan

It is essential that the work of the audit, risk and improvement committee is thoroughly planned and executed to ensure that no council activity or function is missed by the committee and that councils receive value for money from their assurance investment.

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must develop a strategic work plan every four years to ensure that



all the matters listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act are reviewed by the committee and considered by the internal audit function when developing their risk-based program of internal audits.

The plan must be developed by the audit, risk and improvement committee in consultation with the governing body, general manager, the head of the internal audit function and senior managers (where appropriate) and adopted by the governing body of the council at the start of the council term.

To maintain the independence of the audit, risk and improvement committee, the governing body of the council must be careful when adopting the strategic work plan not to direct the committee's work over the council term.

Content

The nature of the strategic work plan will be commensurate with the size and operational complexity of the council and its risk profile, and consistent with the requirements of the International Professional Practices Framework.

At a minimum, it should document:

- the goals and expected outcomes of the audit, risk and improvement committee for the council term
- key organisational issues and risks faced by the council and how the committee will review these, and
- key performance indicators to measure progress across the council term.

When developing the council's strategic work plan, the audit, risk and improvement committee should consider at a minimum:

- the council's strategic objectives
- risks facing the council
- the work of other review activities or functions (for example, external and performance audits, and reviews or audits by other government agencies)
- an assurance map of the council's assurance activities which may assist to determine where the committee's and internal audit function's work should focus, and
- stakeholder expectations.

There should also be sufficient flexibility in the strategic work plan to accommodate the need for additional audits on emerging risks from time to time.

The audit, risk and improvement committee may, in consultation with the council's governing body, 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 will rest with the committee.

When considering whether to vary the strategic work plan, 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 strategic work plan.

Review

The audit, risk and improvement committee must review the four-year strategic plan at least annually to ensure that it is dynamic, relevant and aligns with the council's risk profile.

This will also ensure that the council remains on track with its audits and any delay in progress can be quickly addressed.

Annual work plan

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must develop an annual work plan to guide its work over the forward year.



The annual work plan must be developed by the audit, risk and improvement committee in consultation with the governing body, general manager, head of the internal audit function and senior managers (where appropriate).

The annual work plan must be consistent with the requirements of the International Professional Practices Framework and identify:

- the internal audits that will be carried out during the year to support the work of the audit, risk and improvement committee

- the key goals, objectives and scope of the proposed audits
- the resources needed for each audit (for example, staffing, budget, technology), and
- key performance indicators to measure annual progress against.

The annual work plan must be flexible enough to allow it to be reviewed and adjusted as necessary throughout the year in response to any changes to the council's risks or operations.

The audit, risk and improvement committee may, in consultation with the council's governing body 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 will rest with the committee.

When considering whether to vary the annual work plan, 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 annual work plan.

Performance measurement

The performance of each council's audit, risk and improvement committee and internal audit function must be able to be assessed to measure progress and improvement.

The audit, risk and improvement committee must establish key performance indicators for the council's four-year strategic work plan and annual work plan to allow the council to gauge the:

- performance of the committee and internal audit function and the value they are providing to the council, and
- council's performance regarding the matters listed in s428A so that the council can assess whether it is improving each council term in these areas.

These key performance indicators are to be reviewed and refreshed by the audit, risk and improvement committee for each annual work plan and four-year strategic work plan to

ensure they reflect the changing needs of the council and the increased capacity of the committee and internal audit function as they mature.

The general manager, in consultation with the audit, risk and improvement committee, must ensure that a data collection or performance management system is established and maintained to collect the data needed to measure progress against these key performance indicators.

Providing advice to the governing body

Quarterly updates

Ongoing reporting by the audit, risk and improvement committee to the governing body (and general manager) is essential for accountability and will ensure that the governing body is kept informed of matters considered by the committee and any emerging issues that may influence the strategic direction of the council or the achievement of the council's goals and objectives.

It will also ensure strong linkages between the audit, risk and improvement committee, the governing body and the general manager and lead to a better functioning assurance mechanism.

The audit, risk and improvement committee must provide an update to the governing body of the council of its activities and opinions after every committee meeting.

The audit, risk and improvement committee must also provide its quarterly update to the general manager to ensure they are kept informed of issues raised and can answer any questions the governing body may have about the committee's opinions and recommendations.

The mayor can request to meet with the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee at any time to discuss any issues relating to the work of the committee during the quarter.

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee can also request to meet with the mayor at any time.

Content

The nature and content of the audit, risk and improvement committee's quarterly updates is to be determined by the governing body and the committee.

It could simply be providing a copy of the audit, risk and improvement committee's meeting minutes to the governing body if appropriate, or something more formal such as a report for noting by the governing body, or a face-to-face meeting between the committee, governing body and general manager to discuss important issues that have been identified.

Whatever the nature and form the update takes, the governing body and general manager must be advised, at a minimum, of:

- any formal resolutions of the audit, risk and improvement committee
- the committee's assessment of any audits conducted, including any breaches or deficiencies in controls that require an immediate response from the council
- progress on the implementation of corrective actions
- opportunities for longer-term improvement, and
- any key opinions or 'take-outs' from the committee's meeting.

Should the governing body require additional information, a request for the information may be made to the chair by resolution. The chair is only required to 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.

Annual assessment

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must provide an annual assessment to the governing body each year.



This will ensure that the governing body of the council is fully informed of the audit, risk and improvement committee's work and its opinion on how council is performing.

The annual assessment must include:

- a summary and assessment of the work the audit, risk and improvement committee performed to discharge its responsibilities during the preceding year
- an overview and assessment of the work of the internal audit function
- progress against key performance indicators
- advice on the appropriateness of the committee's terms of reference
- an independent assessment and advice on the matters considered by the committee during the year that, in the committee's opinion, and based on the level of risk facing the council, the governing body should be informed of, and
- other views or opinions on the council that the committee wishes to share.

Before providing their annual assessment to the governing body, the audit, risk and improvement committee must provide a copy of its annual assessment report to the general manager to allow them to develop an action plan to address any issues identified.

Both the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual assessment and the general manager's action plan can then be considered jointly by the governing body at an annual assurance meeting with the committee and the general manager.

Annual assurance meeting

It would be beneficial for the audit, risk and improvement committee, the governing body and general manager to come together annually to discuss the committee's annual assessment of the council, how the council

proposes to respond to the committee's recommendations for corrective actions and other important internal audit and risk management matters.

The governing body may wish to hold an extraordinary or additional meeting each year for this purpose.

The annual assurance meeting should also discuss:

- the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual plan and review priorities for the upcoming year, for the approval by resolution of the governing body
- any resourcing issues for the internal audit or risk management functions that the committee considers the governing body should be informed of
- any updated committee terms of reference, for approval by resolution by the governing body, and
- the general manager's annual assessment of the council's risk management function (see core requirement 2).

The mayor, chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee and general manager can invite observers or other participants to the meeting where appropriate.

Strategic assessment

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must provide to the governing body of the council a comprehensive independent assessment every council term (i.e. four years) of all the matters listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act that have been reviewed during the council term.



This will ensure that the governing body of the council is fully informed of the council's performance in relation to the matters specified in section 428A of the Local Government Act and what corrective actions are required to address any issues identified.

It will also provide the governing body with essential information that will assist with

strategic decision-making and resource allocation during the next council term.

Before providing its strategic assessment to the governing body, the audit, risk and improvement committee must provide a copy of its report to the general manager to allow the general manager to develop an action plan to address any issues identified during the next council term.

Given the audit, risk and improvement committee's functional responsibility for the internal audit function of the council, the committee must also develop an action plan for the governing body to address any internal audit issues identified by the committee.

The audit, risk and improvement committee's strategic assessment and the action plans can be considered jointly by the governing body at a strategic assurance meeting held every four years.

Strategic assurance meeting

It would be beneficial for the audit, risk and improvement committee, the governing body and general manager to come together at the close of the council term or commencement of the new council term to discuss the committee's strategic assessment of the council, how the council proposes to respond to the committee's recommendations during the next council term and any other important internal audit and risk management issues.

This discussion can also inform the strategic plans to be made through the integrated planning and reporting process for the next council term.

The governing body may wish to hold an extraordinary or additional meeting for this purpose.

The four-yearly assessment meeting could also discuss:

- the audit, risk and improvement committee's four-year strategic work plan for the upcoming council term for approval by resolution of the governing body
- a four-yearly review of the committee's terms of reference, for noting by the governing body and where applicable, an

updated terms of reference for approval by resolution

- the governing body's four-yearly review of the committee's performance and action plan to address any issues identified, for approval by resolution of the governing body (see below).

Review of committee performance

It is important that the work of the audit, risk and improvement committee is regularly assessed, and that the committee is accountable for its performance.

This will ensure that the audit, risk and improvement committee is making a valuable contribution to the council and allow the governing body to determine whether any changes to the committee's terms of reference or membership are required.

At least once each council term (i.e. four years) the governing body of the council is to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the audit, risk and improvement committee in conformance with the International Professional Practice Framework.



This will ensure that audit, risk and improvement committees are assessed consistently across all councils and allow councils to have confidence in the work of their committees.

To conduct the review, the governing body can:

- engage a suitably qualified external assessor or peer to undertake the review, or
- undertake the review itself and engage an external assessor or peer to conduct an independent evaluation of the findings.

The external assessor or peer should have specific skills relevant to the major risks of the council and a strong understanding of what constitutes best practice in relation to the operations and performance of audit, risk and improvement committees.

Review criteria

The review of the audit, risk and improvement committee's performance must consider:

- the appropriateness of the committee's terms of reference and whether these have been complied with
- the processes and procedures undertaken by the committee
- the collective performance of the committee – for example:
 - the quality and timeliness of assurance and advice provided by the committee to the governing body and general manager
 - the effectiveness of the committee in meeting its responsibilities
 - the relationship and quality of communication with the council and other stakeholders
- the individual performance of each member – for example, their:
 - understanding of the council, its key risks and internal controls
 - ability to act objectively and independently
 - preparation for committee meetings
 - contribution to the work of the committee through their participation in discussion and decision-making, skills and experience
- the performance of the chair, including whether the chair has (in addition to their performance as a member of the committee):
 - demonstrated positive leadership
 - maintained effective working relationships among audit, risk and improvement committee members and with the council, council's external auditor and the internal audit function
 - ensured the governing body and general manager was well informed and briefed on the strategic and technical aspects of internal audits and risk and control issues, and
 - lead effective committee meetings.
- the way the committee, external auditor, council and internal audit function work

together to manage risk and support the council and how effective this is

- whether the committee has effectively reviewed the matters identified in section 428A of the Local Government Act and contributed to an improvement in these areas, and
- whether the composition of the committee is appropriate.

When conducting the review, the governing body is to consider feedback on each member's performance by the chair and councillor member of the committee and the general manager.

Self-assessments by the chair and members of the audit, risk and improvement committee can also be used.

The governing body of council can also request the chair of the committee to address the council and answer any questions about the operations of the committee.

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee is to develop an action plan for the governing body of the council to address any issues identified in the performance review and present it to the governing body at the four-yearly assessment meeting.

Annual attestation

It is important that councils are accountable to their communities for the efficacy of their internal controls and assurance mechanisms and the operations of their audit, risk and improvement committees.

Commencing with the 2024-2025 annual report, the general manager will be required under the Local Government Regulation to attest each year in the council's annual report whether the council has complied with the following requirements in relation to its audit, risk and improvement committee, as detailed in these Guidelines:

- the council's audit, risk and improvement committee is independent of the council and has three or more members
- the chair and all members of the committee meet the eligibility and

independence criteria required of their position, and have been appointed in accordance with prescribed membership term limits

- the council's audit, risk and improvement committee operates according to terms of reference approved by the governing body of the council that are consistent with the approved Model Terms of Reference contained in these Guidelines
- the council's audit, risk and improvement committee operates according to annual and four-year strategic work plans endorsed by the governing body of the council
- council's audit, risk and improvement committee provides an annual assessment to the governing body each year, and a strategic assessment of all the matters listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act to the governing body each council term
- the council provides the committee with direct and unrestricted access to the general manager, senior management, council information and council resources so it can fulfil its responsibilities, and
- at least once each council term the governing body of the council reviews the effectiveness of the audit, risk and improvement committee.

Further information on annual attestation requirements is detailed in the statutory framework section of these Guidelines.

Further resources

The following resources may be useful to councils seeking more information about the establishment and operation of their audit, risk and improvement committee.

This is not an exhaustive list but provides a useful starting point for councils that seek to better understand what audit, risk and improvement committees do, and how they can be supported to add maximum value to councils.

[Audit Committees – A Guide to Good Practice \(3rd edition\)](#) – Auditing and Assurance Standards Board, Australian Institute of Company Directors and The Institute of Internal Auditors-Australia (2017)

Provides a checklist to assess the performance of audit, risk and improvement committees and members.

[Audit Committees – A Guide to Good Practice for Local Government](#) – Victorian Government, Department of Planning and Community Development (2011)

Provides detailed information on the activities audit, risk and improvement committees can perform in relation to external audit, financial management, risk management and internal audit.

[Audit Committee Guidelines – Improving Accountability and Performance](#) – The State of Queensland (Queensland Treasury and Trade) (2012)

Provides sample:

- letter of appointment for audit, risk and improvement committee members
- self-assessment questionnaire for committee members, external peer review checklist and management feedback questionnaire when assessing committee performance, and
- committee meeting agenda.

[Audit Committees \(RM-G2\)](#) – Australian Government, Department of Finance

Provides a list of professional peak bodies councils could contact to source audit, risk and improvement committee members.

[Chairing an Audit Committee](#) – KPMG

Provides information about the role of audit, risk and improvement committee chairs, particularly in relation to:

- leadership, and
- managing the work of audit, risk and improvement committee members.

[Dealing with Corruption, Fraud and the ICAC: the role of public sector Audit and Risk Committees](#) – Independent Commission Against Corruption (2020)

Provides information about the role of audit, risk and improvement committees and risk management in relation to fraud and corruption.

[Establishing a skills-based audit committee](#) – Institute of Internal Auditors-Australia (2020)

Provides an analysis matrix template to assess the skills mix of an audit, risk and improvement committee when appointing committee members.

[Guide for Audit & Risk Committees: Understanding Financial Statements](#) – NSW Treasury (2017)

Provides information on activities audit, risk and improvement committee can undertake when reviewing financial statements.

[How can audit committee members add value?](#) – PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2011)

Provides a checklist for measuring the performance of audit, risk and improvement committees.

[Internal Audit and Risk Management Policy for the General Government Sector \(TPP-20-08\)](#) – NSW Treasury (2020)

Provides information on the NSW public sector risk management and internal audit policy, including:

- the operation of shared audit, risk and improvement committees in the NSW public sector
- matters to consider when deciding whether to enter into a shared arrangement, and
- recommended content for shared use agreements.

[Public Sector Audit Committees: Independent assurance and advice for Accountable Authorities](#) – Australian National Audit Office (2015)

Provides information about the role and functions of audit, risk and improvement committees, including:

- member roles and responsibilities
- how to foster good relationships between the council and committee, and
- checklists for:
 - o secretariat actions
 - o planning forward meeting agendas, and
 - o assessing the performance of members.

[Service Delivery Review: A how to manual for local government \(second edition\)](#) – Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (2015)

Outlines the factors councils and audit, risk and improvement committees may consider when reviewing service delivery by the council.

[Setting up the Audit Committee](#) – PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2011)

Provides information on:

- how a council might assess the financial literacy of an audit, risk and improvement committee member, and
- best practice for inducting new committee members.

[The Role of the Audit Committee Chair](#) – KPMG (2019)

Provides information on the role of audit, risk and improvement committee chairs, particularly in relation to:

- running committee meetings, and
- overseeing risk management.

Core requirement 2:

Risk management

- Each council and joint organisation must implement a risk management framework that is consistent with current Australian standards for risk management

Guiding principles for risk management

- ❖ Each council must accept responsibility and accountability for risk management in the council.
- ❖ Each council has a risk management framework that is appropriate for that council and is consistent with the accepted Australian risk management standard.
- ❖ Risk management is an integral part of all council management, operations, functions and activities and it is clear who is responsible for managing each risk.
- ❖ Each council supports the development of a positive risk culture.
- ❖ Councils regularly review their risk management framework and can flexibly adapt their risk management activities to suit their operations and risk profiles.
- ❖ Each council is accountable to the community for complying with its statutory obligation to adopt and maintain a risk management framework.

Standards

Each council must manage its strategic and operational risks and implement a risk management framework that is consistent with the current Australian risk management standard, and appropriate for the council's risks.



It is recognised that each council will have different risk management requirements depending on its size, needs, budget, operational complexity and risk management maturity.

Councils have the flexibility under the Australian risk management standard to adapt the size, scope and delivery of their risk management framework provided it reflects the principles, key elements and processes set out in the standard for managing risks in any sized council or organisation.

Councils can adopt additional requirements that supplement those in the standard provided they do not conflict with the standard.

The current risk management standard at the time of the release of these Guidelines is *AS ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management – Guidelines*.

Under current licensing and copyright requirements, each council will need to purchase an individually licensed copy of *AS ISO 31000:2018* from Standards Australia to obtain a full copy of the standard.

The following is a summary of the definitions, principles, key elements and process of *AS ISO 31000:2018*.

Definitions

The definition of 'risk' and 'risk management' adopted by councils as part of their risk management framework will be the same as that adopted in the current Australian risk management standard.

At the time of printing, *AS ISO 31000:2018* defines:

- risk as the *"effect of uncertainty on objectives, where an effect is a deviation from the expected. It can be positive, negative or both, and can address, create or result in opportunities and threats"*, and
- risk management as *"coordinated activities to direct and control an organisation with regard to risk"*.

Principles

In summary, *AS ISO 31000:2018* requires a council's approach to risk management to be based on the following eight specific principles to ensure it is effective:

- **integrated** – risk management is integrated into all council activities and decision-making processes
- **structured and comprehensive** – risk management is a structured and comprehensive process that achieves consistent and comparable results

- **customised** – the risk management framework and process are customised to the council
- **inclusive** – risk management is inclusive of all stakeholders and enables their knowledge, views and perceptions to be considered
- **dynamic** – risk management is dynamic and able to respond to changes and events in an appropriate and timely manner
- **best available information** – risk management decisions are based on the best available information and take into account any limitations and uncertainties
- **human and cultural factors** – risk management takes into account human and cultural factors, and
- **continual improvement** – risk management is continuously and periodically evaluated and improved through learning and experience.

Key elements

To achieve these principles, *AS ISO 31000:2018* requires each council to ensure its risk management framework demonstrates the following six elements:

Leadership and commitment

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires risk management to be supported by a positive culture that promotes and communicates risk management as part of everyday activities and decision-making.

The standard states that this culture can only exist when management (i.e. the governing body, general manager and senior staff) demonstrate strong leadership and commitment to risk management.

Practical measures the governing body and/or general manager can take under *AS ISO 31000:2018* to exhibit strong leadership in risk management are set out further below.

Integration

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires that risk management is fully integrated within a council and made part of the council's

purpose, governance, leadership, strategy, objectives and operations.

Risk is to be managed in every part of the council's organisational structure and every council employee is to be responsible for managing risk.

Design

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires that the design of a council's risk management framework:

- is based on the unique needs, characteristics and risks of the council, and its external and internal context
- demonstrates the council's continual commitment to risk management
- assigns risk management roles, responsibilities and accountabilities within the council
- allocates appropriate council resources for risk management, and
- effectively documents and communicates risk management across the council.

Implementation

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires that each council implements its risk management framework by:

- developing a risk management plan that provides structure for how the council will implement its risk management policy and conducts its risk management activities, and
- ensuring the council's risk management activities are clearly understood and practiced.

The plan should identify decision makers for risk within the council and ensure risk management processes and arrangements are well understood by the council and practiced.

Evaluation

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires that each council regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its risk management framework and determines whether it remains suitable.

Improvement

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires that each council continually adapts and improves the design of its risk management framework and how it is integrated throughout the council to help the council move to a higher level of risk maturity.

Process

AS ISO 31000:2018 provides each council with a systematic process to identify, assess and prioritise risks, decide how they will be managed, and document and communicate them across the council.

The process defined in AS ISO 31000:2018 consists of the following steps:

- defining the scope of the council's risk management activities to assist in planning the council's risk management approach
- establishing the internal and external context to ensure that the council understands the internal and external environment it operates in and how risk management will impact, and be impacted by these
- deciding the performance indicators that the council will use to measure the effectiveness of its risk management framework and identify gaps between its actual and desired performance
- defining the council's risk criteria/appetite – that is, the amount and type of risk that the governing body is willing to take, or not take, in order to achieve its strategic plan and objectives
- conducting risk assessments to determine what risks need to be managed
- deciding risk treatment options
- developing risk treatment plans that document how controls will be implemented, and
- writing risk reports that will document and communicate the risk management framework to all staff and be used by the council to regularly review the risk management framework.

County councils and joint organisations

County councils and joint organisations have a lower risk profile than larger and more operationally complex general-purpose councils.

However, they are still responsible for the expenditure of public money, providing services (in the case of county councils), and delivering outcomes on behalf of their member councils and regions (in the case of joint organisations), and need to identify and manage risks appropriately.

Given their lower risk profiles, county councils and joint organisations can share the administration of their risk management framework with another council to reduce costs.

Alternatively, joint organisations can undertake the coordination and administration of their member councils' risk management frameworks on behalf of the councils.

Any shared risk management function must operate as an individual resource for each council in the shared arrangement and implement the requirements in these Guidelines for each council individually.

A shared risk management function should only be established and utilised by a county council or joint organisation where the shared function can maintain a high level of understanding and fulfilment of each council's risk management needs, as well as effective working and reporting relationships with the general manager and senior staff of each council in the shared arrangement.

Councils that establish a shared risk management function should develop and sign a formal agreement with the other councils in the shared arrangement which outlines how the shared arrangement will operate and costs are shared.

Resourcing

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires each council to ensure sufficient resources are allocated to implement the council's risk management framework and deliver the internal controls needed to ensure the council's risks are appropriately managed.

In practice, this responsibility will fall to the governing body and/or general manager of the council.

These resources include the necessary:

- human resources (with appropriate skills and experience)
- technology, equipment, tools and information management systems for managing risk
- documented processes and procedures, and
- professional development and training for staff to ensure they can fulfil their risk management responsibilities.

To ensure that the governing body and/or general manager makes informed budgeting decisions, the audit, risk and improvement committee is to advise of the resources it considers that the council needs to effectively implement its risk management framework, having regard to any budgetary constraints facing the council and the council's operational environment.

Roles and responsibilities

AS ISO 31000:2018 requires that each council assign risk management roles and responsibilities to all relevant roles within the council.

To ensure effective implementation, the standard also requires each council to demonstrate strong leadership and commitment to risk management.

In practice, this will see the general manager, governing body and council staff take on the following responsibilities:

Governing body – strategic leadership

Consistent with the governing body's strategic leadership role under section 223 of the Local Government Act, the governing body is responsible for establishing the foundational elements of the council's risk management framework and setting the 'tone at the top'.

This includes approving by resolution the council's risk criteria/appetite – a statement that conveys how much risk will be tolerated by the governing body in the pursuit of the strategic objectives for the council, and how risk is to be managed and decisions made within this context.

The council's risk criteria/appetite is to be approved in consultation with the audit, risk and improvement committee.

General manager – operational leadership

Consistent with the general manager's role under section 335 of the Local Government Act to conduct the day-to-day management of the council, the general manager has ultimate responsibility and accountability for risk management in the council.

A council's general manager is responsible for implementation of the council's risk management framework. This includes:

- overseeing the council's risk management framework and ensuring it is effectively communicated, implemented and reviewed regularly
- approving the council's risk management policy, plans and risk reports (where applicable)
- promoting and championing a positive risk culture
- assigning authority and accountability for risk management at appropriate levels and to appropriate staff in the council, and ensuring they are held accountable for these responsibilities
- annually attesting that the council's risk management framework complies with these Guidelines (see below), and

- approving the council's implementation of corrective actions recommended by the council's internal audit function, external audit and audit, risk and improvement committee.

Depending on the council's needs, resources and organisational structure, and to assist the integration of risk management across the council, the general manager may wish to delegate responsibility for key aspects of the council's risk management framework to a senior manager or group of senior managers established for this purpose.

The delegate would report to the general manager on risk management issues.

An example risk management policy is provided at **Appendix 4**.

Risk management function – oversight and facilitation

Each council is to establish a risk management function responsible for the day-to-day activities required to implement the council's risk management framework and provide specialist risk management skills and knowledge.

The council's risk management function is a key support to the general manager in meeting their risk management responsibilities and reports directly to the general manager or their delegate.

Each council will have the flexibility to establish its risk management function based on its structure, resourcing, risk management needs and risk management maturity.

Regardless of its structure and composition, the role and responsibilities of the risk management function should include:

- supporting the general manager by coordinating and providing clear and concise risk information, advice and/or reports that can be used in planning and decision-making
- coordinating the various activities relating to risk management within the council
- helping to build a risk management culture within the council, including facilitating and driving risk management at the

strategic and operational level within the council and ensuring consistency in practice

- ensuring there are easily accessible systems and processes in place to enable all staff to conveniently undertake risk management in their day-to-day work
- ensuring risk management processes are applied consistently across the council
- organising appropriate staff risk management training and development
- developing and maintaining a risk reporting framework to enable regular advising/reporting of key risks, and the management of those risks, to the general manager or their delegate
- supporting council staff with their risk management obligations and providing staff with advice and tools to ensure risk management compliance
- implementing effective risk management communication mechanisms and information system/s
- establishing and maintaining an ongoing monitoring system to track the risk management activities undertaken within the council and assessing the need for further action
- assessing risk management information for completeness, accuracy and consistency (for example, risk registers, risk treatment plans), and
- preparing advice or reports for the audit, risk and improvement committee and attending committee meetings (where requested).

In order to fulfil its role, the risk management function needs to:

- have a well-developed understanding of the council and its operations
- have the skills, knowledge and leadership qualities required to support and drive risk management
- have sufficient authority to intervene in instances where risk management efforts are being hampered by a lack of cooperation or through lack of risk management capability or maturity, and
- be able to add value to the risk management process by providing guidance and support in managing difficult

risk, or risks spread across a number of the council's business units or operational areas.

Dual responsibilities

It is important that the risk management function is independent of line management to reduce the potential for management influence on the risks that are reported on, and to ensure independence.

Where risk management oversight or facilitation activities are performed by council staff with other council responsibilities, the council must put safeguards in place to limit any cognitive bias (which can lead to faulty risk assessments and decision-making errors).

Depending on the specific needs and circumstances of the council, these safeguards could include:

- the audit, risk and improvement committee being informed of the other council responsibilities the risk management function has, including reporting lines, responsibilities and expectations related to the role/s
- any potential issues or conflicts of interest arising from these other roles being formally documented and communicated to the committee
- risk management staff being prohibited from undertaking risk management evaluations and reviews in relation to the council operations they are responsible for, and/or
- the committee regularly assessing that the safeguards put in place are effective.

Internal audit function – review and assurance

Councils' internal audit function is responsible for reviewing and providing advice to the audit, risk and improvement committee and the council on the effectiveness of the council's risk management framework.

Given the need to maintain the independence and objectivity of the internal audit function, the following boundaries are to apply with respect to the role of the internal audit

function in relation to the council's risk management framework:

- it is to be clear that council management remains responsible for risk management
- the internal audit function is to provide advice and challenge and support management's decision-making, as opposed to taking risk management decisions themselves
- the internal audit function should not:
 - manage any of the risks on behalf of the council
 - set the council's risk criteria/appetite
 - impose risk management processes
 - decide or implement risk responses, or
 - be held accountable for risk management activities.

Audit, risk and improvement committee – advice and assurance

An audit, risk and improvement committee's role in relation to risk management is to support the governing body and general manager and to ensure that the council's risk management framework is appropriate and operationally effective.

The breadth and depth of this assurance role is to be determined by the council and the audit, risk and improvement committee and could include:

- assessing whether risks at all levels are identified, assessed and reviewed regularly by the council
- being involved in the regular review of the council's risk register
- reviewing the integration of risk management into business planning and program implementation activities, and/or
- providing assurance in relation to the management of risk or governance arrangements on individual projects, programs or activities.

Appendix 3 provides further examples of the activities the audit, risk and improvement committee could perform in relation to risk management.

Review and reporting

Quarterly reporting

Each council should ensure its risk management framework is regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure it is relevant, effective and complies with the current Australian risk management standard.

Each council should base its ongoing monitoring and review process on its own needs. However, this should include at a minimum, providing quarterly advice from the risk management function to the general manager or their delegate.

This will ensure that risks are being correctly identified, prioritised and treated, and any emerging problems are known and rectified quickly.

Annual assessment

Each council's risk management function is to conduct an annual self-assessment of the council's risk management framework.

The annual self-assessment is to report to the general manager whether the council's risk management framework:

- complies with these Guidelines
- is sufficiently resourced
- operates effectively, this includes whether:
 - the internal control framework appropriately reflects the council's risk criteria/appetite
 - risks are formally considered when developing and implementing all council policies, programs, projects and other activities, including procurement
 - risk management covers all relevant risk categories including strategic, operational, compliance, reputational and reporting risks
 - major risks have been identified and assessed by the council and appropriate risk treatments have been implemented that reflect the council's risk criteria

- the council's internal controls are effective and appropriate
- the council's risk register and risk profile are current and appropriate
- risk information is captured and communicated in a timely manner across the council, enabling management and staff to carry out their responsibilities, and
- the council's risk management policies, procedures and plans are being complied with.

The general manager should discuss the annual assessment of the council's risk management function with the governing body and audit, risk and improvement committee at the council's strategic assurance meeting held each council term.

Strategic assessment

The Local Government Regulation (section #tbc) requires councils' audit, risk and improvement committees to keep the implementation of a council's risk management framework under review and provide advice to the council on its implementation.

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee must provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the council's risk management framework to the governing body each council term, as part of the committee's four-yearly strategic assessment.



As part of the audit, risk and improvement committee's assessment of the council's risk management function, it should consider whether:

- the council is providing sufficient resources for risk management
- the council's risk management framework complies with these Guidelines, and
- the council's risk management framework operates effectively, is being complied with and supports the achievement of the council's strategic goals and objectives.

The general manager is to develop an action plan for the governing body to address any risk management issues identified by the committee.

The audit, risk and improvement committee and general manager should discuss the strategic assessment and action plan with the governing body at the council's strategic assurance meeting held each council term (see above).

Performance measures

To ensure the effectiveness of the council's risk management activities can be regularly monitored and reviewed, each council must ensure that it:

- assigns performance targets to risk management activities that can be measured against goals and objectives, and
- can obtain the data needed to measure the impact of the council's risk management framework.

Annual attestation

Commencing with the 2024-2025 annual report, the general manager will be required under the Local Government Regulation to attest each year in the council's annual report whether the council has complied with the following requirements in relation to its risk management activities:

- the council has adopted a risk management framework that is consistent with current Australian risk management standards and is appropriate for the council's risks, and
- the council's audit, risk and improvement committee reviews the implementation of the council's risk management framework and issues an assessment of the effectiveness of the council's risk management framework to the governing body each council term.

Further information on annual attestation requirements is detailed in the statutory framework section of these Guidelines.

Further resources

The following resources may be useful to councils seeking more information about the establishment and operation of their risk management framework. They provide examples, checklists, samples, templates and other practical tools councils could use.

This is not an exhaustive list but provides a useful starting point for councils that seek further information.

[A Guide to Risk Management – The State of Queensland \(Queensland Treasury\) \(2020\)](#)

Provides guidance on how to apply the Australian risk management standard, including checklists for each stage of the risk management process.

[AS ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management – Guidelines – International Standards Organisation \(2018\)](#)

The current Australian risk management standard at the time of printing (for purchase from the International Standards Organisation)

[Audit Committee Guidelines – Improving Accountability and Performance – The State of Queensland \(Queensland Treasury and Trade\) \(2012\)](#)

Provides checklists of the matters audit, risk and improvement committees are to consider when reviewing a council's risk management framework and internal controls.

[Dealing with Corruption, Fraud and the ICAC: the role of public sector Audit and Risk Committees – Independent Commission Against Corruption \(2020\)](#)

Provides information about the role of risk management in relation to fraud and corruption.

[Risk Management Toolkit for Public Sector Agencies \(TPP 12-03\) – NSW Treasury \(2012\)](#)

Consists of three parts:

- Executive Guide (TPP 12-03a)

- Volume 1 – Guidance for Agencies (TPP 12-03b), and
- Volume 2 – Templates, Examples and Case Study (TPP 12-03c).

Provides detailed and practical advice on the various elements of the Australian risk management standards (ISO 31000), templates and worked examples.

[The Three Lines of Defense in Effective Risk Management and Control – Institute of Internal Auditors \(2013\)](#)

Outlines the three lines of defence approach to risk management and the role of management and internal audit in risk management.

[The Role of Internal Auditing in Enterprise-Wide Risk Management – Institute of Internal Auditors](#)

Outlines what enterprise risk management is, how it can be implemented and the role of internal audit in risk management.

[Victorian Government Risk Management Framework Practice Guide – Victorian Managed Insurance Agency](#)

Provides guidance on how to apply the Australian risk management standard, including examples of a risk appetite/criteria statement.

Core requirement 3:

Internal audit

- Each council and joint organisation must have an independent internal audit function that reports to the audit, risk and improvement committee and is consistent with current international standards for internal audit

Guiding principles for internal audit

- ❖ The internal audit function operates independently and with appropriate expertise in a manner that is appropriate for the council.
- ❖ The internal audit function has access to all council information necessary to fulfil its role and responsibilities.
- ❖ The internal audit function is appropriately positioned in the council's governance framework to ensure its work complements the work of other internal and external assurance providers.
- ❖ The internal audit function has a comprehensive work plan linked to the council's strategic objectives and current and emerging risks.
- ❖ The audit, risk and improvement committee receives relevant and timely advice from the internal audit function to ensure the committee can fulfil its role and responsibilities.
- ❖ The internal audit function operates in a manner consistent with accepted international standards.
- ❖ The work of the internal audit function is thoroughly planned and executed, risk-based, client-focused and linked to the council's strategic goals.
- ❖ The internal audit function adds value to the council and is held accountable by the committee and governing body for its performance.
- ❖ Each council is accountable to the community for the effective implementation of its internal audit function.

Independence

Each council in NSW, (including county councils and joint organisations) must have an internal audit function to provide an independent unbiased



assessment of the council's operations and risk and control activities.

Internal audit is defined in the International Professional Practices Framework issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors as '*an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation's operations. It helps an organisation accomplish its objective by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes*'.

A council's internal audit function must operate independently of the council and internal audit activities cannot be subject to direction by the council.



To ensure that the internal audit function remains independent from council management it must have a dual reporting line that reports:



- **administratively to the general manager or a sufficiently senior role in the council to ensure the internal audit function fulfils its responsibilities, and**
- **functionally to the audit, risk and improvement committee.**

Resourcing

The governing body and general manager of the council must ensure that the council's internal audit function is sufficiently resourced to effectively carry out its work. The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee should be consulted on the resourcing required.

The audit, risk and improvement committee's resourcing recommendations are to be minuted by the committee.

Internal audit charter

It is important that council's internal audit function has clear guidance on how it should support the audit, risk and improvement committee and the council, and that the committee and council has input into how the internal audit function will operate.

This will ensure there is clarity in the relationships between the audit, risk and improvement committee, the council and the internal audit function and that the performance of the internal audit function can be assessed.

The Local Government Regulation (section 330) requires each council to adopt an internal audit charter to guide how internal audit will be undertaken by the council that is consistent with the approved Model Internal Audit Charter provided at Appendix 5.



The internal audit charter is to be developed by the audit, risk and improvement committee in consultation with the general manager and the head of the internal audit function and approved by resolution by the governing body of the council.

Councils may include additional provisions in their internal audit charter so long as they are not inconsistent with the approved Model Internal Audit Charter.

The audit, risk and improvement committee is to review the council's internal audit charter annually in consultation with the general manager and the head of the internal audit function.

Role of the general manager

Consistent with their role under the Local Government Act (section 355) to conduct the day-to-day management of the council, the general manager has administrative responsibility for internal audit.

This means that the general manager is responsible for:

- advising the governing body on the resources required for the effective functioning of the internal audit function
- ensuring appropriate administrative support is provided to support the work of the internal audit function - for example, access to council's human resources networks, payroll, work health and safety, office facilities and resources, council information etc
- ensuring that the internal audit function is appropriately positioned within the council to work with external bodies and internal business units and to fulfil its role and responsibilities
- ensuring the internal audit function complies with the International Professional Practices Framework, and
- annually attesting, on behalf of the council, that the council is complying with these Guidelines in relation to internal audit.

The general manager has no role in the performance of the internal audit function (e.g. the conduct of internal audits, the audit techniques used and the reporting of internal audit findings to the audit, risk and improvement committee).

Delegation

The general manager can, in consultation with the governing body of the council and the audit, risk and improvement committee, delegate their functions in relation to the oversight of the council's internal audit function to another role in the council that is sufficiently senior to ensure the internal audit function meets its responsibilities.

In making a delegation, consideration should be given to how the delegation will influence the internal audit function's ability to achieve the internal audit charter considering the:

- seniority and expertise of the delegate and demands placed on them by their other roles and responsibilities in the council
- support available to the delegate to successfully execute their delegation in relation to internal audit
- complexity of the council's core business

- risk profile of the council
- expectations of stakeholders, and
- likely demands placed on the internal audit function.

Role of the audit, risk and improvement committee

Under the Local Government Regulation (section #1bc), the audit, risk and improvement committee exercises functional oversight of a council's internal audit function to ensure it operates independently from the council.

This means that the audit, risk and improvement committee is responsible for:

- assisting the governing body to identify the resources necessary for the effective functioning of the internal audit function
- setting the annual and four-year strategic work plans for the internal audit function, including the audits that will be completed
- assessing the findings and recommendations of completed audits and providing the committee's advice and opinion on issues raised to the general manager and governing body of the council
- developing the internal audit charter that will guide the work of the internal audit function and how it operates, and
- reviewing the performance of the internal audit function.

Structure

Each council will have different internal audit requirements depending on the council's size, needs, budget and operational complexity and can either:

- establish an internal audit function for their own exclusive use, or
- share their internal audit function with another council, county council or joint organisation.

For cost and administrative efficiency, councils may also:

- establish an in-house internal audit function comprising of council staff (supplemented with contractors as may be required), and/or
- outsource their internal audit function to an external provider/s – for example, a private sector accounting firm, internal audit firm, internal audit contractor etc.

These options will assist councils, county councils and joint organisations:

- to establish their internal audit function in the most cost-effective way
- to source expert internal audit personnel in locations where it may be difficult to recruit staff with the necessary skill set
- to access a larger resource pool than would be available to a single council, and
- create efficiencies through common systems, shared knowledge and internal audit tools.

When deciding the most appropriate way to structure a council's internal audit function, the general manager should consider the viability and capacity of a shared internal audit function to achieve the council's internal audit charter given the:

- size of the council in terms of both staffing levels and budget
- geographical and functional distribution of the council's operations
- complexity of the council's core business
- risk profile of the council
- expectations of stakeholders, and
- likely demands placed on the internal audit function by other councils in the shared arrangement.

Whatever structure is adopted, the head of a council's internal audit function must:



- **be a council employee and cannot be outsourced, other than through a shared arrangement with another council, and**
- **meet the eligibility and independence criteria for the position.**

This is to ensure that the council retains strategic control of the internal audit function and can actively monitor its performance.

County councils

County councils may enter into a shared arrangement with one of their constituent councils or another council.

Joint organisations

Joint organisations that do not host a shared internal audit function for the use of their member councils can enter into a shared arrangement with a member council or, if this is not possible, with another council or joint organisation.

In-house internal audit function

An in-house internal audit function is one where internal auditors and other staff (where required) are employed by the council to conduct the internal audits and other activities in the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual and four-year strategic work plans.

The advantages of establishing an in-house internal audit function may include:

- council retaining ownership of internal audit information
- confidentiality of sensitive information contained in audits
- stronger direction and oversight by the council of the internal audit function with more direct control over the quality of audits conducted
- internal auditors having council-specific knowledge and experience that delivers better audit results
- greater agility to respond quickly to emerging issues, and
- the retention of corporate knowledge within the council.

Disadvantages may include:

- challenges attracting and retaining suitable staff

- specialist skills may not be available in-house
- reduced flexibility, and
- the need to provide council facilities and office space for internal audit personnel.

Councils that establish an in-house internal audit function are not limited to employing staff members and can supplement the internal audit team's work with audits undertaken by external providers where necessary.

Metropolitan and larger regional councils are encouraged to establish an in-house internal audit function given their:

- significant assets
- higher risk profiles
- higher levels of expenditure, and
- more complex transactions and operations.

Head of an in-house internal audit function

Each council's internal audit function must be led by a staff member with sufficient skills, knowledge, experience and integrity to ensure it undertakes its role appropriately, fulfils its responsibilities to the audit, risk and improvement committee and makes a valuable contribution to the council.

The head of an in-house internal audit function (described as the 'chief audit executive' in the International Professional Practices Framework) also needs to report to the general manager or a sufficiently senior role in the council that ensures the internal audit function fulfils its responsibilities.

For some councils with larger budgets and higher risks, the head of the internal audit function will require the support of a dedicated internal audit team to fulfil the internal audit charter.

For other smaller councils, their size and risk profile may not justify additional internal audit staff and the head of the internal audit function will be sufficient.

The head of the internal audit function may also have other council responsibilities outside of internal audit.

Role and responsibilities

For all in-house internal audit functions, regardless of size, the key responsibilities of the head of the internal audit function include:

- managing the day-to-day activities of the council's internal audit activities to ensure they add value to council
- managing the council's internal audit budget
- supporting the operation of the audit, risk and improvement committee
- approving internal audit project plans, conducting or supervising audits and assessments and providing independent advice to the audit, risk and improvement committee
- monitoring the council's implementation of corrective actions that arise from the findings of audits
- fulfilling the committee's annual and four-year strategic work plans
- ensuring the council's internal audit activities comply with these Guidelines
- managing internal audit personnel and ensuring that they have the skills necessary to fulfil the role and responsibilities of the internal audit function (where appropriate), and
- contract management and oversight of supplementary external providers (where appropriate).

Eligibility criteria

To fulfil these responsibilities, the head of the internal audit function:

- must be a council employee and cannot be outsourced, other than through a shared arrangement with another council – this is to ensure that the council retains strategic control of the internal audit function and is able to actively monitor the performance of the internal audit function
- must be independent, impartial, unbiased and objective when performing their work and free from conflicts of interest
- should possess the following skills, knowledge and experience to effectively carry out their role:

- the credibility to ensure they can negotiate on a reasonably equal footing with the general manager (or their delegate), governing body and audit, risk and improvement committee
- the skills, knowledge and personal qualities necessary to lead credible and accepted internal audit activities in the council
- strong experience overseeing internal audit
- appropriate qualifications and professional certifications, and
- local government experience (preferred).

The head of the internal audit function must also operate and conduct the internal audit activities in accordance with the International Professional Practices Framework, including its Code of Ethics.

As a council employee, the head of the internal audit function must comply with all relevant council policies and procedures, including the council's code of conduct.

Independence

It is important that the head of an in-house internal audit function has the functional independence necessary to independently assess and report on the way the council operates.

As a safeguard, the Local Government Regulation (section #tbc) requires the general manager to consult with the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee on any decisions affecting the employment of the head of the internal audit function (including disciplinary measures).

If the head of the internal audit function is dismissed, the general manager must report the reasons for their dismissal to the governing body of the council.

Where the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee has any concerns about the treatment of the head of the internal audit function, or any action taken that may compromise the head of the internal audit function's ability to undertake their functions

independently, they can report their concerns to the governing body of the council.

The head of the internal audit function is required to confirm at least annually to the audit, risk and improvement committee the independence of internal audit activities from the council.

Access to council staff and information

All internal audit personnel, including the head of an in-house internal audit function have direct and unrestricted access to council staff, the audit risk and improvement committee and council information and resources necessary to undertake their role and responsibilities.



All council staff and contractors should have unrestricted access to the head of the internal audit function to allow them to alert them to emerging risks or internal audit related issues.

Internal audit team

Any other staff members appointed to council's in-house internal audit function report directly to the head of the internal audit function.

As council employees, internal audit staff must comply with all relevant council policies and procedures including the council's code of conduct.

In-house internal auditors must also conduct internal audit activities in accordance with the International Professional Practices Framework.

Internal audit should be performed by professionals with an appropriate level of understanding of the council's culture, systems and processes to provide assurance that the internal controls in place are sufficient to mitigate risk, that governance processes are adequate, and that organisational goals and objectives are met.

In-house internal auditors should therefore possess the following skills, knowledge and experience to effectively carry out their role:

→ the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to conduct internal audit activities in the council – for example:

- accounting
- finance
- economics
- governance
- management
- law
- taxation
- fraud and corruption
- IT

→ effective interpersonal and communication skills to ensure they can engage with council staff effectively and collaboratively

→ honesty, integrity and due diligence, and

→ appropriate qualifications and professional certifications.

Local government experience or expertise is also strongly preferred.

Dual responsibilities

To ensure the internal audit function's independence and objectivity, it is best practice that the head of the in-house internal audit function and any other members of an in-house internal audit team have no other council responsibilities other than internal audit.

However, it is recognised that some councils may find it difficult to employ a stand-alone head of an in-house internal audit function or other supporting internal auditors because of the cost involved, or because the council's location, size and risk profile may not warrant stand-alone employees.

Councils can combine the role of the head of the internal audit function and/or members of the internal audit team with other responsibilities provided there are adequate safeguards put in place by the council to limit any real or perceived bias or conflicts of interest that may lead to faulty decision-making and cognitive bias.

An internal audit role must not be combined with the role of the general manager, chief

financial officer or risk management function as it will create conflicts of interest that cannot be resolved.

Councils can also share their head of the internal audit function with another council, county council or joint organisation as part of a shared arrangement.

Depending on the specific needs and circumstances of the council, safeguards could include:

- any potential issues or conflicts of interest arising from a dual role being formally documented in the council's internal audit charter
- the audit, risk and improvement committee, or another suitably qualified and independent party, reviewing internal audit briefs, findings and recommendations before they are finalised where they concern any key risks overseen by the head of the internal audit function or internal audit team member in another role
- the head of the internal audit function or an internal audit team member not having responsibility for managing any risks or implementing any audit recommendations or corrective actions in their other role/s, and/or
- the audit, risk and improvement committee including an assessment of the independence and objectivity (for internal audit purposes) of the head of the internal audit function or any internal audit team members exercising a dual role in their annual assessment report to the governing body.

The endorsement of the governing body, in consultation with the audit, risk and improvement committee is also required for any combined roles.

Where the head of the internal audit function has a dual role in a council, they are to remain independent and report functionally to the audit, risk and improvement committee on their internal audit responsibilities.

For other council responsibilities, the head of the internal audit function reports functionally through normal council reporting lines to the general manager.

Outsourced internal audit function

Where a council outsources their internal audit function, the internal audits programmed by the audit, risk and improvement committee are undertaken by an external provider such as an internal audit or accounting firm, or an individual practitioner.

Contract management is overseen by an employee within the council.

The advantages of using external providers for internal audit activities may include:

- flexibility
- access to a wide range of expertise and experience that the council may not otherwise have in-house
- provides a window to better practice methods for smaller councils they may otherwise find difficult to access
- the ability to purchase services as and when required
- can increase internal audit's independence from the council
- overcoming challenges recruiting a head of an internal audit function and internal audit staff, and
- potential to negotiate lower fee-for-service costs.

Disadvantages may include:

- increased costs
- potential loss of corporate knowledge from the council
- difficulty building and maintaining professional relationships between council management and external contractors
- reduced oversight and control of internal audit activities
- additional in-house staff time required to source and manage external providers and contracts
- the external provider lacking council-specific knowledge
- internal audit coordinator is unlikely to be audit trained and may not have the knowledge to ensure audit quality is maintained, and

- potential confidentiality breaches.

Given their size, resources, geographical isolation and risk profiles, rural and smaller regional councils are encouraged, at a minimum, to establish an outsourced internal audit function.

Head of an outsourced internal audit function

Compared to the head of an in-house internal audit function which directly conducts or supervises internal audits and provides opinions and recommendations to the audit, risk and improvement committee, the head of an outsourced internal audit function will, in practice, primarily be a coordination and administrative role.

The key responsibilities of any council staff member assigned responsibility for leading an outsourced internal audit function include:

- contract management
- managing the internal audit budget
- ensuring the external provider completes internal audits in line with the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual and four-year strategic work plans
- forwarding audit reports by the external provider to the audit, risk and improvement committee
- acting as a liaison between the external provider and the audit, risk and improvement committee
- monitoring the council's implementation of corrective actions that arise from the findings of audits and reporting progress to the audit, risk and improvement committee, and
- assisting the audit, risk and improvement committee to ensure the council's internal audit activities comply with these Guidelines.

To fulfil these responsibilities, the head of an outsourced function:

- reports functionally to the audit, risk and improvement committee
- must be free from conflicts of interest
- must be a council employee and cannot be outsourced, other than through a shared

arrangement with another council, county council or joint organisation – this is to ensure that the council retains control of the internal audit function and is able to actively monitor the performance of the external provider

- should possess the following skills, knowledge and experience to effectively carry out their role:
 - a good understanding of the work of audit, risk and improvement committees and internal audit, and
 - the skills, knowledge and personal qualities necessary to manage the council's contract with the external provider and liaise between the external provider and the audit, risk and improvement committee.

As a council employee, the head of an outsourced function must comply with all relevant council policies and procedures, including the council's code of conduct.

Dual responsibilities

The head of an outsourced internal audit function can be assigned other roles and responsibilities in the council.

Where the head of an outsourced function has a dual role in a council, they are to remain independent and report functionally to the audit, risk and improvement committee in relation to their internal audit responsibilities.

For other council responsibilities, the head of an outsourced function reports functionally through normal council reporting lines to the general manager.

Councils can combine the head of an outsourced internal audit function's role with other responsibilities provided there are adequate safeguards put in place by the council to limit any real or perceived bias or conflicts of interest.

Depending on the specific needs and circumstances of the council, safeguards could include:

- any potential issues or conflicts of interest arising from a dual role being formally

documented in the council's internal audit charter

- the audit, risk and improvement committee endorsing the dual roles
- the head of the outsourced function not having responsibility for managing any risks or implementing any audit recommendations or corrective actions in their other role/s, and/or
- the committee including an assessment of the independence and objectivity (for internal audit purposes) of the head of the outsourced function in their annual assessment report to the governing body.

External provider/s

It is important that any external provider engaged by a council is independent and can objectively assess and report on the way council operates.

To ensure the independence of an external provider, the head of an outsourced internal audit function must ensure the external provider:

- does not conduct any audits on specific council operations or areas that they have worked on within the last two years
- is not the same auditor conducting the council's external audit
- is not the auditor of any contractors of the council that may be subject to the internal audit, and
- can satisfy the requirements in these Guidelines relating to internal audit.

The head of the outsourced function must also consult with the audit, risk and improvement committee and general manager regarding the appropriateness of the skills, knowledge and experience of any external provider before they are engaged by the council.

Chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee

The chair of an audit, risk and improvement committee overseeing an outsourced internal audit function is likely to have greater responsibilities than a chair overseeing an in-house internal audit function. Because the

head of an outsourced internal audit function is largely a coordination/administrative role, the chair and members of the audit, risk and improvement committee will do much of the 'heavy lifting' and will be the primary source of advice on the findings and recommendations of audits conducted by the external provider and assurance to the council.

Councils that establish an outsourced internal audit function must ensure that their audit, risk and improvement committee has the capacity and capability to undertake this enhanced role.

Shared internal audit function

Councils can:

- share an internal audit function with another council or joint organisation as part of an independent shared arrangement
- utilise the internal audit function established by their joint organisation that is shared by member councils
- for county councils – share an internal audit function with a constituent council where possible, or with another council
- for joint organisations – share an internal audit function with a member council where possible or with another council or joint organisation.

Councils can establish an in-house or outsourced internal audit function as part of a shared arrangement.

A shared internal audit function must operate as a standalone internal audit function for each participating council in the shared arrangement and satisfy the requirements of these Guidelines for each participating council.

A shared internal audit function should only be established and utilised where all participating councils can be confident that the shared function can deliver a high level of understanding and fulfilment of each council's internal audit needs and maintain effective working and reporting relationships with each participating council in the shared arrangement.

Councils that establish a shared internal audit function should develop and sign a formal agreement with the other councils in the shared arrangement that outlines how the shared arrangement will operate and how costs will be shared.

Implementation

Given the administrative complexity of an internal audit function shared between and reporting to different councils, the following arrangements are recommended:

- the internal audit function is hosted by one of the councils, county councils or joint organisations in the shared arrangement
- the head of the internal audit function and any other internal audit team members are employees of the host council
- the head of the internal audit function reports administratively to the general manager (or their delegate) of the host council, and
- the general manager of the host council can only appoint or dismiss the head of the internal audit function in consultation with the general managers and audit, risk and improvement committees of each participating council.

For internal audit functions established by joint organisations and shared between member councils it is recommended that:

- the internal audit function is physically located at the offices of the joint organisation or a member council
- the head of the internal audit function reports administratively to the executive officer of the joint organisation
- the head of the internal audit function and any internal audit staff are employees of the joint organisation, and
- the executive officer of the joint organisation can only appoint or dismiss the head of the internal audit function in consultation with the general managers and audit, risk and improvement committees of each member council.

Head of a shared internal audit function

In-house function

The head of a shared in-house internal audit function needs to be able to:

- liaise with the governing body and general manager of each participating council about that council's internal audit activities
- implement the annual and four-year strategic work plans for each council
- conduct or oversee the individual audits of each council and monitor the implementation of corrective actions
- manage any contractual arrangements with external providers on behalf of each council (where required)
- attend the audit, risk and improvement committee meetings of each respective council on behalf of that council, and
- maintain separate and confidential information for each council.

Outsourced function

The head of a shared outsourced internal audit function needs to be able to:

- manage contracts with external providers on behalf of all councils in the shared arrangement
- liaise with the audit, risk and improvement committee and general manager of each council
- coordinate the completion of audits by the external provider in line with each council's annual and four-year strategic work plans
- provide audit reports by the external provider to the relevant audit, risk and improvement committee and general manager and coordinate council responses
- monitor implementation by each council of corrective actions arising from the findings of audits and report progress to the audit, risk and improvement committee
- assist each council's audit, risk and improvement committee to ensure the council's internal audit activities comply with these Guidelines, and

- maintain separate and confidential information for each council.

Work plans

The work of each council's internal audit function will be guided by the four-year strategic work plan and annual work plan developed by the audit, risk and improvement committee (see core requirement 1).



Performing internal audits

It is essential that a council's internal audit function performs the council's internal audits to a high and consistent standard and that the findings and recommendations that arise from audits can be relied upon by the audit, risk and improvement committee and the council.

Each council's internal audits must be performed in accordance with the requirements of the International Professional Practices Framework.



The internal audit tools, techniques and methodologies used by the internal audit function must be approved by the audit, risk and improvement committee.

Where risk information or ratings are used during the internal audit process, they must be developed and applied consistently with the current Australian risk management standard.

Audit reports

The head of the internal audit function must report the findings and recommendations of internal audits to the audit, risk and improvement committee when they are finalised.

The audit, risk and improvement committee will determine whether audit reports should be

distributed to committee members out-of-session as they are completed, or at each quarterly meeting of the committee.

Each internal audit report must reflect the requirements of the International Professional Practices Framework.

This includes:

- necessary background information, including the objective and scope of the audit
- the audit processes and methodology used
- findings and recommendations based on the audit's objectives, prioritised according to their level of risk
- recommended remedial actions to address problems identified which have been prioritised according to risk, and
- a response or action plan from the general manager and/or responsible senior managers of the council.

Before reports are finalised, the head of the internal audit function must provide a draft of each report to the responsible senior manager/s for comment so that a response to each recommendation from each relevant business unit is included in the final report submitted to the audit, risk and improvement committee.

Timeframes for management responses to internal audit recommendations are to be agreed between the general manager and the head of the internal audit function and chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee.

Responsible senior managers may reject recommended corrective action/s on reasonable grounds but should discuss their position with the head of the internal audit function or the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee before finalising the council's position with the general manager. Reasons for rejecting the recommendation/s must be included in the final audit report.

For the recommendations that are accepted, responsible senior managers are required to ensure that:

- an action plan is prepared for each recommendation that assigns responsibility for implementation to a

council staff member/s and timeframes for implementation

- all corrective actions are implemented within proposed timeframes, and
- the head of the internal audit function is provided regular updates in relation to the implementation of the internal audit action plan.

Where corrective actions are not implemented within agreed timeframes, the audit, risk and improvement committee can invite the responsible senior manager to explain why implementation has not occurred and how the resulting risk is being addressed in the interim.

The audit, risk and improvement committee can raise any concerns it may have about the council's response to internal audit reports with the general manager and in the committee's quarterly report to the governing body so that they are aware of the risks posed to the council.

Ongoing monitoring

The head of the internal audit function should establish an ongoing monitoring system to track the internal audits undertaken for the council and follow-up the council's progress in implementing corrective actions.

Key risks or emerging issues must be reported to the audit, risk and improvement committee and general manager to ensure they can be rectified quickly before their consequences escalate.

The audit, risk and improvement committee can raise any concerns it has that may arise between meetings with the governing body via an additional report where needed. The chair of the committee can also request to meet with the mayor.

This will ensure that the governing body is kept informed of significant emerging risks posed to the council.

Policies and procedures

The general manager, in consultation with the audit, risk and improvement committee, must develop and maintain policies and procedures to guide the operation of the council's internal

audit function and the performance of internal audits.

These policies and procedures could include:

- the structure and resourcing of the internal audit function
- how internal audits will be conducted, reported, implemented and monitored
- audit methodology
- timeframes for reporting and the council's response to recommendations
- how any internal audit-related disputes are to be resolved
- the internal audit function's access to council staff, resources and information
- how the performance of the internal audit function will be reviewed
- communication between the audit, risk and improvement committee and internal audit function, and the internal audit function and the general manager, and
- information management including document retention, security and access to audit reports.

Providing advice to the audit, risk and improvement committee

Ongoing reporting to the audit, risk and improvement committee is essential to ensure that the committee is kept informed of matters considered by the internal audit function and any emerging issues that may require reporting to the governing body or general manager.

Quarterly updates

The head of the internal audit function is to ensure that the audit, risk and improvement committee is advised at each of the committee's quarterly meetings of

- the internal audits completed during that quarter

- progress in implementing the annual work plan, and
- progress made implementing corrective actions arising from any past internal audits.

The way this information is communicated is to be decided by the audit, risk and improvement committee in consultation with the head of the internal audit function.

Ongoing advice

The head of the internal audit function can meet with the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee at any time, as necessary, between committee meetings.

This is particularly important to ensure that any urgent or emerging issues identified by the internal audit function can be quickly reported to the audit, risk and improvement committee for consideration and action before their consequences escalate.

- can be accessed by the governing body by resolution, subject to the approval of the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee (any disputes can be referred to the Office of Local Government for resolution)
- subject to the GIPA Act, can only be released to an external party with the approval of the general manager and the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee, except where the information is being provided to an external oversight or investigative body for the purposes of informing that agency of a matter that may warrant its attention.

Any internal audit documentation provided to any individual, including members of the governing body, should be treated as strictly confidential.

The chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee may refuse to provide access to internal audit documents or information to anyone who has previously released such information without authorisation.

Internal audit documents

Internal audit documentation includes any information or documents produced or obtained by a council's internal audit function that relates to the internal audit activities of the council.

All internal audit documents:

- are for internal use only, subject to the requirements of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act)
- are to remain the property of the audited council, including where internal audit services are performed by an external provider – all rights reside with the audited council
- must be documented, retained and controlled in accordance with the International Professional Practices Framework and council policies
- can be accessed by the audit, risk and improvement committee and external auditor without restriction

Review of internal audit function performance

It is important that the work of each council's internal audit function is regularly assessed, and that internal auditors are accountable for their performance.

This will ensure that the internal audit function is making a valuable contribution to the council and allows the audit, risk and improvement committee and the council to understand how the council is performing in relation to the matters listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act.

It will also ensure that the audit, risk and improvement committee and council can determine whether any changes to the internal audit function are required.

Annual assessment

The audit, risk and improvement committee must review the performance of the internal

audit function each year and report its findings to the governing body as part of the committee's annual assessment.

The annual assessment is to ensure that any concerns regarding the operation of the internal audit function and compliance with the International Professional Practices Framework can be dealt with before they are identified in the four-yearly strategic review, by which time their consequences may have escalated.

An annual assessment will also encourage continuous improvement of the council's internal audit activities.

The audit, risk and improvement committee is to determine the nature of this assessment. It could be conducted, for example, via a self-assessment performed by the head of the internal audit function.

More information about the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual assessments is provided under core requirement 1.

Four-yearly strategic assessment

A council's audit, risk and improvement committee is to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the council's internal audit function to the general manager and governing body in each term of the council, as part of the committee's four-yearly strategic assessment.



This assessment is to occur regardless of whether the council has established an in-house or outsourced internal audit function, as the assessment focuses on how the council has implemented its internal audit function.

As part of the audit, risk and improvement committee's assessment of the council's internal audit function, it should consider:

- the views of an independent external party with strong knowledge of internal audit operation
- the independence of the internal audit function
- whether resourcing is sufficient
- whether the internal audit function complies with these Guidelines and the

International Professional Practices Framework

- the appropriateness of annual and strategic work plans based on the risks facing the council
- progress against key performance indicators
- whether the internal audit function adds value and delivers outcomes for the council, and
- the appropriateness of the internal audit charter.

To ensure the views of the external party consulted are robust, the external party should have:

- strong skills, knowledge and expertise in internal audit
- a working knowledge of the International Professional Practices Framework, and
- no conflicts of interest that may result in bias or a lack of objectivity.

The audit, risk and improvement committee, in consultation with the general manager, is to develop an action plan for the governing body to address any issues identified by the committee in relation to the performance of the internal audit function.

The audit, risk and improvement committee's strategic assessment and action plan is to be discussed with the governing body and general manager at the strategic assurance meeting held each council term.

More information about the audit, risk and improvement committee's strategic assessment is provided under core requirement 1.

Reporting concerns about councillors or council staff

Given the nature of internal audit, there may be times when the internal audit function identifies concerns about the conduct of council staff.

Where the head of the internal audit function has concerns regarding a staff member, they can:

- raise their concerns with the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee (if it relates to the effectiveness of the internal audit function)
 - report breaches of the council's code of conduct to the general manager, or by the general manager to the mayor, as required by the *Procedures for the Administration of the Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW*
 - report their concerns through the council's internal reporting policy, complaints handling policy or other associated protocols, and/or
 - make a public interest disclosure under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994* to the:
 - Independent Commission Against Corruption (concerning corrupt conduct)
 - NSW Ombudsman (concerning maladministration)
 - NSW Auditor General (concerning serious and substantial waste of public money)
 - Office of Local Government (concerning serious and substantial waste in local government and breaches of pecuniary interest obligations), and/or
 - Information and Privacy Commissioner (concerning government information contraventions).
- the council's internal audit function reports to the audit, risk and improvement committee on internal audit matters
 - the internal audit function operates independently of the council
 - the council's internal audit function operates according to an internal audit charter, which is consistent with the approved Model Internal Audit Charter contained in these Guidelines
 - the council has appointed an appropriately skilled and eligible staff member to direct the council's internal audit activities or is part of a shared arrangement where a participating council has appointed a staff member to lead internal audit
 - internal audit activities are conducted in accordance with the International Professional Practices Framework
 - council's internal audit function operates according to the annual and four-year strategic work plans adopted by the governing body of the council
 - the council provides the internal audit function with direct and unrestricted access to the general manager and other staff, council information and resources so it can fulfil its responsibilities, and
 - at least once each council term (i.e. four years) the audit, risk and improvement committee conducts a review of the effectiveness of the council's internal audit function.

Further information on annual attestation requirements is detailed in the statutory framework section of these Guidelines.

Annual attestation

Commencing with the 2024-2025 annual report, the general manager will be required under the Local Government Regulation to attest each year in the council's annual report whether the council has complied with the following internal audit requirements:

- the council has an internal audit function that provides an independent unbiased assessment of the council's operations and risk and control activities

Further resources

The following resources may be useful to councils seeking more information about the establishment and operation of their internal audit function.

This is not an exhaustive list but provides a useful starting point for councils seeking to better understand internal audit, how it can be used by councils to improve performance, and practical tools, examples and templates to adapt for their own use.

[International Professional Practices Framework \(mandatory guidance\)](#) – Institute of Internal Auditors (2017)

Outlines the mandatory requirements for undertaking internal auditing under the International Professional Practices Framework.

Consists of four parts:

- Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing
- Definition of Internal Auditing
- Code of Ethics, and
- International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

[International Professional Practices Framework \(recommended guidance\)](#) – Institute of Internal Auditors (2017)

Provides detailed guidance on how to implement the International Professional Practice Framework.

Consists of two parts:

- Implementation Guide – assists an internal audit function to apply the standards and understand how compliance will be measured by the audit, risk and improvement committee, and

- Supplemental Guide (Practice Guides) – provides detailed processes and procedures for the internal audit function.

[How can audit committee members add value?](#) – PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2011)

Provides a checklist for measuring the performance of an internal audit function.

[Internal Audit in Australia](#) – Institute of Internal Auditors Australia (2016)

Provides an overview of the role of internal audit and the internal audit function, including:

- the different types of work plans that can be used to guide internal audit activity
- the skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications/certifications required of internal auditors
- performing, reporting and monitoring internal audits, and
- how to review the performance of an internal audit function, including performance measures that could be used

[Practice Guide – Talent Management: Recruiting, Developing, Motivating and Retaining Great Team Members](#) – Institute of Internal Auditors (2015)

Provides guidance on how to establish an effective internal audit team (for purchase from the Institute of Internal Auditors).

[Quality Assessment Manual for the Internal Audit Activity](#) – Institute of Internal Auditors (2017)

Outlines how the performance of council's internal audit function can be assessed both internally and externally against the International Professional Practices Framework.

Implementation

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Under the Local Government Act, all councils and joint organisations are required to have appointed an audit, risk and improvement committee by **4 June 2022**.

Councils and joint organisations have a further two years, until **1 July 2024**, to comply with these Guidelines.

Audit, risk and improvement committees

New committees

Councils and joint organisations are required under section 428A of the Local Government Act to appoint an audit, risk and improvement committee by **4 June 2022**.

Councils and joint organisations that do not have an audit, risk and improvement committee must take immediate steps to appoint a committee or to enter into an arrangement with another council or joint organisation to share a committee.

Existing committees

Councils and joint organisations that already have an audit, risk and improvement committee will already comply with the requirement under the Local Government Act to appoint a committee.

Transitional arrangements

Councils and joint organisations with existing committees have until **1 July 2024** to ensure the membership and operations of their committee comply with the requirements in these Guidelines.

Risk management framework

Councils and joint organisations have until **1 July 2024** to establish a risk management framework and to ensure it complies with these Guidelines.

Councils and joint organisations that already have a risk management framework are encouraged to comply sooner.

Internal audit function

Councils and joint organisations have until **1 July 2024** to establish an internal audit function and to ensure it complies with these Guidelines.

Councils and joint organisations that already have an internal audit function are encouraged to comply sooner.

Attestation

Commencing with the **2024-2025 annual report**, general managers of councils and executive officers of joint organisations will be required to publish an attestation statement each year in the annual report indicating whether, during the preceding financial year, the council's or joint organisation's audit, risk and improvement committee, risk management framework and internal audit function complied with these Guidelines.

Councils and joint organisations with an established audit, risk and improvement committee, internal audit function and/or risk management framework may wish to consider publishing attestation certificates in their annual reports sooner.

Appendices

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Appendix 1:

Attestation and exemption templates

Internal audit and risk management attestation statement for the [years] financial year for [council/joint organisation]

I am of the opinion that [council/joint organisation] has an audit, risk and improvement committee, risk management framework and internal audit function that operate in compliance with the following requirements except as may be otherwise provided below:

Audit, risk and improvement committee

	Requirement	Compliance
1.	[Council/joint organisation] has appointed an audit, risk and improvement committee that comprises of an independent chair and at least two independent members.	[compliant or non-compliant]
2.	The chair and all members of [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee meet the relevant independence and eligibility criteria specified in the Departmental Chief Executive's Guidelines and have not exceeded the membership term limits specified in the Guidelines.	[compliant or non-compliant]
3.	[Council/joint organisation] has adopted terms of reference for its audit, risk and improvement committee that are consistent with the model terms of reference approved by the Departmental Chief Executive and the committee operates in accordance with the terms of reference.	[compliant or non-compliant]
4.	[Council/joint organisation] provides the audit, risk and improvement committee with direct and unrestricted access to the [general manager/executive officer] and other senior management and the information and resources necessary to exercise its functions.	[compliant or non-compliant]
5.	[Council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee exercises its functions in accordance with a four-year strategic work plan that has been endorsed by the governing body and an annual work plan that has been developed in consultation with the governing body and senior management.	[compliant or non-compliant]
6.	[Council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee provides the governing body with an annual assessment each year, and a strategic assessment each council term of the matters listed in section 428A of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> reviewed during that term.	[compliant or non-compliant - include date of last strategic assessment provided]
7.	The governing body of [council/ joint organisation] reviews the effectiveness of the audit, risk and improvement committee at least once each council term.	[compliant or non-compliant - include date of last review]

Membership

The chair and membership of the audit, risk and improvement committee are:

Chair	[name]	[start term date]	[finish term date]
Independent member	[name]	[start term date]	[finish term date]
Independent member	[name]	[start term date]	[finish term date]
[Councillor/board] member ¹	[name]	[start term date]	[finish term date]

Risk Management

	Requirement	Compliance
8.	[Council/joint organisation] has adopted a risk management framework that is consistent with current Australian risk management standard and that is appropriate for the [council's/joint organisation's] risks.	[compliant or non-compliant]
9.	[Council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee reviews the implementation of its risk management framework and provides a strategic assessment of its effectiveness to the governing body each council term.	[compliant or non-compliant - include date of last strategic assessment provided]

Internal Audit

	Requirement	Compliance
10.	[Council/joint organisation] has an internal audit function that reviews the council's operations and risk management and control activities.	[compliant or non-compliant]
11.	[Council's/joint organisation's] internal audit function reports to the audit, risk and improvement committee on internal audit matters.	[compliant or non-compliant]
12.	[Council's/joint organisation's] internal audit function is independent and internal audit activities are not subject to direction by the [council/joint organisation].	[compliant or non-compliant]
13.	[Council/joint organisation] has adopted an internal audit charter that is consistent with the model internal audit charter approved by the Departmental Chief Executive and the internal audit function operates in accordance with the charter.	[compliant or non-compliant]
14.	[Council/joint organisation] has appointed a member of staff who satisfies the independence and eligibility requirements specified in the Departmental Chief Executive's Guidelines to direct and coordinate internal audit activities or is part of a shared arrangement where a participating [council/joint organisation] has appointed a staff member to direct and coordinate internal audit activities for all participating councils.	[compliant or non-compliant]
15.	Internal audit activities are conducted in accordance with the International Professional Practices Framework.	[compliant or non-compliant]

	Requirement	Compliance
16.	[Council/joint organisation] provides the internal audit function with direct and unrestricted access to staff, the audit, risk and improvement committee, and the information and resources necessary to undertake internal audit activities.	[compliant or non-compliant]
17.	[Council's/joint organisation's] internal audit function undertakes internal audit activities in accordance with a four-year strategic work plan that has been endorsed by the governing body and an annual work plan that has been developed in consultation with the governing body and senior management.	[compliant or non-compliant]
18.	[Council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee reviews the effectiveness of the internal audit function and reports the outcome of the review to the governing body each council term.	[compliant or non-compliant - include date of last strategic assessment provided]

Exemptions from compliance

I advise that [council's/joint organisation's] [audit, risk and improvement committee/risk management/internal audit processes] (delete where relevant) have been exempted from compliance with the following requirements by the Departmental Chief Executive:

Non-compliance	Reason	Alternative measures being implemented	Exemption granted by the Departmental Chief Executive
[requirement]	[detailed description of reasons giving rise to the non-compliance]	[detailed description of the practicable alternative measures implemented to achieve equivalent level of assurance]	[yes/no]

These processes, including the alternative measures implemented, demonstrate that [council/joint organisation] has established and maintained frameworks, systems, processes and procedures for appropriately managing audit and risk within [council/joint organisation].

[signed]

[name and position]

[date]

Exemption from compliance with risk management and internal audit requirements

I am advised that [council/joint organisation] has not complied with the following requirements with respect to the operation of its [audit, risk and improvement committee/risk management/internal audit processes] (omit where relevant):

Requirement	Reason for non-compliance
[requirement]	[detailed description of reasons giving rise to the non-compliance]

I note that the following alternative arrangements have been implemented to achieve outcomes equivalent to the relevant requirement/s:

Summary of alternative arrangements	How they will achieve equivalent outcomes
[summary of alternative arrangement]	[summary of how they will achieve equivalent outcomes]

I am satisfied that these alternative arrangements will achieve outcomes equivalent to the requirement/s.

This exemption from compliance with the requirements listed above is valid for the [years] financial year.

[signed]

[name and position]

[date]

[Office of Local Government officer's contact details]

Appendix 2:

Audit, risk and improvement committee – role and responsibilities

Under section 428A of the Local Government Act, each council (including county councils and joint organisations) must have an audit, risk and improvement committee to independently review and provide advice to the council regarding the following aspects of the 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
- any other matters prescribed by the regulation (i.e. internal audit).

The committee must also provide information to the council for the purpose of improving the council's performance of its functions.

The audit, risk and improvement committee and the council are to agree on the specific activities the committee is to review based on the council's needs, risks and business functions.

The following is a list of activities audit, risk and improvement committees and councils should consider as part of the committee's 'audit', 'risk' and 'improvement' roles based on the requirements of section 428A of the Local Government Act.

This is not an exhaustive list and audit, risk and improvement committees and councils are encouraged to carefully consider the council's business operations, service delivery, financial management processes, internal audit function, external accountability requirements, risk management framework, governance arrangements and integrated planning and reporting framework to maximise the advice and assistance the committee can provide to the council.

Audit

Internal audit

Section 428A(2)(i) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective internal audit function and receives maximum value from its internal audit activities.

Committee's role

- 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.
- Coordinate as far as is practicable, the work programs of internal audit and other assurance and review functions.
- Advise the general manager and governing body of the council:
 - 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 compliance 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 work plan and annual work plan of internal audits to be undertaken by the council's internal audit function
 - if the council's internal audit activities are effective, including the performance of the head of the internal audit function and the internal audit function
 - of the findings and recommendations of internal audits conducted, and corrective actions needed to address issues raised

- of the implementation by the council of the 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

Principle

The council receives maximum value from its external audit activities.

Committee's role

- Act as a forum for communication between the governing body, general manager, senior management, the internal audit function and external audit.
- Coordinate 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

Compliance framework

Section 428A(2)(a) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective compliance framework that ensures it is complying with its legal obligations and other governance and contractual requirements when undertaking its functions.

Committee's role

Advise the general manager and governing body of 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.

Risk management

Section 428A(2)(b) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective risk management framework and internal controls that successfully identify and manage the risks it faces.

Committee's role

Advise the general manager and governing body of the council on the following:

Risk management framework

- whether the council is providing the resources necessary to successfully implement its risk management framework

- if the council has in place a current and appropriate risk management framework that is consistent with the Australian risk management standard
- whether the council's risk management framework is adequate and effective for identifying and managing the risks the council faces, including those associated with 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
- whether appropriate policies and procedures are in place for the management and exercise of delegations
- if the council has taken steps to embed a culture that 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 the 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 control framework

- if the internal controls in place are appropriate for the risk the council faces
- 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, including policies and procedures, is sufficient, and

- if internal and external audit recommendations to correct internal control weaknesses are implemented appropriately.

Fraud and corruption control framework

Section 428A(2)(c) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective fraud and corruption control framework in place that minimises the incidence of fraud and corruption.

Committee's role

Advise the general manager and governing body of the council of the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's fraud and corruption prevention framework and activities, including whether the council has:

- a fraud and corruption policy
- clearly defined responsibilities for managing fraud and corruption
- risk-based preventative and detective controls
- policies, systems and processes to respond to, investigate and report suspected fraud and corruption
- employee awareness/education measures
- robust third-party management systems
- appropriate processes and systems in place to capture and effectively investigate fraud-related information
- regular review of the fraud and corruption control framework and reporting, and
- implemented applicable guidance and other better practice measures by the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Financial management framework

Section 428A(2)(d) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective financial management framework, sustainable financial position and positive financial performance.

Committee's role

Advise the general manager and governing body of the council on the following:

External accountability and financial reporting framework

- if the council is complying with accounting standards and external accountability requirements
- of the appropriateness of the council's accounting policies and disclosures
- of the implications for the council of the findings of external audits and performance audits and the 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 annual report is consistent with signed financial statements.

Financial management framework

- if the council's financial management processes are adequate

- the adequacy of cash management and credit card use 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.

Financial position and performance

- if policies and procedures for management review and consideration of the financial position and performance of the council are adequate.

Grants and tied funding policies and procedures

- if the council's grants and tied funding policies and procedures are sound.

Governance framework

Section 428A(2)(e) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective governance framework to ensure it is appropriately directing and controlling the management of the council.

Committee's role

Advise the governing body and general manager if the council's governance framework is sound, including the council's:

- decision-making processes
- implementation of governance policies and procedures
- reporting lines and accountability
- assignment of key roles 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

Section 428A(2)(f) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective framework that ensures it achieves its strategic plans and objectives under the integrated planning and reporting (IP&R) framework.

Committee's role

Advise the general manager and governing body of the council:

- of the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's IP&R processes
- if appropriate reporting and monitoring mechanisms 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

Section 428A(2)(g) and section 428A(3) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council has an effective framework to ensure it is delivering services and conducting its business and functions to an expected standard.

Committee's role

- 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).

- Advise the general manager and governing body of the council:
 - if the 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

Section 428A(2)(h) of the Local Government Act

Principle

The council's performance management framework ensures the council can measure its performance and if it is achieving its strategic goals.

Committee's role

Advise the general manager and governing body of the council:

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

Appendix 3:

Model terms of reference for audit, risk and improvement committees

Model terms of reference for local government audit, risk and improvement committees

[Council/joint organisation] has established an audit, risk and improvement committee in compliance with section 428A of the *Local Government Act 1993*, section (# tbc) of the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021* and the Departmental Chief Executive's *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*. These terms of reference set out the committee's objectives, authority, composition and tenure, roles and responsibilities, reporting and administrative arrangements.

Objective

The objective of [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee is to provide independent assurance to [council/joint organisation] by monitoring, reviewing and providing advice about the [council's/joint organisation's] governance processes, compliance, risk management and control frameworks, external accountability obligations and overall performance.

Independence

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 to provide [council/joint organisation] with robust, objective and unbiased advice and assurance.

The committee is to have an advisory and assurance role only and is to exercise no administrative functions, delegated financial responsibilities or any management functions of the [council/joint organisation]. The committee will provide independent advice to the [council/joint organisation] that is informed by the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit and risk management activities and information and advice provided by staff, relevant external bodies and subject matter experts.

The committee must always ensure it maintains a direct reporting line to and from the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit function and act as a mechanism for internal audit to report to the governing body and the [general manager/executive officer] on matters affecting the performance of the internal audit function.

Authority

[Council/joint organisation] authorises the committee, for the purposes of exercising its responsibilities, to:

- access any information it needs from the [council/joint organisation]
- use any [council/joint organisation] resources it needs
- have direct and unrestricted access to the [general manager/executive officer] and senior management of the [council/joint organisation]
- seek the [general manager's/executive officer's] permission to meet with any other [council/joint organisation] staff member or contractor
- discuss any matters with the external auditor or other external parties
- request the attendance of any employee at committee meetings, and

→ obtain external legal or other professional advice in line with councils' procurement policies.
[Detail any prior approval needed or pre-determined budget for costs].

Information and documents pertaining to the committee are confidential and are not to be made publicly available. The committee may only release [council/joint organisation] information to external parties that are assisting the committee to fulfil its responsibilities with the approval of the [general manager/executive officer], 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. [amend if documentation is to be made available to the public].

Composition and tenure

The committee consists of an independent chair and [two] independent members who have voting rights and [one non-voting councillor/board member], as required under the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*.

The governing body is to appoint the chair and members of the committee. Current committee members are:

[name]	Independent chair (voting)
[name]	Independent member (voting)
[name]	Independent member (voting)
[name]	[Councillor/board] member (non-voting) (if applicable) [cannot be the mayor]

All committee members must meet the independence and eligibility criteria prescribed in the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*.

Members will be appointed for up to a four-year term. Members can be reappointed for one further term, but the total period of continuous membership cannot exceed eight years. This includes any term as chair of the committee. Members who have served an eight-year term (either as a member or as chair) must have a two-year break from serving on the committee before being appointed again. To preserve the committee's knowledge of the [council/joint organisation], ideally, no more than one member should retire from the committee because of rotation in any one year.

The terms and conditions of each member's appointment to the committee are to be set out 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 responsibilities.

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 or a committee member is also to be subject to that person still meeting the independence and eligibility requirements.

Members of the committee must possess and maintain a broad range of skills, knowledge and experience relevant to the operations, governance and financial management of the [council/joint organisation], the environment in which the [council/joint organisation] operates, and the contribution that the committee makes to the [council/joint organisation]. 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/joint organisation's] financial reporting responsibilities to be

able to contribute to the committee's consideration of the [council's/joint organisation's] annual financial statements.

[Add any relevant details about shared arrangements, if applicable].

Role

As required under section 428A of the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act), the role of the committee is to review and provide independent advice to the [council/joint organisation] regarding the following aspects of the [council's/joint organisation'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/joint organisation], and
- internal audit.

The committee must also provide information to the [council/joint organisation] for the purpose of improving the [council's/joint organisation's] performance of its functions.

The committee's specific audit, risk and improvement responsibilities under section 428A of the Act are outlined in Schedule 1 to this charter.

The committee will act as a forum for consideration of the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit function and oversee its planning, monitoring and reporting to ensure it operates effectively.

The committee has no power to direct external audit or the way it is planned and undertaken but will act as a forum for the consideration of external audit findings.

The committee is directly responsible and accountable to the governing body 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/joint organisation] rests with the governing body and the [general manager/executive officer].

The responsibilities of the committee may be revised or expanded in consultation with, or as requested by, the governing body from time to time.

Responsibilities of members

Independent members

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/joint organisation]
- 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/joint organisation]
- have strong leadership qualities (chair)
- lead effective committee meetings (chair), and
- oversee the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit function (chair).

[Councillor/board] members (if applicable)

To preserve the independence of the committee, the [councillor/board] member of the committee is a non-voting member. Their role is to:

- relay to the committee any concerns the governing body may have regarding the [council/joint organisation] and issues being considered by the committee
- provide insights into local issues and the strategic priorities of the [council/joint organisation] 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.

Issues or information the councillor member raises with or provides to the committee must relate to the matters listed in Schedule 1 and issues being considered by the committee.

The [councillor/board] member of the committee must conduct themselves in a non-partisan and professional manner. The [councillor/board] member 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.

If the [councillor/board] member of the committee engages 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/joint organisation], that the [councillor/board] member be removed from membership of the committee. Where the [council/joint organisation] does not agree to the committee chair's recommendation, the [council/joint organisation] must give reasons for its decision in writing to the chair.

Conduct

Independent committee members are required to comply with the [council's/joint organisation's] code of conduct.

Complaints alleging breaches of the [council's/joint organisation's] 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/executive officer] must consult with the governing body before taking any disciplinary action against an independent committee member in response to a breach of the [council's/joint organisation's] code of conduct.

Conflicts of interest

Once a year, committee members must provide written declarations to the [council/joint organisation] 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' for the purposes of the [council's/joint organisation's] code of conduct and must also complete and submit returns of their interests.

Committee members and observers must declare any pecuniary or non-pecuniary conflicts of interest they may have in a matter being considered at the meeting at the start of each meeting or as soon as they become aware of the conflict of interest. Where a committee member or observer declares a pecuniary or a significant non-pecuniary conflict of interest, they must remove themselves from committee deliberations on the issue. Details of conflicts of interest declared at meetings must be appropriately minuted.

Standards

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 [current Australian risk management standard], where applicable.

Work plans

The work of the committee is to be thoroughly planned and executed. The committee must develop a strategic work plan every four years to ensure that the matters listed in Schedule 1 are reviewed by the committee and considered by the internal audit function when developing their risk-based program of internal audits. The strategic work plan must be reviewed at least annually to ensure it remains appropriate.

The committee may, in consultation with the governing body, vary the strategic work plan at any time to address new or emerging risks. The governing body may also, by resolution, request the committee to approve a variation to the strategic work plan. Any decision to vary the strategic work plan must be made by the committee.

The committee must also develop an annual work plan to guide its work, and the work of the internal audit function over the forward year.

The committee may, in consultation with the governing body, vary the annual work plan to address new or emerging risks. The governing body may also, by resolution, request the committee to approve a variation to the annual work plan. Any decision to vary the annual work plan must be made by the committee.

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 work plan.

Assurance reporting

The committee must regularly report to the [council/joint organisation] to ensure that it is kept informed of matters considered by the committee and any emerging issues that may influence the strategic direction of the [council/joint organisation] or the achievement of the [council's/joint organisation's] goals and objectives.

The committee will provide an update to the governing body and the [general manager/executive officer] of its activities and opinions after every committee meeting.

The committee will provide an annual assessment to the governing body and the [general manager/executive officer] on the committee's work and its opinion on how the [council/joint organisation] is performing.

The committee will provide a comprehensive assessment every council term of the matters listed in Schedule 1 to the governing body and the [general manager/executive officer].

The committee may at any time report to the governing body or the [general manager/executive officer] on any other matter it deems of sufficient importance to warrant their attention. The [mayor/chairperson] and the chair of the committee may also meet at any time to discuss issues relating to the work of the committee.

Should the governing body require additional information, a request for the information may be made to the chair by resolution. The chair is only required to 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/board members] are not entitled to request or receive information from the committee.

Administrative arrangements

Meetings

The committee will meet at least [number (minimum of 4)] times per year, [including a special meeting to review the [council's/joint organisation's financial statements]].

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/executive officer] or the governing body.

Committee meetings can be held in person, by telephone or videoconference. Proxies are not permitted to attend meetings if a committee member cannot attend.

A quorum will consist of a majority of independent voting members. Where the vote is tied, the chair has the casting vote.

The chair of the committee will decide 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.

The [general manager/executive officer] and the [head of the internal audit function] should attend committee meetings as non-voting observers. The external auditor (or their representative) is to be invited to each committee meeting as an independent observer. The chair can request the [council's/joint organisation's] [chief finance officer or equivalent], [head of risk management function or equivalent], [senior managers or equivalent], any [councillors/board members], any employee/contractor of the council and any subject matter expert to attend committee meetings. Where requested to attend a meeting, persons must attend the meeting where possible and provide any information requested. Observers have no voting rights and can be excluded from a meeting by the chair at any time.

The committee can hold closed meetings whenever it needs to discuss confidential or sensitive issues with only voting members of the committee present.

The committee must meet separately with the [head of the internal audit function] and the [council's/joint organisation's] external auditor at least once each year.

Dispute resolution

Members of the committee and the [council's/joint organisation's] management should maintain an effective working relationship and seek to resolve any differences they may have in an amicable and professional way by discussion and negotiation.

In the event of a disagreement between the committee and the [general manager/executive officer] or other senior managers, the dispute is to be resolved by the governing body.

Unresolved disputes regarding compliance with statutory or other requirements are to be referred to the Departmental Chief Executive in writing.

Secretariat

The [general manager/executive officer] will nominate a staff member to provide secretariat support to the committee. The secretariat will ensure the agenda for each meeting and supporting papers are circulated after approval from the chair at least [number] weeks before the meeting and ensure that minutes of meetings are prepared and maintained. Minutes must be approved by the chair and circulated within [agreed timeframe] of the meeting to each member.

Resignation and dismissal of members

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 [agreed timeframe] notice to the chair and the governing body prior to their resignation to allow the [council/joint organisation] to ensure a smooth transition to a new chair or committee member.

The governing body can, by resolution, terminate the appointment of the chair or an independent committee member before the expiry of their term where that person has:

- breached the council's code of conduct
- performed unsatisfactorily or not to expectations
- declared, or is found to be in, a position of a conflict of interest which is unresolvable
- been declared bankrupt or found to be insolvent
- experienced an adverse change in business status
- been charged with a serious criminal offence
- been proven to be in serious breach of their obligations under any legislation, or
- experienced an adverse change in capacity or capability.

The position of a [councillor/board] member on the committee can be terminated at any time by the governing body by resolution.

Review arrangements

At least once every council term, the governing body must review or arrange for an external review of the effectiveness of the committee.

These terms of reference must be reviewed annually by the committee and once each council term by the governing body. Any substantive changes are to be approved by the governing body.

Further information

For further information on [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee, contact [name] on [email address] or by phone [phone number].

Reviewed by chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee

[signed]

[date]

Reviewed by [council/joint organisation] in accordance with a resolution of the governing body.

[signed]

[date]

[resolution reference]

Next review date: [date]

DRAFT

Schedule 1 – Audit, risk and improvement committee responsibilities

[Note: each council/joint organisation is to determine the responsibilities of its committee related to each matter listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act 1993 and list them in Schedule 1 to the committee's terms of reference. Suggested responsibilities are provided below and further detailed in core requirement 1 and Appendix 2 of these Guidelines.]

Audit

Internal audit

- Provide overall strategic oversight of internal audit activities
- Act as a forum for communication between the governing body, [general manager/executive officer], senior management, the internal audit function and external audit
- Coordinate, as far as is practicable, the work programs of internal audit and other assurance and review functions
- Review and advise the [council/joint organisation]:
 - on whether the [council/joint organisation] is providing the resources necessary to successfully deliver the internal audit function
 - if the [council/joint organisation] is complying with internal audit requirements, including conformance with the International Professional Practices Framework
 - if the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit charter is appropriate and whether the internal audit policies and procedures and audit/risk methodologies used by the [council/joint organisation] are suitable
 - of the strategic four-year work plan and annual work plan of internal audits to be undertaken by the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit function
 - if the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit activities are effective, including the performance of the head of the internal audit function and the internal audit function
 - of the findings and recommendations of internal audits conducted, and corrective actions needed to address issues raised
 - of the implementation by the [council/joint organisation] 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/executive officer], senior management, the internal audit function and external audit
- Coordinate 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/executive officer] on action taken on significant issues raised in relevant external audit reports and better practice guides

Risk

Risk management

Review and advise the [council/joint organisation]:

- if the [council's/joint organisation's] has in place a current and appropriate risk management framework that is consistent with the Australian risk management standard
- whether the [council/joint organisation] is providing the resources necessary to successfully implement its risk management framework
- whether the [council's/joint organisation's] risk management framework is adequate and effective for identifying and managing the risks the [council/joint organisation] faces, including those associated with individual projects, programs and other activities
- if risk management is integrated across all levels of the [council/joint organisation] and across all processes, operations, services, decision-making, functions and reporting
- of the adequacy of risk reports and documentation, for example, the [council's/joint organisation'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 the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation] and strong leadership that supports effective risk management
- of the adequacy of staff training and induction in risk management
- how the [council's/joint organisation's] risk management approach impacts on the [council's/joint organisation's] insurance arrangements
- of the effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation'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/joint organisation]:

- whether the [council's/joint organisation's] approach to maintaining an effective internal audit framework, including over external parties such as contractors and advisors, is sound and effective
- whether the [council/joint organisation] has in place relevant policies and procedures and that these are periodically reviewed and updated
- 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/joint organisation'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/joint organisation] of the adequacy and effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation's] compliance framework, including:

- if the [council/joint organisation] has appropriately considered legal and compliance risks as part of the [council's/joint organisation's] risk management framework
- how the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation] of the adequacy and effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation's] fraud and corruption prevention framework and activities, including whether the [council/joint organisation] has appropriate processes and systems in place to capture and effectively investigate fraud-related information.

Financial management

Review and advise the [council/joint organisation]:

- if the [council/joint organisation] is complying with accounting standards and external accountability requirements
- of the appropriateness of the [council's/joint organisation's] accounting policies and disclosures
- of the implications for the [council/joint organisation] of the findings of external audits and performance audits and the [council's/joint organisation's] responses and implementation of recommendations
- whether the [council's/joint organisation's] financial statement preparation procedures and timelines are sound
- the accuracy of the [council's/joint organisation's] annual financial statements prior to external audit, including:
 - management compliance/representations
 - significant accounting and reporting issues
 - the methods used by the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation's] annual report is consistent with signed financial statements
- if the [council's/joint organisation'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/joint organisation] are adequate
- if the [council's/joint organisation's] grants and tied funding policies and procedures are sound.

Governance

Review and advise the [council/joint organisation] regarding its governance framework, including the [council's/joint organisation's]:

- decision-making processes
- implementation of governance policies and procedures
- reporting lines and accountability
- assignment of key roles 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/joint organisation]:

- of the adequacy and effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation's] integrated, planning and reporting (IP&R) processes
- if appropriate reporting and monitoring mechanisms are in place to measure progress against objectives, and
- whether the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation]:
 - If the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation] can improve its service delivery and the [council's/joint organisation's] performance of its business and functions generally

Performance data and measurement

Review and advise the [council/joint organisation]:

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

Appendix 4:

Example risk management policy

Example risk management policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to express [council's/joint organisation's] commitment to implementing organisation-wide risk management principles, systems and processes that ensure the consistent, efficient and effective assessment of risk in all [council's/joint organisation's] planning, decision-making and operational processes.

Risk management framework

[Council/joint organisation] provides critical services and infrastructure to the residents, ratepayers and visitors to [area]. [Council/joint organisation] also has service agreements and contractual obligations with government and non-government agencies and organisations and has its own strategic goals and objectives that it seeks to achieve on behalf of the [area] community.

It is therefore incumbent on [council/joint organisation] to understand the internal and external risks that may impact the delivery of these services, contracts and strategic objectives and have processes in place to identify, mitigate, manage and monitor those risks to ensure the best outcome for [council's/joint organisation's], staff and the community. It is also our responsibility to ensure the efficient, effective and ethical use of resources and services by ratepayers, residents, staff and visitors.

[Council/joint organisation] has developed a risk management framework consistent with [Australian standard] to assist it to identify, treat, monitor and review all risks to its operations and strategic objectives and apply appropriate internal controls.

[Council/joint organisation] is committed to the principles, framework and process of managing risk as outlined in [Australian standard] and commits to fully integrating risk management within the [council/joint organisation] and applying it to all decision-making, functions, services and activities of the [council/joint organisation] in accordance with our statutory requirements.

Responsibilities

[Council/joint organisation] aims to create a positive risk management culture where risk management is integrated into all everyday activities and managing risks is an integral part of governance, good management practice and decision-making at [council/joint organisation]. It is the responsibility of every staff member and business area to observe and implement this policy and [council's/joint organisation's] risk management framework.

All staff are responsible for identifying and managing risk within their work areas. Key responsibilities include:

- being familiar with, and understanding, the principles of risk management
- complying with all policies, procedures and practices relating to risk management
- alerting management to risks that exist within their area, and
- performing any risk management activities assigned to them as part of their daily role.

Risk management is a core responsibility for all senior staff/management at [council/organisation]. In addition to their responsibilities as staff members, senior staff/management are responsible for:

- ensuring all staff manage their risks within their own work areas. Risks should be anticipated, and reasonable protective measures taken
- encouraging openness and honesty in the reporting and escalation of risks
- ensuring all staff have the appropriate capability to perform their risk management roles
- reporting to the [general manager/executive officer] on the status of risks and controls, and
- identifying and communicating improvements in [council's/joint organisation's] risk management practices to [council's/joint organisation's] risk management function.

[Council's/joint organisation's] risk management function is available to support staff in undertaking their risk management activities.

To ensure [council/joint organisation] is effectively managing its risk and complying with its statutory obligations, [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee and internal audit function is responsible for reviewing the [council's/joint organisation's]:

- risk management processes and procedures
- risk management strategies for major projects or undertakings
- control environment and insurance arrangements
- business continuity planning arrangements, and
- fraud control plan.

Monitoring and Review

[Council/joint organisation] is committed to continually improving its ability to manage risk. [Council/joint organisation] will review this policy and its risk management framework at least annually to ensure it continues to meet the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993*, the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021*, and the [council's/joint organisation's] requirements.

Further information

For further information on [council's/joint organisation's] risk management policy, framework and process, contact [name] on [email address] or by phone [phone number].

[signed – General Manager/Executive officer]

[name]

[date]

[review date]

Appendix 5:

Model internal audit charter

Model internal audit charter for local government

[Council/joint organisation] has established the [name of internal audit function] as a key component of the [council's/joint organisation's] governance and assurance framework, in compliance with the Departmental Chief Executive's *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*. This charter provides the framework for the conduct of the [name of internal audit function] in the [council/joint organisation] and has been approved by the governing body taking into account the advice of the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee.

Purpose of internal audit

Internal audit is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the [council's/joint organisation's] operations. It helps the [council/joint organisation] accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes¹.

Internal audit provides an independent and objective review and advisory service to provide advice to the governing body, [general manager/executive officer] and audit, risk and improvement committee about the [council's/joint organisation's] governance processes, risk management and control frameworks and its external accountability obligations. It also assists the [council/joint organisation] to improve its business performance.

Independence

[Council's/joint organisation's] [name of internal audit function] is to be independent of the [council/joint organisation] so it can provide an unbiased assessment of the [council's/joint organisation's] operations and risk and control activities.

[Name of internal audit function] reports functionally to the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee on the results of completed audits, and for strategic direction and accountability purposes, and reports administratively to the [general manager/executive officer] to facilitate day-to-day operations. Internal audit activities are not subject to direction by the [council/joint organisation] and the [council's/joint organisation's] management has no role in the exercise of the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit activities.

The audit, risk and improvement committee is responsible for communicating any internal audit issues or information to the governing body. Should the governing body require additional information, a request for the information may be made to the chair by resolution. The chair is only required to 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/board members] are not entitled to request or receive information from the committee.

¹ As defined by the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (2017)

[Detail any delegations made by the general manager/executive officer regarding their internal audit responsibilities].

The [general manager/executive officer] must consult with the chair of the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee before appointing or making decisions affecting the employment of the [head of internal audit function]. If the [head of internal audit function] is dismissed, the [general manager/executive officer] must report the reasons for their dismissal to the governing body.

Where the chair of the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee has any concerns about the treatment of the [head of internal audit function], or any action taken that may compromise their ability to undertake their functions independently, they can report their concerns to the governing body.

The [head of internal audit function] is to confirm at least annually to the audit, risk and improvement committee the independence of internal audit activities from the [council/joint organisation].

Authority

[Council/joint organisation] authorises the [name of internal audit function] to have full, free and unrestricted access to all functions, premises, assets, personnel, records and other documentation and information that the [head of internal audit function] considers necessary for the [name of the internal audit function] to undertake its responsibilities.

All records, documentation and information accessed while undertaking internal audit activities are to be used solely for the conduct of those activities. The [head of internal audit function] and individual internal audit staff are responsible and accountable for maintaining the confidentiality of the information they receive when undertaking their work.

All internal audit documentation is to remain the property of [council/joint organisation], including where internal audit services are performed by an external third-party provider.

Information and documents pertaining to the [name of the internal audit function] are not to be made publicly available. The [name of the internal audit function] may only release [council/joint organisation] information to external parties that are assisting the [name of the internal audit function] to undertake its responsibilities with the approval of the [general manager/executive officer], 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.

Role

The [name of internal audit function] is to support the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee to review and provide independent advice to the [council/joint organisation] in accordance with section 428A of the *Local Government Act 1993*. This includes conducting internal audits of [council/joint organisation] and monitoring the implementation of corrective actions.

The [name of internal audit function] is to also play an active role in:

- developing and maintaining a culture of accountability and integrity
- facilitating the integration of risk management into day-to-day business activities and processes, and
- promoting a culture of high ethical standards.

[Name of internal audit function] has no direct authority or responsibility for the activities it reviews. [Name of internal audit function] has no responsibility for developing or implementing procedures or systems and does not prepare records or engage in [council/joint organisation] functions or activities (except in carrying out its own functions).

[Head of internal audit function]

Option 1: In-house internal audit function

[Council's/joint organisation's] [name of internal audit function] is to be led by a member of [council's/joint organisation's] staff with sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to ensure it fulfils its role and responsibilities to the [council/joint organisation] and the audit, risk and improvement committee. The [head of internal audit function] must be independent, impartial, unbiased and objective when performing their work and free from any conflicts of interest.

Responsibilities of the [head of internal audit function] include:

- managing the day-to-day activities of the [name of internal audit function]
- managing the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit budget
- supporting the operation of the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee
- approving internal audit project plans, conducting or supervising audits and assessments and providing independent advice to the audit, risk and improvement committee
- monitoring the [council's/joint organisation's] implementation of corrective actions that arise from the findings of audits
- implementing the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual work plan and four-year strategic work plan
- ensuring the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit activities comply with the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*, and
- contract management and oversight of supplementary external providers (where appropriate).

[Details of any dual responsibilities and independence safeguards]

[Details of any shared arrangements]

Option 2: Outsourced internal audit function

[Council's/joint organisation's] [name of internal audit function] is to be led by a member of [council's/joint organisation's] staff with sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to ensure it fulfils its role and responsibilities to the [council/joint organisation] and the audit, risk and improvement committee. The [head of internal audit function] must be independent, impartial, unbiased and objective when performing their work and free from any conflicts of interest.

Responsibilities of the [head of internal audit function] include:

- contract management
- managing the internal audit budget
- ensuring the external provider completes internal audits in line with the audit, risk and improvement committee's annual work plan and four-year strategic work plan
- forwarding audit reports by the external provider to the audit, risk and improvement committee
- acting as a liaison between the external provider and the audit, risk and improvement committee
- monitoring the [council's/joint organisation's] implementation of corrective actions that arise from the findings of audits and reporting progress to the audit, risk and improvement committee, and

- assisting the audit, risk and improvement committee to ensure the [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit activities comply with the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*.

[Details of any dual responsibilities and independence safeguards]

[Details of any shared arrangements]

[Name of internal audit team]

Option 1: In-house internal audit team

Members of the [name of internal audit function] are responsible to the [head of internal audit function].

Individuals that perform internal audit activities for [council/joint organisation] must have:

- an appropriate level of understanding of the [council's/joint organisation's] culture, systems and processes
- the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to conduct internal audit activities in the [council/joint organisation]
- effective interpersonal and communication skills to ensure they can engage with [council/joint organisation] staff effectively and collaboratively, and
- honesty, integrity and diligence.

[Details of any dual responsibilities and independence safeguards]

[Details of any shared arrangements]

Option 2: Out-sourced internal audit team

[Council/joint organisation] is to contract an external third-party provider to undertake its internal audit activities. To ensure the independence of the external provider, the [head of internal audit function] is to ensure the external provider:

- does not conduct any audits on specific [council/joint organisation] operations or areas that they have worked on within the last two years
- is not the same provider conducting the [council's/joint organisation's] external audit
- is not the auditor of any contractors of the [council/joint organisation] that may be subject to the internal audit, and
- can meet the [council's/joint organisation's] obligations under the *Guidelines for risk management and internal audit for local government in NSW*.

The [head of internal audit function] must consult with the audit, risk and improvement committee and [general manager/executive officer] regarding the appropriateness of the skills, knowledge and experience of any external provider before they are engaged by the [council/joint organisation].

[Details of any shared arrangements].

Performing internal audit activities

The work of the [name of internal audit function] is to be thoroughly planned and executed. The [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee must develop a strategic work plan every four years to ensure that the matters listed in Schedule 1 are reviewed by the committee and considered by the internal audit function when developing their risk-based program of internal audits. The strategic work plan must be reviewed at least annually to ensure it remains appropriate.

The committee must also develop an annual work plan to guide the work of the internal audit function over the forward year.

All internal audit activities are to be performed in a manner that is consistent with relevant professional standards including the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors and [current Australian risk management standard].

The [head of internal audit function] is to provide the findings and recommendations of internal audits to the audit, risk and improvement committee at the end of each audit. Each report is to include a response from the relevant senior manager.

The [head of internal audit function] is to establish an ongoing monitoring system to follow up [council's/joint organisation's] progress in implementing corrective actions.

The [general manager/executive officer], in consultation with the audit, risk and improvement committee, is to develop and maintain policies and procedures to guide the operation of the [council's/joint organisation's] [name of internal audit function].

The [head of internal audit function] is to ensure that the audit, risk and improvement committee is advised at each of the committee's meetings of the internal audit activities completed during that quarter, progress in implementing the annual work plan and progress made implementing corrective actions.

Conduct

Internal audit personnel must comply with the [council's/joint organisation's] code of conduct. Complaints about breaches of [council's/joint organisation's] code of conduct by internal audit personnel 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/executive officer] must consult with the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee before any disciplinary action is taken against the [head of internal audit function] in response to a breach of the [council's/joint organisation's] code of conduct.

Internal auditors must also comply with the Code of Ethics for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing issued by the Institute of Internal Auditors.

Administrative arrangements

Audit, risk and improvement committee meetings

The [head of internal audit function] will attend audit, risk and improvement committee meetings as an independent non-voting observer. The [head of internal audit function] can be excluded from meetings by the committee at any time.

The [head of internal audit function] must meet separately with the audit, risk and improvement committee at least once per year.

The [head of internal audit function] can meet with the chair of the audit, risk and improvement committee at any time, as necessary, between committee meetings.

External audit

Internal and external audit activities will be coordinated to help ensure the adequacy of overall audit coverage and to minimise duplication of effort.

Periodic meetings and contact between internal and external audit shall be held to discuss matters of mutual interest and to facilitate coordination.

External audit will have full and free access to all internal audit plans, working papers and reports.

Dispute resolution

[Name of internal audit function] should maintain an effective working relationship with the [council/joint organisation] and the audit, risk and improvement committee and seek to resolve any differences they may have in an amicable and professional way by discussion and negotiation.

In the event of a disagreement between the [name of internal audit function] and the [council/joint organisation], the dispute is to be resolved by the [general manager/executive officer] and/or the audit, risk and improvement committee. Disputes between the [name of internal audit function] and the audit, risk and improvement committee are to be resolved by the governing body.

Unresolved disputes regarding compliance with statutory or other requirements are to be referred to the Departmental Chief Executive in writing.

Review arrangements

The [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee must review the performance of the internal audit function each year and report its findings to the governing body. A strategic review of the performance of the [name of internal audit function] must be conducted each council term that considers the views of an external party with a strong knowledge of internal audit and reported to the [governing body/board].

This charter is to be reviewed annually by the committee and once each council term by the governing body. Any substantive changes are to be approved by the governing body.

Further information

For further information on [council's/joint organisation's] internal audit activities, contact [name] on [email address] or by phone [phone number].

Reviewed by [head of internal audit function]

[sign and date]

Reviewed by chair of the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee

[sign and date]

Reviewed by [general manager/executive officer]

[sign and date]

Reviewed by [council/joint organisation] in accordance with a resolution of the governing body

[sign and date]

[resolution reference]

Schedule 1 – internal audit function responsibilities

[Note: each council/joint organisation is to determine the responsibilities of its internal audit function in relation to each matter listed in section 428A of the Local Government Act 1993 and list them in Schedule 1 to the council's/joint organisation's internal audit charter. Suggested responsibilities are provided below and further detailed in core requirement 3 and Appendix 2 of these Guidelines.]

Audit

Internal audit

- Conduct internal audits as directed by the [council's/joint organisation's] audit, risk and improvement committee.
- Implement the [council's/joint organisation's] annual and four-year strategic internal audit work plans.
- Monitor the implementation by the [council/joint organisation] of corrective actions.
- Assist the [council/joint organisation] to develop and maintain a culture of accountability and integrity.
- Facilitate the integration of risk management into day-to-day business activities and processes.
- Promote a culture of high ethical standards.

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 the [council's/joint organisation's] implementation of audit recommendations.
- Provide advice on action taken on significant issues raised in relevant external audit reports and better practice guides.

Risk

Risk management

Review and advise:

- if the [council's/joint organisation's] has in place a current and appropriate risk management framework that is consistent with the Australian risk management standard
- whether the [council's/joint organisation's] risk management framework is adequate and effective for identifying and managing the risks the [council/joint organisation] faces, including those associated with individual projects, programs and other activities
- if risk management is integrated across all levels of the [council/joint organisation] and across all processes, operations, services, decision-making, functions and reporting
- of the adequacy of risk reports and documentation, for example, the [council's/joint organisation'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 the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation] and strong leadership that supports effective risk management
- of the adequacy of staff training and induction in risk management
- how the [council's/joint organisation's] risk management approach impacts on the [council's/joint organisation's] insurance arrangements
- of the effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation'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:

- whether the [council's/joint organisation's] approach to maintaining an effective internal audit framework, including over external parties such as contractors and advisors, is sound and effective
- whether the [council/joint organisation] has in place relevant policies and procedures and that these are periodically reviewed and updated
- 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/joint organisation'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 of the adequacy and effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation's] compliance framework, including:

- if the [council/joint organisation] has appropriately considered legal and compliance risks as part of the [council's/joint organisation's] risk management framework
- how the [council/joint organisation] 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 of the adequacy and effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation's] fraud and corruption prevention framework and activities, including whether the [council/joint organisation] has appropriate processes and systems in place to capture and effectively investigate fraud-related information.

Financial management

Review and advise:

- if the [council/joint organisation] is complying with accounting standards and external accountability requirements
- of the appropriateness of the [council's/joint organisation's] accounting policies and disclosures

- of the implications for the [council/joint organisation] of the findings of external audits and performance audits and the [council's/joint organisation's] responses and implementation of recommendations
- whether the [council's/joint organisation's] financial statement preparation procedures and timelines are sound
- the accuracy of the [council's/joint organisation's] annual financial statements prior to external audit, including:
 - management compliance/representations
 - significant accounting and reporting issues
 - the methods used by the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation's] report is consistent with signed financial statements
- if the [council's/joint organisation'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/joint organisation] are adequate
- if the [council's/joint organisation's] grants and tied funding policies and procedures are sound.

Governance

Review and advise of the adequacy of the [council/joint organisation] governance framework, including the [council's/joint organisation's]:

- decision-making processes
- implementation of governance policies and procedures
- reporting lines and accountability
- assignment of key roles 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:

- of the adequacy and effectiveness of the [council's/joint organisation's] integrated, planning and reporting (IP&R) processes

- if appropriate reporting and monitoring mechanisms are in place to measure progress against objectives, and
- whether the [council/joint organisation] is successfully implementing and achieving its IP&R objectives and strategies.

Service reviews and business improvement

Review and advise:

- if the [council/joint organisation] 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/joint organisation] can improve its service delivery and the [council's/joint organisation's] performance of its business and functions generally

Performance data and measurement

Review and advise:

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

