

Report to Council

Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2024/25

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Abdul Jabbar MBE, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate Services and Sustainability

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10th December 2025

Reason for Decision

CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022, states that:

To discharge its responsibilities effectively, the committee should:

- ***report annually on how the committee has complied with the position statement, discharged its responsibilities, and include an assessment of its performance. The report should be available to the public.***

The Council's Audit Committee is a key component of this Authority's governance framework. Its function is to provide an independent review and assurance role to support good governance and sound public financial management. This report has been prepared for full Council to advise of the work undertaken by the Committee in the financial year 2024/25 and for Council to note the views of the Committee on internal control.

Executive Summary

To discharge its role, the Audit Committee met on eight separate occasions during the municipal year 2024/25 undertaking the work detailed in this report. Two of these meetings were to receive training on their role and responsibilities as Members of the Audit Committee, and one was to undertake a private meeting with the Council's External Auditors, Forvis Mazars.

The Committee's annual work programme is built around its responsibilities for corporate governance, internal audit, external audit, risk management, anti-fraud and corruption,

Treasury Management, and the review of the annual Statement of Accounts. This report summarises the work undertaken by key programme area for the financial year 2024/25.

This report is to inform Members of the work of the Audit Committee in the previous financial year and to report on the Committee's assessment of its own effectiveness against the CIPFA Position Statement and associated guidance.

At the Committee's meeting of 23rd July 2025, Members discussed the Committee's draft Annual Self-Assessment and Report to full Council for the year 2024/25.

At that meeting Members requested certain additions to the report, in summary:

- The report should make reference to the ongoing recruitment to the second Independent Member vacancy on the Committee.
- Members' concern at not receiving an update on progress against the latest Payroll audit report recommendations as a separate agenda item.
- Members' wish to be kept informed of the Council's reserves position.
- Members' desire for closer working arrangements with the Council's Scrutiny Committees.
- Members' attendance figures to be moved from appendices to the body of the report.
- That the report should reflect the discussions held at the Committee's meeting of 23rd July 2025.

Please see attached the revised report for consideration.

Recommendation

That Council accepts the Annual Report of the Audit Committee.

Annual Report of the Audit Committee to Council

1 Background

- 1.1 The Council's Audit Committee is a key component of this Authority's governance framework. Its function is to provide an independent review and assurance role to support good governance and sound public financial management.
- 1.2 The purpose of the Committee is to provide, to those charged with governance, independent assurance on the adequacy of the internal control environment / governance processes, integrity of financial reporting and adequacy of the risk and information management framework.
- 1.3 To discharge its role, the Audit Committee met on eight separate occasions, five of which were formal meetings of the committee, during the municipal year 2024/25 undertaking the work detailed in this report. Member attendance details are shown in the table below.

Member	Present	Apologies	Absent	Total attendance
Grenville Page	5			100%
Cllr Al-Hamdani	5			100%
Cllr Arnott	3		2	60%
Cllr Aslam	4	1		80%
Cllr Chowhan	1	2	2	20%
Cllr Davis	4	1		80%
Cllr Hince*		1		-
Cllr S Hussain	3	2		60%
Cllr Rustidge	5			100%
Cllr Sykes*	2	2		50%
Cllr Wilkinson	5			100%

*For the first meeting of the year, Cllr Hince was a member of the Committee but, due to changes to the political balance of the Council, Cllr Hince was subsequently replaced by Cllr Sykes.

- 1.4 The Committee has been unsuccessful on a number of occasions over the last two years in recruiting a second, suitably qualified and experienced, independent member to broaden the skills and knowledge available to assist Members in discharging their role and responsibilities. Members have raised concerns in this area and a recruitment exercise is ongoing to address this at the earliest opportunity.

2 Work of the Committee during 2024/25 in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference

- 2.1 The Committee's work programme was built around its responsibilities for corporate governance, internal audit, external audit, risk management, fraud and corruption, Treasury Management, Information Governance, and the review of the annual Statement of Accounts.
- 2.2 The paragraphs below outline the work undertaken in each of the key areas of responsibility.

Statement of Accounts

- 2.3 The Council published its draft Statement of Accounts for the financial year 2023/24 for submission to the External Auditor on 7 June 2024. The accounts were considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 27 June 2024. Whilst not a statutory requirement for the Audit Committee to review the draft Statement of Accounts, it is considered good practice that appropriate scrutiny occurs at this stage. It provides Members with the opportunity to ask detailed questions and seek assurances before the accounts are finalised.
- 2.4 Many local Authorities across the UK are experiencing significant delay in the completion of both their annual financial statements and the associated audit work in connection with those statements. Whilst Oldham submitted its 2023/24 annual financial statements to its external auditor one week beyond the deadline, the Council remains in a significantly better position than many others.
- 2.5 At the meeting of 23 July 2025 Members noted the Council's use of reserves to support revenue expenditure over a number of preceding financial years. Members expressed a wish to be kept informed of the Council's financial position in relation to the use of reserves going forward by way of updates in this area through the financial year 2025/26.

Audit Completion Report

- 2.6 At its meeting on 26 February 2025 the Audit Committee considered the Auditor's Annual Report produced by the External Auditor to the Council (Forvis Mazars LLP) which set out the draft findings of the audit of the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts. Overall, the findings of the External Auditor continued to be positive with an unqualified audit opinion, including the value for money judgement, as in previous financial years, reflecting the good practice adopted by Oldham in preparing its accounts.

Annual Governance Statement and Local Code of Corporate Governance

- 2.7 The main purpose of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is to provide the necessary assurance that a reliable framework is in place for the financial year that aligns to the Statement of Accounts. The Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 was presented as part of the draft Statement of Accounts at the meeting on 27 June 2024. An update on progress against AGS actions was submitted to the Committee in November 2024. The Annual Governance Statement complies with the framework set out in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (CIPFA/SOLACE) guidance.
- 2.8 The Committee also reviewed the Local Code of Corporate Governance at its meeting on 27 June 2024. It is considered good practice to review the Code as a minimum every two years.

Partnership Governance

- 2.9 An emerging challenge for all Councils to consider is whether they have appropriate oversight, from a governance perspective, over the partnerships in which they have a financial and operational interest. There have been several matters reported in the public domain which has highlighted that in other public bodies those charged with the provision of this oversight have not fully understood the risk. The Audit Committee therefore considered reports, as part of the Annual Governance Statement and update on 27 June 2024 and 28 November 2024 on the wider risks from entities in which the Council has an interest.

At the Committee's meeting of 23 July 2025, Members also expressed a wish for closer working arrangements with the Council's Scrutiny Committee's in order to strengthen the assurance provided by all of these Committees.

Internal Audit and Annual Report of the Chief Internal Auditor

- 2.10 The Internal Audit service was provided in-house during 2024/25 with specialist support from Salford City Council for computer audit. The Committee received regular quarterly updates on Internal Audit and Counter Fraud progress, and an update to the Audit Charter at its meeting on 27 March 2025. At its meeting on 27 June 2024, it reviewed the system of internal audit for the financial year 2023/24 in line with good practice. In accordance with expected professional standards, which requires a review of the Internal Audit Service every five years, CIPFA were commissioned to undertake an External Quality Assurance review which was completed in 2023. This reviewed whether Internal Audit Practices adopted by the Service in Oldham conformed with the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standard. The outcome, which was reported in the municipal year 2023/24 was that the Service "Generally Conforms to the Standard". As such the work undertaken by internal audit is in line with best practice as "Generally Conforms to the Standard" is the highest rating. A self-assessment of conformance for the year 2024/25 by the Head of Audit and Counter fraud confirmed that the Service remained in conformance with the required standards in that year.
- 2.11 At the meeting which considered the draft Statement of Accounts on 27 June 2024, the Audit Committee considered the Annual Report of the Head of Audit for 2023/24. This highlighted that the overall control environment was adequate during 2023/24. The report did however highlight the challenges associated with the internal control environment in Social Care and Payroll.
- 2.12 At the meeting which considered the draft Statement of Accounts on 23 July 2025, the Audit Committee considered the Annual Report of the Head of Audit for 2024/25. The Head of Audit's Annual Opinion for 2024/25 is that the systems of governance and internal control during that year provided Limited assurance that they were effective in aiding the Council in achieving its objectives and goals. The Committee expressed concern at the Limited assurance opinion and, looking forward into 2025/26, the Audit Committee will receive progress updates on improvement actions to address audit recommendations in the areas contributing to this Limited assurance opinion.
- 2.13 At the meeting of 23 July 2025 Members expressed concern that the update report on progress against agreed actions from the latest Internal Audit Report on Payroll was not presented as a separate agenda item.

Treasury Management

- 2.14 Recent corporate failings of other local authorities reported in the public domain have identified the importance of appropriate independent scrutiny of Treasury Management which is therefore a key task of the Audit Committee. In line with recently updated best practice the Audit Committee now receives quarterly, as opposed to half yearly, reports on Treasury Management. The Quarter 3 treasury management report was, however, submitted late to the committee alongside the Treasury Management Annual report in July 2025.

Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) / Information Governance

- 2.15 Another key role in the Governance Framework is the SIRO who considers the Council's risks in relation to information governance and when information is disclosed, often inadvertently, to an individual who has no right to access that data. During 2024/25 this role

was undertaken by the Director of Finance who submitted half yearly reports to the Audit Committee detailing breaches.

Risk Management

2.16 The Audit Committee reviewed the Council’s risk management arrangements during the year. Effective risk management can have a major impact on the successful achievement of the objectives, policies, and strategies of the Authority. In particular, the Audit Committee concentrated on reviewing the Corporate Risk Register.

3 Audit Committee self-assessment and review of its own effectiveness.

3.1 CIPFA’s Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022, contains two self-assessment questionnaires for the Committee to complete each year to assist the Committee in conducting a self-assessment of the Committee’s own effectiveness.

3.2 The completed questionnaires are reproduced as Annexes 1 and 2 to this report. The outcome of the self-assessment is positive, with the Committee able to demonstrate high levels of adherence to best practice (Annex 1) and high levels of effectiveness (Annex 2). Areas where potential improvements have been identified are detailed and associated actions to implement improvements are noted in the annexes.

3.3 A summary of the actions identified during the 2024/25 review for the Committee to take forward during 2025/26, and progress against these actions, is shown in the table below:

Audit Committee Effectiveness Review 2024/25 and Action Plan for 2025/26.

No.	Actions from 2023/24 Review	Progress at 2024/25 Review and areas to take forward into 2025/26
1	Explore opportunities to liaise across Greater Manchester with other Local Authority Audit Committee Chairs to share knowledge and experience as required.	<u>Ongoing</u> Audit Committee Chair is liaising with both the CFO of GMCA and Forvis Mazars to explore options and opportunities in this area. The Chair has also received an invitation to join the LGA North-West Chair’s Forum.
2	Review protocol for inviting Officers to appear at Audit Committee.	<u>Complete</u> Going forward all Limited or Weak Audit Opinion Reports will be brought to the Committee and Service representatives invited to attend to answer Member questions.
3	Committee to receive reports for information on results from other assurance providers, e.g. Ofsted, CQC etc.	<u>Ongoing</u> The Council is awaiting outcomes of its latest CQC review and the results will be distributed to members when available.
4	Committee to meet privately with both Internal and External Auditors during 2024/25.	<u>Complete</u> Meeting took place on 10 th March 2025. Members expressed the opinion that they considered the opportunity to meet with the External Auditor privately was beneficial.

5	Review plain English induction sheet for new Members outlining the role and functions of the Committee based on the Committee's Terms of Reference.	<p><u>Complete</u> Summary Induction distributed to Members on 3rd June 2024. Comprehensive CIPFA Guidance materials distributed to members 14th June 2024.</p>
6	A self-assessment of Member skills and knowledge based on the Committee's Terms of Reference to be circulated and completed and utilised to identify additional Member training and development needs.	<p><u>Complete/Ongoing</u> Comprehensive CIPFA Guidance materials distributed to members 14th June 2024. Members also received comprehensive training from CIPFA on their roles and responsibilities in June 2024. Self-assessment questionnaire issued to members for completion and inclusion in 2024/25 effectiveness review and to be utilised as a basis for further training. All documents re-issued to new and existing Members 25th June 2025. Self-assessment questionnaire issued to existing Members 9th May 2025, and to new Members 25th June 2025. Responses received indicate that members feel they have either a good or adequate knowledge in most areas pertinent to their role.</p> <p>The Council continues to seek to recruit a second independent member to support the committee in undertaking its role.</p>
7	Update the Committee's Terms of Reference to make explicit, rather than implicit, reference to the Committee's role in reviewing the Council's ethical framework as part of its review work in connection with the Council's wider governance arrangements.	<p><u>Ongoing</u> Head of Audit and Counter Fraud liaising with the recently appointed Assistant Director (Governance) on updating the Committee's Terms of Reference in line with CIPFA's Model Terms of Reference.</p>
8	Seek feedback from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and Council following presentation of the Committee's annual report to full Council.	<p><u>Complete</u> Meeting between the Audit Committee Chair, the Executive Member for Value for Money and Sustainability, the Director of Finance and Head of Audit and Counter Fraud took place on 10th July 2024 to discuss the outcome of the Committee's self-assessment of its own effectiveness for 2023/24. Good feedback on the work of the Committee was received. Next meeting to be arranged following Audit Committee approval of 2024/25 effectiveness review.</p>

- 3.4 Ongoing actions will be taken forward during 2025/26 and their implementation reviewed as part of the Committee's subsequent annual review process. The Committee also continues to seek to appoint a second suitably qualified and experienced second independent member to support the work of the Committee.

4 Options

- 4.1 There are two options as follows:
- a) Accept the Annual Report of the Audit Committee.
 - b) Reject the Annual Report of the Audit Committee and request an alternative style of report.

Preferred Option

Option (a) at 4.1 is the preferred option, that the proposed Annual Report of the Audit Committee is accepted by Council.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 There has been consultation with the Audit Committee on the preparation of this report.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

7 Legal Services Comments

- 7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

8 Co-operative Agenda

- 8.1 The Annual Report of the Audit Committee has been prepared to support the Council in its delivery of the cooperative agenda.

9 Human Resources Comments

- 9.1 There are no specific human resources implications.

10 Risk Assessments

- 10.1 The Council is required to prepare an Annual Report on the operation of its Audit Committee. The report does not identify any specific risks to identify to full Council.

11 IT Implications

- 11.1 There are no specific IT implications.

12 Property Implications

- 12.1 There are no specific property implications.

13 Procurement Implications

- 13.1 There are no specific procurement implications.

14 Environmental and Health & Safety Implications

14.1 There are no specific Environmental and Health & Safety Implications.

15 Equality, community cohesion and crime implications

15.1 There is no specific equality, community cohesion and crime implications.

16 Equality Impact Assessment Completed?

16.1 N/A.

17 Key Decision

17.1 No.

18 Key Decision Reference

18.1 N/A

19 Background Papers

19.1 The following is a list of background papers on which this report is based in accordance with the requirements of Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. It does not include documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information as defined by the Act:

Background papers are shown as the Annexes to this report.

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20 Appendices

Annex 1 - Self-assessment of good practice

Annex 2 - Self -assessment of effectiveness

Annex 3 - Member Knowledge and Skills questionnaire – aggregated results

Annex 1 - Self-assessment of good practice

This annex provides a high-level review that incorporates the key principles set out in CIPFA's Position Statement and this publication. Where an audit committee has a high degree of performance against the good practice principles, it is an indicator that the committee is soundly based and has in place a knowledgeable membership. These are the essential factors in developing an effective audit committee. A regular self-assessment should be used to support the planning of the audit committee work programme and training plans. It will also inform the annual report.

Good practice questions	Does not comply	Partially complies and extent of improvement needed			Fully complies
	Major	Significant	Moderate	Minor	None
Scoring of answers	0	1	2	3	5
Audit committee purpose and governance					
1 Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee that is not combined with other functions (e.g. standards, ethics, scrutiny)?					5
2 Does the audit committee report directly to the governing body (PCC and chief constable/full council/full fire authority, etc)?					5
3 Has the committee maintained its advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers?					5
4 Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's 2022 Position Statement?					5
5 Do all those charged with governance and in leadership roles have a good understanding of the role and purpose of the committee?					5

6 Does the audit committee escalate issues and concerns promptly to those in governance and leadership roles?					5
7 Does the governing body hold the audit committee to account for its performance at least annually?					5
8 Does the committee publish an annual report in accordance with the 2022 guidance, including:					5
• compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement 2022.					5
• results of the annual evaluation, development work undertaken and planned improvements					5
• how it has fulfilled its terms of reference and the key issues escalated in the year?					5
Functions of the committee					
9 Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement as follows?					
Governance arrangements					5
Risk management arrangements					5
Internal control arrangements, including: • financial management • value for money • ethics and standards • counter fraud and corruption				3	
Annual governance statement					5
Financial reporting					5
Assurance framework					5
Internal audit					5
External audit					5
10 Over the last year, has adequate consideration been given to all core areas?					5
11 Over the last year, has the committee only considered agenda items that align with its core functions or selected wider functions, as set out in the 2022 guidance?					5

12 Has the committee met privately with the external auditors and head of internal audit in the last year?					5
Membership and support					
13 Has the committee been established in accordance with the 2022 guidance as follows?					
• Separation from executive					5
• A size that is not unwieldy and avoids use of substitutes					5
• Inclusion of lay/co-opted independent members in accordance with legislation or CIPFA's recommendation					5
14 Have all committee members been appointed or selected to ensure a committee membership that is knowledgeable and skilled?			2		
15 Has an evaluation of knowledge, skills and the training needs of the chair and committee members been carried out within the last two years?					5
16 Have regular training and support arrangements been put in place covering the areas set out in the 2022 guidance?					5
17 Across the committee membership, is there a satisfactory level of knowledge, as set out in the 2022 guidance?					5
18 Is adequate secretariat and administrative support provided to the committee?					5
19 Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the CFO?					5
Effectiveness of the committee					

20 Has the committee obtained positive feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?					5
21 Are meetings well chaired, ensuring key agenda items are addressed with a focus on improvement?					5
22 Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?				3	
23 Has the committee maintained a non-political approach to discussions throughout?					5
24 Does the committee engage with a wide range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?					5
25 Does the committee make recommendations for the improvement of governance, risk and control arrangements?					5
26 Do audit committee recommendations have traction with those in leadership roles?					5
27 Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?					5
28 Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?					5
29 Has this assessment been undertaken collaboratively with the audit committee members?					5
Sub totals	0	0	2	6	185

Total score is 193 out of a maximum of 200, with areas of potential development identified. The proposed actions to address these areas where less than full compliance were identified from the 2023/24 assessment. Actions taken to date, and those potential development areas remaining in 2024/25, are shown in the table below:

Question	Level of Compliance	Action to reach full compliance
<p>9 Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement as follows?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethics and standards 	3	Action ongoing – Update the Committee's Terms of Reference to make explicit, rather than implicit, reference to the Committee's role in reviewing the Council's ethical framework as part of its review work in connection with the Council's wider governance arrangements.
<p>14 Have all committee members been appointed or selected to ensure a committee membership that is knowledgeable and skilled?</p>	2	<p>Committee Membership is not based solely on skills and knowledge, political balance of the Committee is a consideration.</p> <p>Action completed – A short, plain English induction sheet outlining the role and functions of the Committee based on the Committee's Terms of Reference has been completed and distributed to Members.</p> <p>Action ongoing – see Members Skills and Knowledge Assessment and Training responses below.</p> <p>Action Ongoing – The Council continues to seek to recruit a second independent member to support the committee in undertaking its role.</p>
<p>15 Has an evaluation of knowledge, skills and the training needs of the chair and committee members been carried out within the last two years?</p>	5	Action completed – A self-assessment of Member skills and knowledge based on the Committee's Terms of Reference has been circulated and completed
<p>17 Across the committee membership, is there a satisfactory level of knowledge, as set out in the 2022 guidance?</p>	5	Action ongoing - The self-assessment of Member skills and knowledge based on the Committee's Terms of Reference found Members responded positively and reported either adequate or good knowledge in most areas. Feedback will be utilised to identify further additional Member training and development needs.

		Action Ongoing – The Council continues to seek to recruit a second independent member to support the committee in undertaking its role.
20 Has the committee obtained positive feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?	5	Action completed – Committee Chair met with Cabinet Portfolio Holder following 2023/24 assessment and feedback from Portfolio Holder was positive. Further meeting to be arranged following Member approval of the 2024/25 assessment.
22 Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?	3	No proposed action – Member comments and questions on all aspects of Committee business are actively sought and welcomed at each meeting and levels of engagement have been good throughout 2024/25. Inevitably some Members contribute more frequently than others.

Annex 2 – Self-evaluation of effectiveness

Areas where the audit committee can have impact by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can demonstrate its impact	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council's Audit Committee as to how the Committee demonstrates its impact	Key indicators of effective arrangements	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council Audit Committee of its strengths, weaknesses and proposed actions
<p>Promoting the principles of good governance and their application to decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the development of a local code of governance. • Providing a robust review of the AGS and the assurances underpinning it. • Supporting reviews/audits of governance arrangements. • Participating in self-assessments of governance arrangements. • Working with partner audit committees to review governance arrangements in partnerships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council has a local code of corporate governance presented to the audit committee in June 2024. • The AGS and in-year updates (November 2024) are regularly reported to the audit committee. • Annual audit plan 2024/25 contained reviews of risk management and standards of conduct, and the corporate risk register. review of the compilation of the AGS is also planned for 2025/26. • The council's ongoing self-assessment of its partnership governance arrangements has previously been reported to the committee. Miocare financial systems are audited each year and a review of OTC is planned for 2025/26. • An annual fundamental financial systems review of Miocare is undertaken by the internal audit service and reported to Miocare. • An internal audit review of Oldham Total Care is planned for 2025/26. • Audit committee chair has liaised with the council's external auditors in connection with meeting other chairs across GM. Chair has also 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected members, the leadership team and senior managers all share a good understanding of governance, including the key principles and local arrangements. • Local arrangements for governance have been clearly set out in an up-to-date local code. • The authority's scrutiny arrangements are forward looking and constructive. • Appropriate governance arrangements established for all collaborations and arm's-length arrangements. • The head of internal audit's annual opinion on governance is satisfactory (or similar wording). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structures are generally sound. One weakness with audit committees generally is the length of tenure linked to electoral cycle. • The council has a local code of corporate governance last presented in June 2024. • The council's scrutiny committees have been restructured. • Partnership governance issues were reported to the committee as part of the AGS update report in November 2024. • Annual CAE opinion reported in July 2025 is Limited assurance. Committee to monitor progress against agreed actions throughout 2025/26.

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Contributing to the development of an effective control environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging ownership of the internal control framework by appropriate managers. • Actively monitoring the implementation of recommendations from auditors. • Raising significant concerns over controls with appropriate senior managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation by Oldham Council's Audit Committee as to how the Committee demonstrates its impact received an invitation to join the LGA NW Forum. • During 2024/25 ASC and HR representatives have addressed the Audit Committee during the year in relation to audit review findings. • Recommendation tracker is reported the regular Internal Audit and Counter fraud progress report. • Moving forward into 2025/26 the Committee will receive reports in connection with all audit opinions of Limited assurance or below. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The head of internal audit's annual opinion over internal control is that arrangements are satisfactory. • Assessments against control frameworks such as CIPFA's FM Code have been completed and a high level of compliance identified. • Control frameworks are in place and operating effectively for key control areas – for example, information security or procurement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-evaluation by Oldham Council Audit Committee of its strengths, weaknesses and proposed actions • Annual CAE opinion of Internal Control published in July 2025 is Limited assurance. • Assessment against FM code completed by CFO and presented to Audit Committee January 2022 and September 2023. A high level of compliance was identified. • Control frameworks are in for key control areas. Where these are not currently in place the Council is working towards addressing these areas. • Moving forward into 2025/26 the Committee will receive reports in connection with all audit opinions of Limited assurance or below. • Committee to monitor progress against agreed actions throughout 2025/26.
Supporting the establishment of arrangements for the governance of risk and for effective arrangements to manage risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing risk management arrangements and their effectiveness, e.g. risk management maturity or benchmarking. • Monitoring improvements to risk management. • Reviewing accountability of risk owners for major/strategic risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Corporate Business Planning Process supports the production of the Corporate Risk Register. The Corporate Risk Register is reported regularly to the Audit Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A robust process for managing risk is evidenced by independent assurance from internal audit or external review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IA Review of Corporate Risk register undertaken during 2024/25 received an Adequate assurance opinion.

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<p>Advising on the adequacy of the assurance framework and considering whether assurance is deployed efficiently and effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the adequacy of the leadership team's assurance framework. • Specifying the committee's assurance needs, identifying gaps or overlaps in assurance. • Seeking to streamline assurance gathering and reporting. • Reviewing the effectiveness of assurance providers, e.g. internal audit, risk management, external audit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the 2024/25 The Audit Committee has received reports on the following elements of the Council's assurance framework: the AGS, the Local Code of Corporate Governance, The Annual Report and Opinion, and regular reports on Partnership Governance and Risks. • The Committee has identified its own assurance needs and gaps in assurance and requested reports on all audit reports with a Limited opinion or below. • The Committee receives regular reports from both internal and external audit on progress throughout the year. It also receives the annual report and opinion from the CAE and the external Auditors audit completion report. • FRC Audit Quality and Inspection Report 2022/23 for Mazars LLP found an improvement in the quality rating from the previous year with no audits reviewed requiring significant improvement. • The Committee receives an annual review of the system of Internal Audit. In March 2023 an External Quality Assessment was conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authority's leadership team have defined an appropriate framework of assurance, including core arrangements, major service areas and collaborations and external bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the 2024/25 The Audit Committee has received reports on the following elements of the Council's assurance framework: the AGS, the Local Code of Corporate Governance, The Annual Report and Opinion, and regular reports on Corporate Risks. • Going forward into 2025/26 the Committee will receive reports on results from other assurance providers, including the upcoming CQC inspection of Adult Social Care.

Areas where the audit committee can have impact by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can demonstrate its impact	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council's Audit Committee as to how the Committee demonstrates its impact	Key indicators of effective arrangements	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council Audit Committee of its strengths, weaknesses and proposed actions
Supporting effective external audit, with a focus on high quality and timely audit work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing and supporting external audit arrangements with focus on independence and quality. • Providing good engagement on external audit plans and reports. • Supporting the implementation of audit recommendations. 	<p>by CIPFA and the results reported to the Committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRC Audit Quality and Inspection Report 2022/23 for Mazars LLP found an improvement in the quality rating from the previous year with no audits reviewed requiring significant improvement. • Liaison is good, The Committee met privately with the External Auditor during 2024/25. • External Auditor attends all Audit Committee meetings and provides a regular update and opinion reports to the Committee on their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of liaison between external audit and the authority is satisfactory. • The auditors deliver in accordance with their audit plan, and any amendments are well explained. • An audit of high quality is delivered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison is good, The Committee met privately with the External Auditor during 2024/25. • The External Auditor delivered in line with the external audit backstop arrangements in place for Local Audit as at the end of February 2025. • FRC Audit Quality and Inspection Report 2022/23 for Mazars LLP found an improvement in the quality rating from the previous year with no audits reviewed requiring significant improvement.
Supporting the quality of the internal audit activity, in particular underpinning its organisational independence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the audit charter and functional reporting arrangements. • Assessing the effectiveness of internal audit arrangements, providing constructive challenge and supporting improvements. • Actively supporting the quality assurance and improvement programme of internal audit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Audit Committee reviews the Audit Charter, including reporting arrangements, annually. • The Committee receives an annual review of the system of Internal Audit. In 2023 an External Quality Assessment was conducted by CIPFA which found the service to conform to the PSIAS standards in all areas, including independence and objectivity. Since then the PSIAS and LGAN have been replaced by the GIAS 2024 and LGAN 2024. HIA self-assessment indicates that the service remains in full conformance with the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal audit that is in conformance with PSIAS and LGAN (as evidenced by the most recent external assessment and an annual self-assessment). • The head of internal audit and the organisation operate in accordance with the principles of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee receives an annual review of the system of Internal Audit. In 2023 an External Quality Assessment was conducted by CIPFA which found the service to conform to the PSIAS standards in all areas, including independence and objectivity. Since then the PSIAS and LGAN have been replaced by the GIAS 2024 and LGAN 2024. HIA self-assessment indicates that the service remains in full conformance with the updated standards. • The organisation and HIA operate in accordance with the CIPFA statement.

Areas where the audit committee can have impact by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can demonstrate its impact	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council's Audit Committee as to how the Committee demonstrates its impact	Key indicators of effective arrangements	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council Audit Committee of its strengths, weaknesses and proposed actions
Aiding the achievement of the authority's goals and objectives by helping to ensure appropriate governance, risk, control and assurance arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing how the governance arrangements support the achievement of sustainable outcomes. • Reviewing major projects and programmes to ensure that governance and assurance arrangements are in place. • Reviewing the effectiveness of performance management arrangements. 	<p>updated standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During 2024/25 the Audit Committee has received reports on the following elements of the Council's assurance framework: the AGS, the Local Code of Corporate Governance, The Annual Report and Opinion, and regular reports on Partnership Governance and Risks. • IA Review of Corporate Risk register reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Adequate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspection reports indicate that arrangements are appropriate to support the achievement of service objectives. • The authority's arrangements to review and assess performance are satisfactory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the 2024/25 The Audit Committee has received reports on the following elements of the Council's assurance framework: the AGS, the Local Code of Corporate Governance, The Annual Report and Opinion, and regular reports on Corporate Risks. • IA Review of Corporate Risk register reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Adequate. • IA Review of Corporate Performance Reporting reported in 2025/26 with a Limited assurance opinion. • Committee to monitor progress against agreed actions throughout 2025/26.
Supporting the development of robust arrangements for ensuring value for money.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that assurance on value-for-money arrangements is included in the assurances received by the audit committee. • Considering how performance in value for money is evaluated as part of the AGS. • Following up issues raised by external audit in their value-for-money work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Audit reports on VFM assessment to the Audit Committee. • AGS and updates are regularly reported to the Audit Committee. IA Review of the compilation of the AGS planned for 2025/26. • VFM assessments have been as follows from Forvis Mazars: • 2022/23 – “Based on the above considerations we are satisfied there is not a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements in relation to financial sustainability/governance/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External audit's assessments of arrangements to support best value are satisfactory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VFM assessments have been as follows from Forvis Mazars: • 2022/23 – “Based on the above considerations we are satisfied there is not a significant weakness in the Council's arrangements in relation to financial sustainability/governance/ improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness. • 2023/24 – “We have completed our work in respect of the Council's arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2024 and we have not identified any significant weaknesses in arrangements that have required us to make a recommendation.”

Areas where the audit committee can have impact by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can demonstrate its impact	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council's Audit Committee as to how the Committee demonstrates its impact	Key indicators of effective arrangements	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council Audit Committee of its strengths, weaknesses and proposed actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness. 2023/24 – “We did not identify any significant weaknesses in the Council’s arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.” 		
<p>Helping the authority to implement the values of good governance, including effective arrangements for countering fraud and corruption risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing arrangements against the standards set out in the <i>Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption</i> (CIPFA, 2014). Reviewing fraud risks and the effectiveness of the organisation’s strategy to address those risks. Assessing the effectiveness of ethical governance arrangements for both staff and governors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council’s Counter Fraud, Anti-Bribery Strategy and Counter Fraud Response Plan is presented to the Audit Committee and is written in line with the CIPFA Code. The Council’s Fraud and Loss risk Assessment and the Council’s self-assessment of its performance against the FFCL 2020-25 Checklist are reported to The Audit Committee. The Annual Audit Plan is constructed with the results the FFCL self-assessment in mind. IA Review of Standards of Conduct reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Adequate. IA Review of Recruitment and Discipline reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Inadequate. IA Review of Delegated Decision Reports reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Inadequate. IA Review of Corporate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good ethical standards are maintained by both elected representatives and officers. This is evidenced by robust assurance over culture, ethics and counter fraud arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IA Review of Standards of Conduct reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Adequate. IA Review of Recruitment and Discipline reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Inadequate. IA Review of Delegated Decision Reports reported during 2024/25 with opinion of Inadequate. IA Review of Corporate Performance Management reported in respect of 2024/25 with opinion of Limited. Committee to monitor progress against agreed actions throughout 2025/26.

Areas where the audit committee can have impact by supporting improvement	Examples of how the audit committee can demonstrate its impact	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council's Audit Committee as to how the Committee demonstrates its impact	Key indicators of effective arrangements	Self-evaluation by Oldham Council Audit Committee of its strengths, weaknesses and proposed actions
<p>Promoting effective public reporting to the authority's stakeholders and local community and measures to improve transparency and accountability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with key members/the PCC and chief constable to improve their understanding of the AGS and their contribution to it. Improving how the authority discharges its responsibilities for public reporting – for example, better targeting the audience and use of plain English. Reviewing whether decision making through partnership organisations remains transparent and publicly accessible and encourages greater transparency. Publishing an annual report from the committee. 	<p>Performance Management reported in respect of 2024/25 with opinion of Limited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Committee reports to Audit Committee are reviewed by the Cabinet Member Finance and Corporate Resources and Sustainability, and the AGS itself is signed by both the Leader and CEX. In respect of improving how the Authority discharges its responsibilities for public reporting, Members have, in the past, questioned the need for inclusion of the AGS update report in the private part of the Committee's agendas. The latest AGS update report was presented in the public part of the Committee agenda in November 2024. The Committee received reports on the risks posed other Council by Partnership arrangements with 3rd parties as part of the AGS reporting in the year. The Committee publishes an annual report to full Council on its work for the year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authority meets the statutory deadlines for financial reporting with accounts for audit of an appropriate quality. The external auditor completed the audit of the financial statements with minimal adjustments and an unqualified opinion. The authority has published its financial statements and AGS in accordance with statutory guidelines. The AGS is underpinned by a robust evaluation and is an accurate assessment of the adequacy of governance arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The External Auditor has completed the audit of the 2023/24 financial statements with an unqualified opinion. The authority has published its 2024/25 financial statements and AGS by the statutory deadline. An IA review of the compilation of the AGS is planned to report in 2025/26.

Annex 3 – Member Knowledge and Skills questionnaire – aggregated results

This questionnaire is designed to identify any areas for future training and development needs for Members of the Council’s Audit Committee.

It covers the broad areas of responsibility of the Committee, and key areas of understanding which assist Members in discharging their responsibilities in their role.

Members were asked to self-assess their level of knowledge and understanding in the broad areas below as either Weak, Adequate or Good. There was also space for commentary on Members’ assessment and/or specific areas where Members’ felt they may benefit from greater understanding.

5 responses were received, and the aggregated results are shown in the tables below.

<u>Roles and responsibilities</u>	<u>Weak</u>	<u>Adequate</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Total</u>
The role of the Audit Committee.			5	5
The role of Scrutiny Committees.		2	3	5
The role of External Audit		3	2	5
The role of Internal Audit		1	4	5
The role of the S151 Officer	1	1	3	5

<u>Governance, risk and control</u>	<u>Weak</u>	<u>Adequate</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Total</u>
Corporate Governance and the principles of good governance.		3	2	5
Ethics		2	3	5
Business Planning and Risk Management		3	2	5
Value for Money		3	2	5
Anti-fraud and Corruption		2	3	5

<u>Financial and Governance reporting</u>	<u>Weak</u>	<u>Adequate</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Total</u>
The Council's Annual Governance Statement.		4	1	5
The Council's Financial Statements.		3	2	5
Treasury Management		3	2	5

