

# Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee

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## Committee Charter



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## Document Control

Original Publication Date: November 2009			
Revision	Audit & Risk Committee Meeting Date	Council Resolution	Council Meeting Date
0	29 September 2009	09/184	16 November 2009
1	09 October 2014	15/038	23 February 2015
2	25 February 2016	16/067	29 March 2016
3	6 April 2017	17/122	24 April 2017
4	14 December 2017	Not Adopted	29 January 2018
5	9 February 2018	18/056	26 February 2018
6	March 2022	General Manager approval under delegation	March 2022
7	16 May 2024	24/161	11 June 2024
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## 1 Introduction

Wagga Wagga City Council (Council) has established an Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee in compliance with section 428A of *the Local Government Act 1993*, the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021* and the Office of Local Government'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.

This "Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee Charter" is adopted by the Council, to define the role of the Council's Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee. The Act states the following in respect of Audit, Risk and Improvement Committees:

- A council must appoint an Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee
- The Committee must keep under review 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
  - Any other matters prescribed by the regulations.
- The Committee is also able to provide information to the council for the purpose of improving the council's performance of its functions.

The Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee is a committee of Council and plays an important role providing oversight of governance, risk management, compliance and control practices. The Committee also serves to provide confidence in the integrity of practices to enable achievement of Wagga Wagga City Council's strategic objectives.

The Committee shall be known as "the Council of the City of Wagga Wagga Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee" (hereinafter referred to as "the Committee").

This Charter provides the framework for performance of Committee activities.

## 2 Mandate

The Committee was established by Council Resolution No 07/008.5 on February 2007 and reconfirmed by Council resolution 22/0050 on 14 February 2022 and has the authority of Council to carry out the activities prescribed in this Charter.

## 3 Objective

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

## 4 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 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. The Committee will provide independent advice to the Council that is informed by the Council's internal audit and risk management activities and information and advice provided by 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 internal audit function and act as a mechanism for internal audit to report to the governing body and the General Manager on matters affecting the performance of the internal audit function.

## 5 Authority

The authority of the Committee to perform its role is established within the scope of this Charter. In discharging its responsibilities, the Committee shall have no executive powers, delegated financial responsibility or management functions.

Council authorises the Committee, for the purposes of exercising its responsibilities, to:

- access any information it needs from the Council through the General Manager or delegated staff member, while ensuring that the demands placed on Council are minimised and that existing information is utilised to obtain the necessary level of assurance as far as practicable.
- use any Council resources it needs, with the understanding that it will exercise prudence and reasonableness in its demands to ensure responsible allocation and utilisation of resources.
- have direct and unrestricted access to the General Manager and senior management of the Council, as necessary for fulfilling their oversight responsibilities.
- seek the General Manager's permission to meet with any other Council staff member or contractor.
- discuss any matters with the external auditor or other external parties.
- request the attendance of any employee at committee meetings through the General Manager, and
- obtain external legal or other professional advice in line with Council's procurement policies and legal service procedure.

Information and documents pertaining to the Committee are confidential and are not to be made publicly available. The Committee may only release Council information to external parties that are assisting the Committee to fulfil its responsibilities with the approval of the General Manager, except where it is being provided to an external investigative or oversight agency for the purpose of informing that agency of a matter that may warrant its attention.

## 6 Composition and Tenure

The Committee consists of an independent Chair and two independent members who have voting rights and one non-voting Councillor 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.

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, 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, the environment in which the Council operates, and the contribution that the Committee makes to the Council. At least one member of the Committee must have accounting or related financial management experience with an understanding of accounting and auditing standards in a local government environment. All members should have sufficient understanding of the Council's financial reporting responsibilities to be able to contribute to the Committee's consideration of the Council's annual financial statements.

## 7 Role

The Committee supports Council by:

- Reviewing effectiveness of governance, risk management, compliance and control.
- Reviewing the financial statements and performance reporting.
- Promoting improved economy, efficiency, effectiveness and ethics.
- Reviewing reliability of management information.
- Monitoring and evaluating internal audit performance.
- Monitoring the independence and effectiveness of external audit.
- Reviewing effectiveness of fraud control measures.
- Monitoring compliance with laws, regulations, standards and good practice.

This requires Committee monitoring and oversight to encompass the broad range of functions and activities related to governance and assurance including:

- Governance structures and processes.
- Risk management structures and processes.
- Control activities.
- Financial management, accounting policies, financial statements and annual reporting.
- External audit.
- Internal audit.
- Compliance.
- Implementation of audit and other review recommendations.
- Ethics and organisation culture.
- External accountability.
- Fraud and corruption control.
- Business continuity management including ICT disaster recovery arrangements.
- Security including physical security, cybersecurity and ICT security.
- Legal issues.
- Complaint management.
- Organisation performance and management reporting.
- Work health safety.
- Environmental management.
- Major projects and business initiatives.
- Regulator activities.
- Response to significant government enquiries such as Royal Commissions.

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

## 8 Responsibilities of Members

### 8.1 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
- have the personal courage to raise and deal with tough issues, express opinions frankly, ask questions that go to the fundamental core of the issue and pursue independent lines of inquiry
- maintain effective working relationships with the Council
- have strong leadership qualities (Chair)
- lead effective committee meetings (Chair), and
- oversee the Council's internal audit function (Chair).

### 8.2 Councillor Member

To preserve the independence of the Committee, the Councillor 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 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.

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 member of the Committee must conduct themselves in a non-partisan and professional manner. The Councillor 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 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, that the Councillor member be removed from membership of the Committee. Where the Council does not agree to the Committee Chair's recommendation, the Council must give reasons for its decision in writing to the Chair.

### 8.3 Conduct

Councillors, Council staff and members of Council Committees must comply with the applicable provisions of Council's Code of Conduct in carrying out the functions as Council officials. It is the personal responsibility of Council officials to comply with the standards in the Code of Conduct and regularly review their personal circumstances with this in mind.

Committee members must maintain the integrity and security of confidential documents or information in their possession, or for which they are responsible.

Complaints alleging breaches of the Council's code of conduct by an independent committee member are to be dealt with in accordance with the Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW.

## **8.4 Conflicts of interest**

Once a year, committee members must provide written declarations to the Council stating that they do not have any conflicts of interest that would preclude them from being members of the Committee. Independent committee members are 'designated persons' for the purposes of the Council'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.

All conflicts of interest will be considered in line with the Code of Conduct. A register of interests will be maintained for the Committee Chair and members to demonstrate transparency and as a safeguard against conflict of interest.

## **8.5 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 AS/NZS ISO 31000:2018, where applicable.

## **9 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. 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 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.

## **10 Assurance Reporting**

The Committee must regularly report to the Council 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 or the achievement of the Council's goals and objectives.

The Committee will provide an update to the governing body and the General Manager of its activities and opinions after every committee meeting.

The Committee will provide an annual assessment to the governing body and the General Manager on the Committee's work and its opinion on how the Council 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.

The Committee may at any time report to the governing body or the General Manager on any other matter it deems of sufficient importance to warrant their attention. The Mayor 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 are not entitled to request or receive information from the Committee.

## **11 Administrative Arrangements**

### **11.1 Meetings**

The Committee will meet at least 4 times per year, including a special meeting to review the Council'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 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.

Council in consultation with 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 and the Chief Audit Executive 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 Committee is supported by non-voting advisers / observers comprising:

- General Manager
- Chief Audit Executive
- Chief Financial Officer
- Manager Corporate Governance and Performance

The Mayor is an ex-officio of the Committee and Councillors not serving on the Committee may attend Committee meetings as observers and to contribute insights to assist Committee deliberations.

Should The 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 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 Chief Audit Executive and the Council's external auditor at least once each year.



## **11.2 Selection of Independent members**

Selection of Independent Members of the Committee shall be made in accordance with Council's Appointment of Organisation Community and Individual Citizen Members to Council Committees Policy (POL 117).

## **11.3 Committee member induction**

New members will receive relevant information and briefings on their appointment to assist them to meet their committee responsibilities.

## **11.4 Conference, Training and Travel Arrangements**

At the request of the General Manager, independent members of the Committee may be required to attend conferences or training to support their role.

Committee members will be nominated and authorised to attend conferences and training:

- Through a resolution of the Committee endorsed by Council or
- The Mayor (or Deputy Mayor) and General Manager jointly where there is insufficient time for consideration by the Committee and Council

In the event that a committee member authorised to attend a conference is unable to attend, at least two (2) days' notice should be given to the General Manager to enable a substitute delegate to be appointed to attend in his or her place.

Costs associated with training, together with associated travel, accommodation and reasonable incidental expenses will be reimbursed to the Committee member by Council. Travel, accommodation and reasonable costs will be considered in line with the arrangements available to Councillors outlined in Councillor Expenses and Facilities Policy (POL 025).

## **11.5 Dispute resolution**

Members of the Committee and the Council'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 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.

## **11.6 Secretariat**

The General Manager has nominated the Chief Audit Executive to provide secretariat support to the Committee. The secretariat will ensure the agenda for each meeting and business papers are circulated after approval from the Chair at least five working days before the meeting and ensure that minutes of meetings are prepared and maintained. Minutes must be approved by the Chair and circulated within two weeks of the meeting to each member.

## **11.7 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 4 weeks notice to the Chair and the governing body prior to their resignation to allow the Council 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 member on the Committee can be terminated at any time by the governing body by resolution.

### **11.8 Vacation of Office**

The office of an elected, appointed or representative member of the Committee shall become vacant:

- Upon his/her death;
- If she/he becomes bankrupt, applies to take the benefit of any law for the relief of bankrupt or insolvent debtors, compounds with his or her creditors or makes an assignment of his or her remuneration for their benefit;
- If she/he becomes a mentally incapacitated person;
- If he/she resigns his/her membership by notice in writing to the Committee;
- If he/she is absent for three (3) or more consecutive meetings, or 50% or more of meetings held over a rolling 12-month period, without prior approved leave of absence of the Committee;
- If he/she holds any office of profit with the Council;
- If he/she is convicted of any indictable offence or of any summary offence related to dishonesty;
- If he/she is disqualified or dismissed from holding civic office;
- If the Committee is dissolved by the Council;
- If the position is used for any pecuniary interest of the individual; or
- In the event of the Councillor ceasing to be a member of the Council.

Where such person was directly appointed by the Council, the vacancy shall be filled by the Council.

### **11.9 Review arrangements**

The Chair of the Committee will initiate a review of the performance of the Committee annually. The review will be conducted on a self-assessment basis (unless otherwise determined by the Chair), with appropriate input from management and any other relevant stakeholders, as determined by the Chair.

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 Council. Any substantive changes will be referred to Council for consideration.

# Schedule 1: Audit, Risk & Improvement Committee Responsibilities

## Audit

### Internal Audit

- Provide overall strategic oversight of internal audit activities
- Act as a forum for communication between the governing body, General Manager, senior management, the internal audit function and external audit
- Review and advise the Council:
  - on whether the Council is providing the resources necessary to successfully deliver the internal audit function
  - if the Council is complying with internal audit requirements, including conformance with the International Professional Practices Framework
  - if the Council's internal audit charter is appropriate and whether the internal audit policies and procedures and audit/risk methodologies used by the Council are suitable
  - of the strategic four-year 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 these corrective actions
  - on the appointment of the head of the internal audit function and external providers, and
  - if the internal audit function is structured appropriately and has sufficient skills and expertise to meet its responsibilities

### External Audit

- Act as a forum for communication between the governing body, General Manager, senior management, the internal audit function and external audit
- 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

## Risk Management

Review and advise the Council:

- if the Council's has in place a current and appropriate risk management framework that is consistent with the Australian risk management standard
- whether the Council is providing the resources necessary to successfully implement its risk management framework
- 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 for major projects or undertakings
- 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 which is committed to ethical and lawful behaviour
- if there is a positive risk culture within the Council and strong leadership that supports effective risk management
- of the adequacy of staff training and induction in risk management
- how the Council's risk management approach impacts on the Council's insurance arrangements
- of the effectiveness of 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 Controls

Review and advise the Council:

- whether the Council'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 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 monitoring and review of controls is sufficient, and
- if internal and external audit recommendations to correct internal control weaknesses are implemented appropriately

## Compliance

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

- if the Council has appropriately considered legal and compliance risks as part of the Council's risk

management framework

- how the Council manages its compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policies, procedures, codes, and contractual arrangements, and
- whether appropriate processes are in place to assess compliance.

## **Fraud and Corruption**

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

## **Financial Management**

Review and advise the Council:

- if 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
- if the Council's financial management processes are adequate
- the adequacy of cash management policies and procedures
- if there are adequate controls over financial processes, for example:
  - appropriate authorisation and approval of payments and transactions
  - adequate segregation of duties
  - timely reconciliation of accounts and balances
  - review of unusual and high value purchases
- if policies and procedures for management review and consideration of the financial position and performance of the Council are adequate
- if the Council's grants and tied funding policies and procedures are sound.

## **Governance**

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

- decision-making processes
- implementation of governance policies and procedures
- reporting lines and accountability
- assignment of key 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:

- of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council'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 is successfully implementing and achieving its IP&R objectives and strategies.

## Service Reviews and Business Improvement

- Act as a forum for communication and monitoring of any audits conducted by external bodies and the implementation of corrective actions (for example, NSW government agencies, Commonwealth government agencies, insurance bodies)
- Review and advise the Council:
  - If 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

Review and advise the Council:

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