

Audit and Assurance Committee Annual Report 2017/18

Introduction

The Audit and Assurance Committee is established under Board delegation with approved terms of reference aligned with the *Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook*, published by the Department of Health.

The Audit and Assurance Committee was chaired by Ray Dawson, a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants with extensive financial expertise. The Committee membership comprises wholly Non-executive directors with executives and others in attendance. Attendance at meetings is detailed below:

Ray Dawson	7/7
Graham Ward	6/7
Tim Reddish	6/7

According to the Terms of Reference, the Chief Executive and other Executive Directors are invited to attend the Audit and Assurance Committee meeting as and when required, but particularly when the Audit and Assurance Committee is discussing areas of risk or operation that are the responsibility of that Director.

Principal review areas

This annual report is divided into five sections reflecting the five key duties of the Committee as set out in the terms of reference.

1. Governance and internal control

The Committee has reviewed relevant disclosure statements, in particular the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) together with the Head of Internal Audit Opinion, External Audit opinions (Financial and Quality Accounts) and other appropriate independent assurances and consider that the AGS is consistent with the Committee's view on the Trust's system of internal control. Accordingly the Committee supports Board approval of the AGS.

The Committee has received regular reports on Information Governance and members were pleased to note that IG Toolkit compliance had been maintained at the level of 'Green – Satisfactory'.

2. Internal audit

Throughout the year the Committee has worked effectively with internal audit to strengthen the Trust's internal control processes. The Committee has also in year:

- Reviewed and approved the internal audit operational plan and more detailed programme of work and considers the provision of the internal audit service sufficient in supporting the Committee in fulfilling its role
- Considered the major findings of internal audit and are assured that the Head of Internal Audit Opinion (which was issued with a Significant Assurance rating) and AGS reflect any significant internal control issues
- Invited lead directors of any internal audit reports issued with Limited Assurance to attend Committee meetings, present the report and provide assurance that recommendations will be implemented within agreed timescales
- Periodically reviewed outstanding audit recommendations, and noted that the improvement evident in the previous year has been maintained. Committee members are assured that a satisfactory progress monitoring process is in place.

3. Counter Fraud Service

The Committee received regular progress reports on activity conducted as part of the agreed Counter Fraud Work Plan, including:

- Provider Standards Self Review Tool
- Quality Assurance Programme – Qualitative Assessment
- Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Risk Assessment
- Annual Report
- Updates on investigations

4. External audit

The Committee reviewed and agreed external audit's annual plan. The Committee reviews and comments on reports prepared by external audit, and welcomes their advice on areas of specific expertise.

Committee members supported the selection process and appointment of PricewaterhouseCoopers as the Trust's external auditors for a period of three years, with options to extend for a further one or two years.

5. Management

The Committee has continually challenged the assurance process when appropriate and has requested and received assurance reports from Trust management and various other sources both internally and externally throughout the year. This process has also included calling managers to account when considered necessary to obtain relevant assurance.

The Committee also examines performance to ensure that the assurance mechanism within the Trust is fully effective and that a robust process is in place to ensure that actions falling out of external reviews are implemented and monitored by the Committee.

6. Annual Report and Accounts

The Committee received schedules and assurance of processes in place to satisfactorily produce the Annual Report, Quality Accounts and Financial Accounts.

As part of the year end process and approval of the accounts for the Board for ratification, the Committee reviewed and took into account:

- Head of Internal Audit Opinion on both financial and non-financial matters
- External audit opinion on the accounts and value for money opinion
- Letter of Representation to external audit
- Going concern / principal risks and uncertainties paper, to assure themselves of the effective financial and non-financial propriety of the Trust.

Other matters worthy of note

Cost Control and Financial Governance reviews

Throughout the year the Committee received reports on Single Tender Waivers, Losses and Special Payments, gaining assurance on value for money and probity within controls.

Governance documents

Amendments to the Trust's Standing Financial Instructions and Scheme of Delegation, enhancing operational effectiveness and controls, were approved for submission to the Board.

Conduct and behaviour policies

Regular reports of the Register of Interests were received and Committee members noted the improvement in compliance and reporting during the year.

Throughout the year the Committee received reports on Whistle Blowing and Bribery Act compliance.

Other areas of assurance

The Committee received reports on Data Quality, which provided an update on the scope of work completed by the Data Quality Team.

A report on the 'FM Providers – Business Continuity and Risk' described a due diligence process on the viability of FM service providers following the collapse of Carillion.

Reports were received on the Clinical Audit Planning Process and the Board Assurance Framework.

Review of the effectiveness and impact of the Audit and Assurance Committee

The Committee has been active during the year in carrying out its duty in providing the Board with assurance that effective internal control arrangements are in place.

A Committee Effectiveness Self-assessment review was completed by the Non-Executive members of the Audit and Assurance Committee, from which no significant issues were identified.

Cost/benefit analysis

It is not possible to accurately quantify the benefits of the work of the Committee during the year as it is impossible to determine the financial impact of risks mitigated and costs avoided, and the proportion of these that could be apportioned to the Committee work. However the current and future costs associated with loss of reputation have been mitigated as a result of the work performed by the Committee.

Conclusion

The Committee is of the opinion that this annual report is consistent with the draft AGS, Head of Internal Audit Opinion and the external audit review and there are no matters that the Committee is aware of at this time that have not been disclosed appropriately.

The Committee has discharged its responsibilities for scrutinising the risks and controls which affect all aspects of the organisation's business.

Graham Ward

Audit and Assurance Committee Chair

May 2018