

Terms of reference

- Audit Committee •
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AFERIAN PLC AUDIT COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE ADOPTED BY THE BOARD SEPTEMBER 2020

1 MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 The board of directors of the company (the “**Board**”) has resolved to establish a committee of the Board to be known as the Audit Committee. The Audit Committee shall make recommendations to the Board which retains the right of final decision.
- 1.2 Membership of the Audit Committee shall consist of at least two members. Members of the Audit Committee shall be appointed by the Board, on the recommendation of the Nomination Committee in consultation with the chairman of the Audit Committee.
- 1.3 All members of the Audit Committee shall be independent non-executive directors at least one of whom shall have recent and relevant financial experience ideally with a professional qualification from one of the professional accountancy bodies. C.3.1 of the UK Corporate Governance Code published by the Financial Reporting Committee (the “**Code**”) provides that in small companies the company chairman may be a member of, but not chair, the Audit Committee provided (s)he was independent on appointment as chairman.
- 1.4 Only members of the Audit Committee have the right to attend committee meetings. However, the external auditor and finance director will be invited to attend meetings of the Audit Committee on a regular basis and other non-members may be invited to attend all or part of any meeting as and when appropriate and necessary.
- 1.5 The Board shall appoint the chairman of the Audit Committee. In the absence of the Audit Committee chairman and/or an appointed deputy, the remaining members shall elect one of themselves to chair the meeting.

2 SECRETARY

The company secretary, or his or her nominee, shall act as the secretary of the Audit Committee and will ensure that the Audit Committee receives information and papers in a timely manner to enable full and proper consideration to be given to issues.

3 QUORUM

The quorum necessary for the transaction of business shall be two members.

4 FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

- 4.1 The Audit Committee shall meet at least three times a year at appropriate intervals in the financial reporting and audit cycle and otherwise as required.
- 4.2 Outside of the formal meeting programme, the Audit Committee chairman will maintain a dialogue with key individuals involved in the company’s governance, including the Board chairman, the chief executive, the finance director, the external audit lead partner and the head of internal audit.

5 NOTICE OF MEETINGS

- 5.1 Meetings of the Audit Committee shall be convened by the secretary at the request of any of its members or at the request of the external audit lead partner or head of internal auditor if they consider it necessary.

5.2 Unless otherwise agreed, notice of each meeting confirming the venue, time and date together with an agenda of items to be discussed, shall be forwarded to each member of the Audit Committee, any other person required to attend and all other non-executive directors, no later than five working days before the date of the meeting. Supporting papers shall be sent to the Audit Committee members and to other attendees as appropriate, at the same time.

6 **MINUTES OF MEETINGS**

6.1 The secretary shall minute the proceedings and decisions of all Audit Committee meetings, including recording the names of those present and in attendance.

6.2 Draft minutes of Audit Committee meetings shall be circulated promptly to all members of the Audit Committee. Once approved, minutes should be circulated to all other members of the Board unless it would be inappropriate to do so in the opinion of the Audit Committee chairman.

7 **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Audit Committee chairman should attend the company's annual general meeting to answer shareholder questions on the Audit Committee activities.

8 **DUTIES**

The Audit Committee should carry out the duties below.

8.1 **Financial reporting**

8.1.1 The Audit Committee shall monitor the integrity of the financial statements of the company, including its annual and half yearly reports, interim management statements, and any other formal announcement relating to its financial performance, reviewing and reporting to the Board on significant financial reporting issues and judgements which they contain having regard to matters communicated to it by the auditor.

8.1.2 In particular, the Audit Committee shall review and challenge where necessary:

- (a) the consistency of, and any changes to, significant accounting policies both on a year on year basis and across the company/group;
- (b) the methods used to account for significant or unusual transactions where different approaches are possible;
- (c) any significant adjustments resulting from the audit;
- (d) the going concern assumption;
- (e) whether the company has followed applicable regulatory and legal requirements, and appropriate accounting standards and made appropriate estimates and judgements, taking into account the views of the external auditor;
- (f) the clarity and completeness of disclosure in the company's financial reports and the context in which statements are made; and
- (g) all material information presented with the financial statements, such as the business review and the corporate governance statements relating to the audit and to risk management.

8.1.3 Where the Audit Committee is not satisfied with any aspect of the proposed financial reporting by the company, it shall report its views to the Board.

8.2 **Narrative reporting**

Where requested by the Board, the Audit Committee should review the content of the annual report and accounts and advise the Board on whether, taken as a whole, it is fair, balanced and understandable and provides the information necessary for shareholders to assess the company's performance, business model and strategy.

8.3 **Internal controls and risk management systems**

The Audit Committee shall:

- (a) keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of the company's internal financial controls and internal control and risk management systems; and
- (b) review and approve the statements to be included in the annual report concerning internal controls and risk management.

8.4 **Compliance whistleblowing and fraud**

The Audit Committee shall:

- (a) review the adequacy and security of the company's arrangements for its employees and contractors to raise concerns, in confidence, about possible wrongdoing in financial reporting or other matters. The Audit Committee shall ensure that these arrangements allow proportionate and independent investigation of such matters and appropriate following up action;
- (b) review the company's procedures for detecting fraud;
- (c) review the company's systems and controls for the prevention of bribery and receive reports on non-compliance;
- (d) review the adequacy and effectiveness of the company's anti-money laundering systems and controls; and
- (e) keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of the company's compliance function.

8.5 **Internal audit**

The Audit Committee shall review the need for an internal audit function. Should an internal audit function be required the Audit Committee shall:

- (a) approve the appointment or termination of appointment of the head of internal audit;
- (b) review and approve the charter of the internal audit function including the lines of reporting and its independence, and ensure the function has the necessary resources and access to information to enable it to fulfil its mandate, and is equipped to perform in accordance with appropriate professional standards for internal auditors;
- (c) ensure the internal auditor has direct access to the chairman of the Board and to the Audit Committee chairman and is accountable to the Audit Committee;

- (d) review and assess the annual internal audit work plan;
- (e) receive a report on the results of the internal auditor's work on a periodic basis;
- (f) review and monitor management's responsiveness to the internal auditor's findings and recommendations;
- (g) meet with the head of internal audit at least once a year without the presence of management; and
- (h) monitor and review the effectiveness of the company's internal audit function in the context of the company's overall risk management system.

8.6 External Audit

8.6.1 The Audit Committee shall:

- (a) consider and make recommendations to the Board, to be put to shareholders for approval at the company's annual general meeting, in relation to the appointment, re appointment and removal of the company's external auditor;
- (b) ensure that at least once every ten years the audit services contract is put out to tender to enable the Audit Committee to compare the quality and effectiveness of the services provided by the incumbent auditor with those of other audit firms; and in respect of such tender oversee the selection process and ensure that all tendering firms have such access as is necessary to information and individuals during the duration of the tendering process;
- (c) if an auditor resigns, investigate the issues leading to this and decide whether any action is required;
- (d) oversee the relationship with the external auditor including (but not limited to):
 - (i) recommendations on their remuneration, including both fees for audit and non-audit services, and that the level of fees is appropriate to enable an effective and high quality audit to be conducted;
 - (ii) approval of their terms of engagement, including any engagement letter issued at the start of each audit and the scope of the audit;
 - (iii) assessing annually their independence and objectivity taking into account relevant professional and regulatory requirements and the relationship with the auditor as a whole, including the provision of any non-audit services;
 - (iv) satisfying itself that there are no relationships (such as family, employment, investment, financial or business) between the auditor and the company (other than in the ordinary course of business) which could adversely affect the auditor's independence and objectivity;
 - (v) agreeing with the Board a policy on the employment of former employees of the company's auditor, and monitoring the implementation of this policy;
 - (vi) monitoring the auditor's compliance with relevant ethical and professional guidance on the rotation of audit partner, the level of fees

paid by the company compared to the overall fee income of the firm, office and partner and other related requirements;

- (vii) assessing annually the qualifications, expertise and resources of the auditor and the effectiveness of the audit process, which shall include a report from the external auditor on their own internal quality procedures;
 - (viii) seeking to ensure co-ordination with the activities of the internal audit function; and
 - (ix) evaluating the risks to the quality and effectiveness of the financial reporting process and consideration of the need to include the risk of the withdrawal of their auditor from the market in that evaluation;
- (e) meet regularly with the external auditor (including once at the planning stage before the audit and once after the audit at the reporting stage) and at least once a year, without management being present, to discuss the auditor's remit and any issues arising from the audit;
 - (f) review and approve the annual audit plan and ensure that it is consistent with the scope of the audit engagement, having regard to the seniority, expertise and experience of the audit team; and
 - (g) review the findings of the audit with the external auditor. This shall include but not be limited, to the following:
 - (i) a discussion of any major issues which arose during the audit;
 - (ii) key accounting and audit judgements;
 - (iii) levels of errors identified during the audit; and
 - (iv) the effectiveness of the audit process.

8.6.2 The Audit Committee shall also:

- (a) review any representation letter(s) requested by the external auditor before they are signed by management;
- (b) review the management letter and management's response to the auditor's findings and recommendations; and
- (c) develop and implement policy on the supply of non-audit services by the external auditor to avoid any threat to auditor objectivity and independence, taking into account any relevant ethical guidance on the matter.

9 REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES

9.1 The Audit Committee chairman shall report formally to the Board on its proceedings after each meeting on all matters within its duties and responsibilities and shall also formally report to the Board on how it has discharged its responsibilities. This report shall include:

- (a) the significant issues that it considered in relation to the financial statements (required under paragraph 8.1.1) and how these were addressed;

- (b) its assessment of the effectiveness of the external audit process (required under paragraph 8.6.1(d)(vii)) and its recommendation on the appointment or reappointment of the external auditor; and
 - (c) any other issues on which the Board has requested the Audit Committee's opinion.
- 9.2 The Audit Committee shall make whatever recommendations to the Board it deems appropriate on any area within its remit where action or improvements is needed.
- 9.3 The Audit Committee shall compile a report on its activities to be included in the company's annual report. The report should include an explanation of how the Audit Committee has addressed the effectiveness of the external audit process; the significant issues that the Audit Committee considered in relation to the financial statements and how these issues were addressed, having regard to matters communicated to it by the auditor; and all other information requirements set out in the Code.
- 9.4 In compiling the reports referred to in paragraph 8.1 (*Financial reporting*) and paragraph 8.3 (*Internal controls and risk management systems*), the Audit Committee should exercise judgment in deciding which of the issues it considers in relation to the financial statements are significant, but should include at least those matters that have informed the Board's assessment of whether the company is a going concern. The report to shareholders need not repeat information disclosed elsewhere in the annual report and accounts, but could provide cross-references to that information.

10 **OTHER MATTERS**

The Audit Committee shall:

- (a) enquire into illegal, questionable or unethical practices or activities;
- (b) have access to sufficient resources in order to carry out its duties, including access to the company secretary for assistance as required;
- (c) be provided with appropriate and timely training, both in the form of an induction programme for new members and on an on-going basis for all members;
- (d) give due consideration to laws and regulations, the provisions of the Code and the requirements of the UK Listing Authority's Listing, Prospectus and Disclosure and Transparency Rules, the AIM Rules for Companies and any other applicable rules, as appropriate;
- (e) be responsible for co-ordination of the internal and external auditors;
- (f) oversee any investigation of activities which are within its terms of reference;
- (g) work and liaise as necessary with all other Board committees; and
- (h) arrange for periodic reviews of its own performance and, at least annually, review its constitution and terms of reference to ensure it is operating at maximum effectiveness and recommend any changes it considers necessary to the Board.

11 **AUTHORITY**

The Audit Committee is authorised to:

- (a) seek any information it requires from any employee of the company in order to perform its duties;
- (b) obtain, at the company's expense, independent legal, accounting or other professional advice on any matter it believes it necessary to do so;
- (c) call any employee to be questioned at a meeting of the Audit Committee as and when required; and
- (d) have the right to publish in the company's annual report, details of any issues that cannot be resolved between the Audit Committee and the Board.