



**COUNTRYWIDE PLC AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE
TERMS OF REFERENCE**



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The following are the terms of reference of the audit and risk committee (the “**committee**”) of Countrywide plc (the “**company**”) and its subsidiaries in the Countrywide Group (the “**group**”).

1. Membership

- 1.1 The committee shall comprise an independent non-executive chair (the “**committee chair**”) and at least two other non-executive directors. Members of the committee shall be appointed by the board, on the recommendation of the nomination committee in consultation with the chair of the audit and risk committee.
- 1.2 All members of the committee shall be independent non-executive directors at least one of whom shall have recent and relevant financial experience and with competence in accounting and/or auditing. The chair of the board shall not be a member of the committee.
- 1.3 Only members of the committee have the right to attend committee meetings. However, the Group Chief Financial Officer, the Group Financial Controller, Risk and Compliance Officers, representatives of internal audit and external audit lead partner, will be invited to attend meetings of the 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.
- 1.4 The board shall appoint the committee chair. In the absence of the committee chair and/or an appointed deputy at a committee meeting, the remaining members present 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 committee and will ensure that the 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 committee members.

4. Frequency of meetings

- 4.1 The committee shall meet at least four 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 committee chair, and to a lesser extent the other committee members, will maintain a dialogue with key individuals involved in the company's governance, including the board chair, the Group Chief Executive, the Group Chief Financial Officer, the Risk and Compliance Officers, representatives of internal audit and the external audit lead partner.

5. Notice of meetings

5.1 Meetings of the committee shall be convened by the secretary of the committee at the request of any of its members or at the request of the external audit lead partner or representatives of internal audit if they consider it necessary.

5.2 Unless otherwise agreed by the committee, 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 committee no later than five working days before the date of the meeting. Supporting papers shall be sent to committee members at the same time.

5.3 Notices, agendas and supporting papers can be sent in electronic form where the recipient has agreed to receive documents in such a way.

6. Minutes of meetings

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

6.2 Draft minutes of committee meetings shall be agreed with the committee chair and then circulated promptly to all members of the committee, unless it would be inappropriate to do so in the opinion of the committee chair.

7. Annual general meeting

The committee chair should attend the annual general meeting to answer any shareholder questions on the committee's activities. In addition the committee chair should seek engagement with shareholders on significant matters related to the committee's areas of responsibility.

8. Duties

The committee should have oversight of the group as a whole and, unless required otherwise by regulation, carry out the duties below for the parent company, major subsidiary undertakings and the group as a whole.

8.1 *Financial reporting*

- (A) The committee shall monitor the integrity of the financial statements of the company, including its annual and half-yearly reports, interim management statements, preliminary announcements and any other formal statements relating to its financial performance, and review and report to the board on significant financial reporting issues and judgements which those statements contain having regard to matters communicated to it by the auditor.
- (B) In particular, the committee shall review and challenge where necessary:
 - (i) the application of significant accounting policies and any changes to them;
 - (ii) the methods used to account for significant or unusual transactions where different approaches are possible;
 - (iii) whether the company has adopted appropriate accounting policies and made appropriate estimates and judgements, taking into account the external auditor's views on the financial statements;
 - (iv) the clarity and completeness of disclosures in the financial statements and the context in which statements are made and
 - (v) all material information presented with the financial statements, including the strategic report and the corporate governance statements relating to the audit and to risk management.
- (C) The committee shall review any other statements requiring board approval which contain financial information first, where to carry out a review prior to board approval would be practicable and consistent with any prompt reporting requirements under any law or regulation including the Listing Rules or Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules sourcebook.
- (D) Where the 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 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 position and performance, business model and strategy and whether it informs the board's statement in the annual report on these matters that is required under the Code.

8.3 *Internal controls and risk management systems*

The committee shall:

- (A) keep under review the company's internal financial controls systems that identify, assess, manage and monitor financial risks, and other internal control and risk management systems; and
- (B) review and approve the statements to be included in the annual report concerning internal control, risk management and the viability statement.

8.4 *Compliance, whistleblowing and fraud*

The 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 committee shall ensure that these arrangements allow proportionate and independent investigation of such matters and appropriate follow 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 regular reports from the Money Laundering Reporting Officers and the adequacy and effectiveness of the company's anti-money laundering systems and controls; and
- (E) review regular reports from the Compliance Officers and keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of the company's compliance function.

8.5 *Internal audit*

The committee shall:

- (A) if required, approve the appointment or termination of appointment of the head of internal audit;
- (B) review and approve the role and mandate of internal audit, monitor and review the effectiveness of its work, and annually approve the internal audit charter ensuring it is appropriate for the current needs of the organisation;
- (C) review and approve the annual internal audit plan to ensure it is aligned to the key risks of the business, and receive regular reports on work carried out;
- (D) ensure internal audit has unrestricted scope, the necessary resources and access to information to enable it to fulfil its mandate, ensure there is open communication between different functions and that the internal audit function evaluates the effectiveness of these functions as part of its internal audit plan, and ensure that the internal audit function is equipped to perform in accordance with appropriate professional standards for internal auditors;

- (E) ensure the internal auditor has direct access to the board chair and to the committee chair, providing independence from the executive and accountability to the committee;
- (F) carry out an annual assessment of the effectiveness of the internal audit function; and as part of this assessment:
 - (i) meet with representatives of internal audit without the presence of management to discuss the effectiveness of the function;
 - (ii) review and assess the annual internal audit work plan;
 - (iii) receive a report on the results of the internal auditor's work;
 - (iv) determine whether it is satisfied that the quality, experience and expertise of internal audit is appropriate for the business; and
 - (v) review the actions taken by management to implement the recommendations of internal audit and to support the effective working of the internal audit function;
- (G) monitor and assess the role and effectiveness of the internal audit function in the overall context of the company's risk management system and the work of compliance, finance and the external auditor; and
- (H) consider whether an independent, third party review of processes is appropriate.

8.6 *External audit*

The committee shall:

- (A) consider and make recommendations to the board, to be put to shareholders for approval at the annual general meeting, in relation to the appointment, re-appointment or removal of the company's external auditor. When carrying out this duty, the committee shall be cognisant of:
 - (i) the UK Corporate Governance Code (July 2018) which states that if the Board does not accept the committee's recommendation, it should include in the annual report, and in any papers recommending appointment or re-appointment, a statement from the audit committee explaining the recommendation and should set out reasons why the board has taken a different position; and
 - (ii) the Statutory Audit Services for Large Companies Market Investigation (Mandatory Use of Competitive Tender Processes and Audit Committee Responsibilities) Order 2014 which, inter alia, requires a FTSE 350 Company to make an auditor appointment pursuant to a competitive tender process in relation to one or more of the preceding nine consecutive financial years or has conducted a competitive tender

process for an auditor appointment in relation to the financial year immediately following these preceding nine consecutive financial years;

- (B) develop and oversee the selection procedure for the appointment of the audit firm, ensuring that all tendering firms have access to all necessary information and individuals during the tendering process;
- (C) if an external auditor resigns, investigate the issues leading to this and decide whether any action is required;
- (D) monitor the external auditor's compliance with APB Ethical Standards for Auditors relating to the rotation of audit partners, the level of fees that the Company pays in proportion to the overall fee income of the firm, or relevant part of it, and other regulatory requirements;
- (E) oversee the relationship with the external auditor. In this context the committee shall:
 - (i) approve their remuneration, including both fees for audit and non-audit services, and ensure that the level of fees is appropriate to enable an effective and high-quality audit to be conducted; and
 - (ii) approve their terms of engagement, including any engagement letter issued at the start of each audit and the scope of the audit;
- (F) assess annually the external auditor's independence and objectivity taking into account relevant UK law, regulation, the Ethical Standard and other professional requirements and the group's relationship with the auditor as a whole, including any threats to the auditor's independence and the safeguards applied to mitigate those threats including the provision of any non-audit services;
- (G) satisfy itself that there are no relationships between the auditor and the company (other than in the ordinary course of business) which could adversely affect the auditor's independence and objectivity;
- (H) agree with the board a policy on the employment of former employees of the company's auditor, taking into account the Ethical Standard and legal requirements, and monitor the application of this policy;
- (I) monitor the auditor's processes for maintaining independence, its compliance with relevant UK law, regulation, other professional requirements and the Ethical Standard, including the guidance on the rotation of audit partner and staff;
- (J) monitor the level of fees paid by the company to the external auditor compared to the overall fee income of the firm, office and partner and assess these in the context of relevant legal, professional and regulatory requirements, guidance and the Ethical Standard;

- (K) assess annually the qualifications, expertise and resources, and independence of the external auditor and the effectiveness of the external audit process, taking into consideration relevant UK professional and regulatory requirements, which shall include a report from the external auditor on their own internal quality procedures;
- (L) seek to ensure coordination of the external audit with the activities of the internal audit function;
- (M) evaluate the risks to the quality and effectiveness of the financial reporting process in the light of the external auditor's communications with the committee;
- (N) develop and recommend to the board the company's formal policy on the provision of non-audit services by the auditor, including approval of non-audit services by the committee and specifying the types of non-audit service to be pre-approved, and assessment of whether non-audit services have a direct or material effect on the audited financial statements. The policy should include consideration of the following matters for implementation:
 - (i) the impact to the independence and objectivity of the external auditor and any safeguards in place, taking into account the relevant regulations and ethical guidance, and reporting to the board on any improvement or action that may be required;
 - (ii) the nature of the non-audit services;
 - (iii) whether the external audit firm is the most suitable supplier of the non-audit service;
 - (iv) the fees for the non-audit services, both individually and in aggregate, relative to the audit fee; and
 - (v) the criteria governing compensation;
- (O) 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, meet with the external auditor without management being present, to discuss the auditor's remit and any issues arising from the audit;
- (P) discuss with the external auditor the factors that could affect audit quality and review and approve the annual audit plan, ensuring it is consistent with the scope of the audit engagement, having regard to the seniority, expertise and experience of the audit team;
- (Q) 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) the auditor's explanation of how the risks to audit quality were addressed;
 - (iii) key accounting and audit judgements;
 - (iv) the auditor's view of their interactions with senior management; and
 - (v) levels of errors identified during the audit;
- (R) review any representation letter(s) requested by the external auditor before they are signed by management;
- (S) review the management letter and management's response to the auditor's findings and recommendations; and
- (T) review the effectiveness of the audit process, including an assessment of the quality of the audit, the handling of key judgements by the auditor, and the auditor's response to questions from the committee.

9. Risk Management

- 9.1 In general the committee shall advise the board of directors on the company's overall risk appetite, tolerance and strategy, taking into account the current and prospective macroeconomic and financial environment, and oversee and advise the board on the current risk exposures of the company and future risk strategy.
- 9.2 In respect of the Risk Management Framework, the committee's responsibilities are to:
- (A) provide advice to the board on risk strategy, including the oversight of the Group's current risk exposures;
 - (B) evaluate potential emerging or new risk issues facing the group as a whole, including their potential impact on the group's business model;
 - (C) develop proposals for consideration by the board in respect of overall risk appetite and tolerance, as well as the metrics to be used to monitor the group's risk management performance;
 - (D) review the principal risk policies for consistency with the group's risk appetite and approve any material changes to those policies;
 - (E) oversee and challenge management's day-to-day risk management and oversight arrangements;
 - (F) review the group's overall risk assessment processes and methodology, ensuring that both qualitative and quantitative metrics are used;
 - (G) oversee and challenge due diligence on risk issues relating to material transactions and strategic proposals that are subject to approval by the board;

- (H) provide advice to the remuneration committee on the implications of the remuneration policy for risk and risk management to ensure the senior executives (the chair of the board, executive directors, members of the executive and the Secretary) are provided with appropriate incentives to encourage enhanced performance and are, in a fair and responsible manner, rewarded for their contributions to the company;
- (I) provide advice, oversight and challenge necessary to embed and maintain a supportive risk culture throughout the group;
- (J) satisfy itself on an on-going basis that risk-based information is used effectively by management and the board in the running of the business;
- (K) receive and review reports from the Risk Management Function on the following, which are designed to assist the Committee in its consideration of the above:-
 - (i) a report of risk exposures measured against agreed appetites and tolerances;
 - (ii) a summary of any significant risk events and material near misses which may have resulted in risk appetites or tolerances being exceeded;
 - (iii) details of the risk assessment process that has been carried out across the group and a confirmation either that it has been conducted satisfactorily according to required standards and accuracy or, if not, the areas of deficiency; and
 - (iv) a statement as to whether approved risk policies and standards have been complied with, and in the event of any breaches, what actions have been taken or are planned to address them; and
- (L) consider and approve the remit and annual objectives of the Risk Management Function, ensuring it has adequate resources, independence and has appropriate access to information to enable it to perform its function effectively.

10. Regulatory reports

- 10.1 Considers any reports presented to the committee by skilled persons under section 166 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other relevant reports, and other material correspondence, issued by the external auditors and external relevant regulatory bodies, including the external auditor's management letter and the appropriateness of management's response.

11. Reporting responsibilities

- 11.1 The committee chair 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 8.1A) and how these were addressed;
- (B) its assessment of the effectiveness of the external audit process (required under paragraph 8.6K), the approach taken to the appointment or reappointment of the external auditor, length of tenure of audit firm, when a tender was last conducted and advance notice of any retendering plans; and
- (C) any other issues on which the board has requested the committee's opinion.

11.2 The committee shall make whatever recommendations to the board it deems appropriate on any area within its remit where action or improvement is needed.

11.3 The 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 committee has assessed the independence and effectiveness of the external audit process and the approach taken to the appointment or reappointment of the external auditor, information on the length of tenure of the current audit firm, when a tender was last conducted and advance notice of any retendering plans; an explanation of how auditor independence and objectivity are safeguarded, if the external auditor provides non-audit services; the significant issues that the 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.

11.4 In compiling the reports referred to in 11.1 and 11.3, the committee should exercise judgement 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 and the inputs to the board's viability statement. The report to shareholders need not repeat information disclosed elsewhere in the annual report and accounts, but could provide cross-references to that information.

12. Other matters

The committee shall:

- (A) have access to sufficient resources in order to carry out its duties, including access to the company secretariat for assistance as required;
- (B) 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;
- (C) give due consideration to relevant laws and regulations, the provisions of the Code and the requirements of the Listing Rules, Prospectus Rules and

Disclosure Guidance and Transparency Rules sourcebook and any other applicable rules, as appropriate;

- (D) be responsible for coordination of the internal and external auditors;
- (E) oversee any investigation of activities which are within its terms of reference;
- (F) work and liaise as necessary with all other board committees, taking particular account of the impact of risk management and internal controls being delegated to different committees; and
- (G) 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.

13. Authority

The 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 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 committee and the board.

These terms of reference were approved by the Board on 23 June 2020.