

Item: 9.3

REPORT CLASSIFICATION	✓	CATEGORY OF PAPER	✓
Official		Proposes specific action	
Official: Sensitive Commercial	✓	Provides assurance	✓
Official: Sensitive Personal		For information only	

BOARD

31 MARCH 2026

Report Title:

Audit Committee Highlight Report

Purpose of report

To provide the Board with the key highlights from the Audit Committee meeting held on 05 February 2026 along with the confirmed minutes from the meeting held on 09 October 2025.

Key points

The Audit Committee is chaired by David Stout, Non-Executive member of the Board, and provides oversight and assurance to the Board on the adequacy of governance, risk management and internal control processes within the ICB.

The Committee confirmed minutes for the meeting held on 09 October 2025 are attached in **Appendix 1**.

Highlights from the Meeting held on 05 February 2026

The Committee considered the following key items at the meeting held on 05 February 2026 including

- Board Assurance Framework and Risk Management Report
- Information Governance Assurance Report Quarter 3
- Review of Audit Committee Terms of Reference
- Annual Report Timetable 2025- 2026
- ICB Finance Update
- Internal Audit Progress Report
- External Audit Progress Report
- Counter Fraud Progress Report
- Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU)
- Annual review of Internal and External Audit Effectiveness

The key points of information from each item are noted below:

Board Assurance Framework (BAF) and Risk Management Report

The Committee received the latest risk management report, corporate risk register and board assurance framework for review and assurance for quarter 3 of 2025/26. The report included information on the structure of the BAF remaining in its current form until the approval of the ICB operating model, and background work was underway to prepare for future updates.

Information Governance Assurance Report - Quarter 3 2025/26

The Committee received an overview of the information governance assurance report for the work undertaken for the period 01 October to 31 December 2025 during quarter 3 2025/26. The updates included Data Protection and Security Toolkit submission, Data Security Incidents, Freedom of Information. The baseline submission was completed in December 2025 and an interim assessment was undertaken with AuditOne in January 2026, the outcome will be fed into the next report.

Review of Audit Committee Terms of Reference

The Committee reviewed the annual terms of reference and received a summary highlighting updates to specific wording, including those related to quoracy and the Auditor Panel. These amendments are consistent with the terms of reference for all ICB committees.

Annual Report Timetable 2025- 2026

The Committee was provided with a copy of the Annual Report and Annual Accounts timetable for 2025/26 national submission deadlines with the assurance that an internal timeline would be maintained to track Committee and Board date sign off.

ICB Finance Update

The Committee received an update on the ICB's financial position and essential financial governance matters covering financial performance, losses and special payments, tender waivers and aged debtors and creditors approved in line with the ICB financial delegations. It was reported that the ICB was forecasting an achievement of its financial target, with an underspend contributing to the mitigation of pressures across the system.

Internal Audit Progress Report

A progress report was shared for information and assurance highlighting the progress and outcomes from internal audit activity, along with the completion of all 2024/25 plans. The Committee were informed that there were no overdue actions. The report included information on a proposal to combine two planned CHC audits into a single governance-focused audit for all age continuing healthcare. It was confirmed that planning for the 2026/27 audit year was underway.

External Audit Progress Report

The Committee received a verbal update on the external audit plans with confirmation that a new audit manager had been appointed to review and progress some of the preparatory audit work. An update report will be provided at the next committee meeting.

Counter Fraud Progress Report

The Committee was provided with a progress report providing an update on the work undertaken for the period 19 September 2025 to 19 January 2026. The report included the overdue tasks in relation to annual leave Local Proactive Exercise (LPE) and Counter Fraud Policy updates that were close to completion. The Counter Fraud Policy was updated to include new legislation and was approved by the ICB Executive Committee on 10 February 2026.

Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU)

The Committee received an update report on the activity including emerging themes and key developments in quarter 3, with positive feedback from staff with ongoing staff activities and training compliance with a focus on senior management engagement. Information was provided on the national changes in the closure of the National Guardian's Office (NGO) from June 2026. The FTSU oversight will move to Department of Health and Social Care and NHSE, supported by CQC.

The FTSU Policy (Version 3) was approved by the Executive Committee in line with the national policy framework, with local adjustment to ensure the policy aligned with requirements of the ICB.

Annual Review of Internal Audit Effectiveness

The Committee assessed the effectiveness of internal audit (AuditOne) based on feedback from staff involved in recent audits. Overall, responses were positive with regards to communication, efficiency, and clarity of approach, with only one area for improvement identified concerning the division of key financial controls across multiple audits.

The evaluation of External Audit (Forvis Mazars) is scheduled to take place in July 2026.

Risks and issues

N/A

Assurances and supporting documentation

- To note the meeting notes from 05 February 2026 will be submitted to the next Board meeting on 02 June 2026.

- To note the completion of the annual review of the effectiveness of Intern Audit (Audit One).
- To note the revision of the FTSU Policy inline with national policy framework.

Recommendation/action required

The Board is asked to:

- Receive the approved minutes for the Audit Committee meeting held on 09 October 2025 (Appendix 1) for assurance.
- Note the key highlights from the Audit Committee meeting held on 05 February 2026 for information and assurance.

Acronyms and abbreviations explained

ICB – Integrated Care Board
 Board Assurance Framework (BAF)
 Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU)
 Local Proactive Exercise (LPE)
 National Guardian's Office (NGO)

Sponsor/Approving Executive Director

C Riley, Chief Corporate Services Officer
 David Stout, Chair of Audit Committee and Independent Non-Executive Member

Date approved by Executive Director

18 March 2026

Report author

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Link to ICP strategy priorities

Longer and Healthier Lives

✓

Fairer Outcomes for All

✓

Better Health and Care Services

✓

Giving Children and Young People the Best Start in Life

✓

Relevant legal/statutory issues

Note any relevant Acts, regulations, national guidelines etc

Any potential/actual conflicts of interest associated with the paper?

Yes

No

N/A

✓

Equality analysis completed

Yes

No

N/A

✓

If there is an expected impact on patient outcomes and/or experience, has a quality impact assessment been undertaken?

Yes

No

N/A

✓

Essential considerations

Financial implications and considerations

N/A

Contracting and Procurement

N/A

Local Delivery Team

N/A

Digital implications

N/A

Clinical involvement	N/A
Health inequalities	N/A
Patient and public involvement	N/A
Partner and/or other stakeholder engagement	N/A
Other resources	N/A