

Circular Details	Circular No 22-21 / Date 20 July 2022 / A824754
Previous Circular	21-26 <i>New risk management and internal audit framework for councils and joint organisations</i>
Who should read this	General Managers / Councillors / Council governance staff / Audit, risk and improvement committee members and internal audit personnel
Contact	Council Governance Team / (02) 4428 4100 / olg@olg.nsw.gov.au
Action required	Information

Update on membership requirements for audit, risk and improvement committees

What's new or changing

- Following recent discussions, the Office of Local Government (OLG) and NSW Treasury have agreed that the NSW Government's Prequalification Scheme for Audit and Risk Committee Chairs and Members will not be suitable for use by councils and joint organisations.
- OLG's draft *Guidelines for Risk Management and Internal Audit for Local Councils in NSW*, issued for consultation last year, contemplated that from June 2027 councils and joint organisations would be required to appoint Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) chairs and a prescribed number of ARIC members from the NSW Government prequalification scheme. Following discussions with NSW Treasury, OLG has taken the opportunity revisit this requirement, delaying the finalisation of the Guidelines.
- While OLG anticipates that this delay will not be significant, it recognises the need to give councils and joint organisations certainty, particularly given that some are currently in the process of establishing an ARIC for the first time and appointing chairs and members. The proposed new requirements for ARIC membership have therefore been set out in the attachment to this circular.

What this will mean for your council

- Under the new requirements, all councils (including county councils) and joint organisations will be required, at a minimum, to have an ARIC that comprises of the following:
 - one independent chair who meets the independence and eligibility criteria for an ARIC chair, and
 - at least two independent members who meet the independence and eligibility criteria for ARIC members – councils may appoint additional independent members should they choose to do so.
- Councils will also have the option of appointing one non-voting councillor member to their ARIC who meets the eligibility criteria for councillor members.
- The proposed independence and eligibility criteria for ARIC chairs and independent members and the proposed eligibility criteria for councillor members of ARICs are set out in the attachment to this circular.
- The above requirements will apply to all councils and joint organisations. The removal of the requirement for ARIC chairs and a prescribed number of ARIC

members to be appointed from the NSW Government prequalification scheme based on which tier a council is in, means that it is no longer necessary to place councils in tiers and these arrangements will no longer apply.

- Given that councils and joint organisations will no longer be required to appoint ARIC chairs and members from the NSW Government prequalification scheme, the timeframe for compliance with the ARIC membership requirements in the Guidelines will be brought forward to **1 July 2024**. As of that date all councils and joint organisations will be required to ensure ARIC chairs and members meet the eligibility and independence requirements set out in the Guidelines and have a risk management framework and internal audit function that complies with the Guidelines.

Key points

- Under the *Local Government Act 1993*, all councils (including county councils) and joint organisations are required to have an ARIC or to have entered into an arrangement with another council or joint organisation to share an ARIC from **4 June 2022**.
- OLG recognises that some councils and joint organisations may have faced challenges in establishing an ARIC or shared arrangements for an ARIC ahead of the 4 June deadline and is prepared to accommodate some flexibility in implementation timeframes provided they can demonstrate that they are actively taking steps to appoint or share an ARIC.
- The Guidelines will be finalised soon. Full compliance with the requirements in the Guidelines will be required from **1 July 2024**.

Where to go for further information

- The proposed independence and eligibility criteria for ARIC chairs and independent members and the proposed eligibility criteria for councillor members are set out in the attachment to this circular.
- The draft [*Guidelines for Risk Management and Internal Audit for Local Councils in NSW*](#) provides further guidance on the proposed requirements for ARICs, the risk management framework and internal audit function. As noted above, the proposed requirement in the draft Guidelines to use the NSW Government prequalification scheme and the tiering arrangements will no longer apply.
- For further information please contact the Council Governance Team on 02 4428 4100 or by email at olg@olg.nsw.gov.au.
- If councils or joint organisations require assistance in establishing an ARIC or shared arrangements for an ARIC, they should contact their Council Engagement Manager at OLG.

Liz Moore
A/Deputy Secretary, Crown Lands and Local Government

Attachment

The following requirements will apply to ARIC chairs and members from **1 July 2024**.

1. Independence requirements for ARIC chairs and independent members

All ARIC chairs and independent members must be independent to ensure they have no real or perceived bias or conflicts of interest that may interfere with their ability to act independently and can provide the council with robust, objective, and unbiased advice about how the council is functioning.

ARIC chairs and independent members cannot:

- currently be a councillor of any NSW council
- be a non-voting representative of the board of a joint organisation
- be a candidate at the last election of the council
- be a person who has held office in the council during its previous term
- be currently employed by the council or joint organisation, or been employed during the last 12 months
- conduct audits of the council on behalf of the Audit Office of NSW
- have a close personal or business relationship with a councillor or a person who has a senior role in the council that may lead to a real or perceived conflict of interest
- currently, or within the last three years, provided any material goods or services (including consultancy, legal, internal audit, and advisory services) to the council which directly affect subjects or issues considered by the ARIC
- be (or have a close family member who is) a substantial shareholder, owner, officer, or employee of a company that has a material business, contractual relationship, direct financial interest or material indirect financial interest with the council or a related entity which could be considered a real or perceived conflict of interest, or
- currently or have previously acted as an advocate of a material interest on behalf of the council or a related entity which could be considered a real or perceived conflict of interest.

Current staff of councils cannot serve as the chair of an ARIC but may serve as an independent member of another council's ARIC provided they meet the independence and eligibility criteria for membership of the council's ARIC and their employer is not participating in a shared arrangement with the other council in relation to the ARIC or the internal audit function.

2. Eligibility requirements for ARIC chairs and members

The persons appointed as a chair or a member of an ARIC must possess the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to undertake their roles on the ARIC effectively and to ensure the ARIC is able to operate appropriately and effectively to support the council.

The following eligibility criteria for ARIC chairs and members reflects the minimum standards persons must meet to be appointed as the chair or member of a council's ARIC. Councils may require ARIC chairs and members to satisfy more onerous eligibility criteria if they choose to do so.

Eligibility requirements for ARIC Chairs

In addition to meeting the independence requirements set out above, the following eligibility criteria apply to the chair of an ARIC.

Essential criteria

ARIC chairs must demonstrate the following:

- leadership qualities and the ability to promote effective working relationships in complex organisations
- an ability to communicate complex and sensitive assessments in a tactful manner to the head of the council's internal audit function, senior management and the mayor and councillors
- a sound understanding of:
 - the principles of good organisational governance and capacity to understand local government accountability, including financial reporting
 - the business of the council or the environment in which it operates
 - internal audit operations, including selection and review of the head of the council's internal audit function, and
 - risk management principles
- extensive senior level experience in governance and management of complex organisations, an ability to read and understand financial statements and a capacity to understand the ethical requirements of government (including potential conflicts of interest)
- functional knowledge in areas such as risk management, performance management, human resources management, internal and external auditing, financial reporting, accounting, management control frameworks, internal financial controls, governance (including planning, reporting and oversight), or business operations
- a capacity to form independent judgements and a willingness to constructively challenge/question management practices and information, and
- a professional, ethical approach to the exercise of their duties and the capacity to devote the necessary time and effort to the responsibilities of the chair of an ARIC.

Desirable criteria

- possession of a relevant professional qualification or membership (e.g., Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), CPA Australia (CPA) and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA)) is desirable.

Eligibility requirements for ARIC independent members

In addition to meeting the independence requirements set out above, the following eligibility criteria apply to ARIC independent members:

Essential criteria

ARIC independent members must demonstrate the following:

- an ability to read and understand financial statements and a capacity to understand the ethical requirements of government (including potential conflicts of interest)
- functional knowledge in areas such as risk management, performance management, human resources management, internal and external auditing, financial reporting, accounting, management control frameworks, internal financial controls, governance (including planning, reporting and oversight), or business operations
- a capacity to form independent judgements and willingness to constructively challenge/question management practices and information
- a professional, ethical approach to the exercise of their duties and the capacity to devote the necessary time and effort to the responsibilities of an independent member of an ARIC, and

- preparedness to undertake any training on the operation of ARICs recommended by the chair based on their assessment of the skills, knowledge and experience of the independent member.

Desirable criteria

Ideally, independent members of ARICs should also meet the following criteria, but these are not essential:

- extensive senior level experience in governance and management of complex organisations, and
- possession of a relevant professional qualification or membership (e.g., Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), CPA Australia (CPA) and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA)).

Eligibility requirements for non-voting councillor members of ARICs

A councillor must demonstrate the following to be appointed as a non-voting ARIC member:

- an ability to read and understand financial statements and a capacity to understand the ethical requirements of government (including potential conflicts of interest)
- a good understanding of one or more of the following: risk management, performance management, human resources management, internal and external auditing, financial reporting, accounting, management control frameworks, internal financial controls, governance (including planning, reporting and oversight), or business operations
- a capacity to form independent judgements and willingness to constructively challenge/question management practices and information
- a professional, ethical approach to the exercise of their duties and the capacity to devote the necessary time and effort to the responsibilities of a councillor member of an ARIC, and
- preparedness to undertake any training on the operation of ARICs recommended by the chair based on their assessment of the skills, knowledge and experience of the councillor member.

Note: The mayor cannot be appointed as a councillor member on a council's ARIC.

3. Appointment of ARICs

When selecting ARIC members, councils should ensure the ARIC has an appropriate mix of skills, knowledge and experience to successfully implement its terms of reference and add value. An ARIC should have:

- at least one member with financial expertise (for example, a qualified accountant or auditor or other financial professional with experience of financial and accounting matters), and
- a mix of skills and experience in:
 - business
 - financial and legal compliance
 - risk management
 - internal audit, and
 - any specialised business operations of the council, where the ARIC would benefit from having a member with skills or experience in this area.

All ARIC members should have sufficient understanding of the council's financial reporting responsibilities to be able to contribute to the ARIC's consideration of the annual financial statements.

Each ARIC member should also have sufficient time to devote to their responsibilities.

Where possible, councils should ensure that at least one other ARIC member is also qualified to act as the chair if this is ever required.

Note: Councils must undertake a criminal record and financial status (bankruptcy) check of ARIC chairs and members before their appointment.