

ZIMBABWE URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AUDIT COMMITTEE FRAMEWORK: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The aim of this paper was to compare the legal and regulatory frameworks governing Urban municipal Audit Committees in the USA, UK, South Africa and Zimbabwe and recommended best practices for the Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework: Literature revealed that Municipal councils audit committee legal and regulatory frameworks vary from one jurisdiction to the other. These are designed to mainly prescribe suitable characteristics of the committees for improvement of their effectiveness. Characteristics widely discussed in literature include the size, independence, composition, members qualifications. However, there is still much to explore on how municipal audit committee models from different jurisdictions can be applied to a developing country such as Zimbabwe.

Design/Methodology/approach: A purposive sample of countries namely Zimbabwe, South Africa, UK, USA representing different political, legal, and economic jurisdictions was selected. Primary documents governing the municipal audit committees were identified, analysed, results tabulated compared, contrasted and recommendations made for Zimbabwe local authorities.

Findings: Municipal council audit committees regulatory and legal frameworks are country specific and there are common features from different jurisdictions. Developed countries are using a voluntary approach to the use of audit committees with guidance coming from initiatives by professional public sector accounting bodies. On the other hand, developing countries mainly rely on legal instruments to prescribe requirements on the composition, size, qualifications and independence committees.

Research, Practical and social implications: Recommendations from this study will be useful to lawmakers in crafting legal provisions governing audit committees in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities.

Introduction

The agency problem that necessitated corporate governance in private sector organizations has to some extent also influenced adoption of some of the initiatives in the public sector including municipal councils. Compared to private sector organizations, demands for probity, diligence, transparency and accountability are more pronounced in the public sector (Thomas and Purcel, 2017). This is in addition to expectations for improved service delivery by residence and

monitoring by the central government. Given such a scenario, adoption of best international corporate governance practices by countries in public sector organisations such as urban local authorities cannot be overemphasised. As a result, audit committees are now a common feature in the governance frameworks of many municipalities across the globe.

A study by Rich and Zhang (2014) established a positive relationship between the quality of internal controls and presence of municipal council audit committees in the USA. The composition, authority, and roles of these committees in the public sector vary from one jurisdiction to the other. It is against this background that a comparative study of audit committee frameworks of different countries can come in handy in recommending best practices to other countries such as Zimbabwe.

This paper aims to explore the audit committee regulatory frameworks of USA, UK and South Africa, compare and contrast them and recommend possible best practices for audit committees in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities. USA and UK were deliberately single out to represent the developed countries as they employ a more voluntary approach to the engagement of audit committees in the public sector while South Africa has adopted a more legalistic approach just like Zimbabwe.

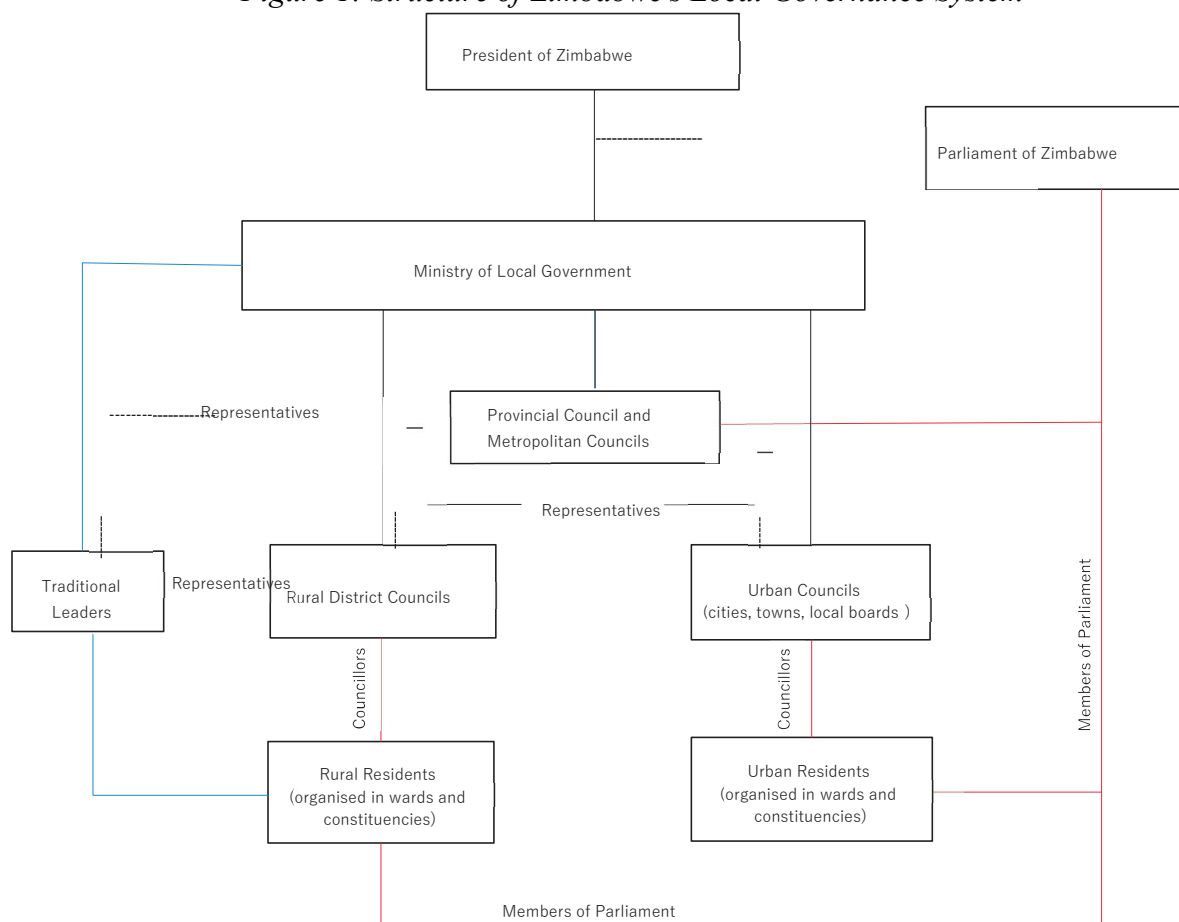
An Overview of Zimbabwe's Local Governance System

To examine the audit committee frameworks further, a brief background and structure of Zimbabwe's local governance systems and a map of the country depicting the municipal councils will be illustrated with the aid of diagrams.

The constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) provides for three tiers of government namely the central government, provincial and metropolitan councils, and the lowest tier being the local authorities. According to Marumahoko et al. (2020) the 2013 constitution upgraded the status of the local authorities as prior to that they were only regulated by Acts of parliament. Urban local authorities represent the interests of people in urban areas and are regulated by the urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) whereas the Rural District Councils Act was promulgated to regulate activities of rural councils that represent and manage development in rural areas. According to the constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) the provinces into which Zimbabwe are divided into are Harare Metropolitan province, Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Mashonaland Central Province, Manicaland Province, Mashonaland East Province, Masvingo Province, Mashonaland West Province, Matabeleland North Province, Midlands Province and Matabeleland South Province.

The governance structure of Zimbabwe's local governance system, according to Masvaure (2016) is summarised diagrammatically as follows:

Figure 1: Structure of Zimbabwe's Local Governance System

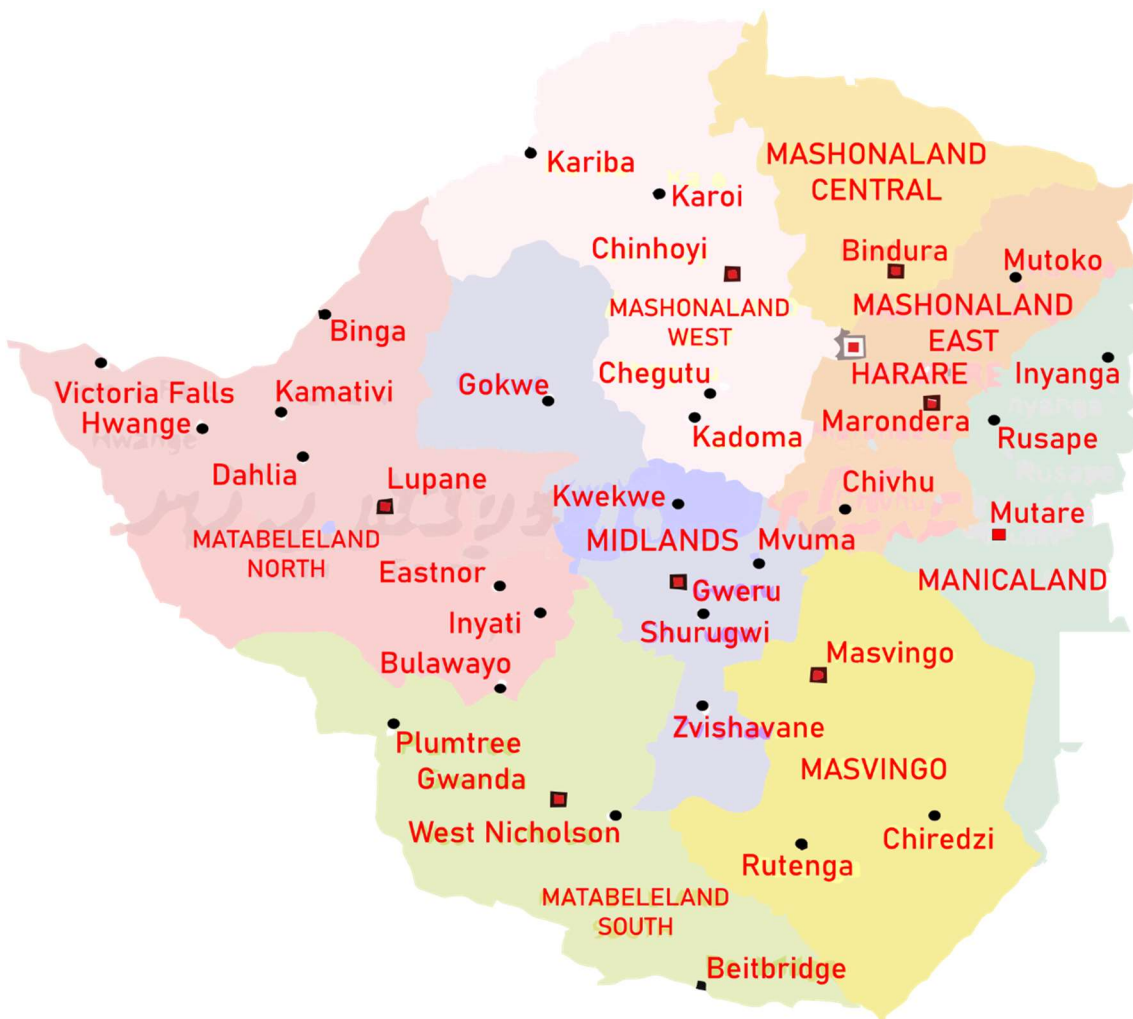


Source: Masvaure (2016)

The above diagram is an illustration of the structure of the local government system in Zimbabwe. Of particular interest is that both the executive arm of government through the responsible Minister and the legislature through parliament have interests in the affairs of the urban local authorities. This calls for improved accountability and efficient corporate governance systems to improve transparency and accountability in the use of public funds.

A map of Zimbabwe illustrating the country's 10 provinces as well as the geographical distribution of the country's urban local authorities is highlighted bellow.

Figure 2: Map of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Illustrating the geographical distribution of Urban Local Authorities



Source: www.mapsofworld.com

Corporate Governance Challenges in Zimbabwe's Urban Local Authorities

In any agent principal relationship, like is the case with the Zimbabwe's municipal councils, audited annual financial statements play a vital role in reducing the agency problem. Principals (citizens represented by councillors together with parliament) require current financial information before it becomes outdated and irrelevant for decision making on municipal transparency and accountability (McGee & Yuan, 2012; Gandía and Archidona, 2008; Piotrowski and Bertelli, 2010; Araújo & Tejedó-Romero, 2016). The case of untimely financial reporting in Zimbabwe's municipal councils was brought to the fore by the Office of the Auditor General of Zimbabwe (OAGZ), who has a mandate to conduct annual statutory audits of the municipal councils (OAGZ, 2017). Of particular concern is the failure by the municipal councils to submit accounts for audit with some, being behind by at least 3 years instead of only 180 days as required by the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15). This is despite the fact that the local authorities are being governed

by functional boards (Municipal council) and audit committees are in place to exercise the oversight function over the process of financial reporting as per the statutory requirements.

Unlike in private sector establishments, the peculiar nature of the board (municipal council) and audit

Committees of municipal councils in Zimbabwe is that they are a creation of the law, Urban Councils Act (UCA) (Chapter 29:15). The Act has a requirement for creation of an audit committee composed of selected members of the governing council and also outlines the roles of the committee including the oversight function on the process of financial reporting. However, the Act is silent on minimum educational and professional level of education required for one to be elected into the council where audit committee members will be drawn from (Jonga, 2014; Mpfu). It is also silent on the qualifications required for one to qualify to be appointed into the audit committee. Scrutiny of corporate governance literature and stock exchange listing requirements of several countries reveals that the major roles of the audit committee are to, oversee the accounting and financial reporting processes and also inspects financial statements of a company (Ball, Ray, Ashok, Robin and Sadka, 2008), give additional assurance regarding the standard and dependability of financial information used by the board (Anderson, Christ, Johnstone, & Rittenberg, 2012), monitoring the standard and dependability of financial information used by the board (Anderson, Christ, Johnstone, & Rittenberg, 2012) as well as to oversee, review and keep an eye on the Corporate financial reporting process and the audit activities (Shelton, 2018).

It is apparent that the audit committee has the responsibility of ensuring a sound internal control system as well as monitor the quality and reliability of financial reporting. Therefore delays in the submission of accounts for audit by municipalities as well as numerous audit observations on the audited accounts expose the need to relook at the municipal councils audit committee framework by comparing it to best practices from other jurisdictions and recommend areas of improvement. Talking about public sector auditing, Hay and Cordery (2020) suggested that future research should explore differences between various jurisdictions and come up with best practice.

Theoretical Reference Framework

Financial reporting scandals the world over have led to regulators coming up with different corporate governance mechanisms to protect investors from the agency problem. For example, the combined code (1992) for UK and the Sarbanes Oxley (SOX) Act (2002) for the USA were some of the efforts made to advance the tenets of corporate governance internationally. Among the requirements of these and other corporate governance codes is the establishment of the audit committees to enhance oversight on financial reporting among other roles. In a private sector set up, the committee reports to the board and is mandated to have oversight over the IAF, external audit and the whole systems of risk management, internal control, and financial reporting (Rich and Zhang, 2014; Haji and Anifowose, 2016). Public sector entities on the other hand including municipal councils are now also setting up audit committees as part of their corporate governance structures. Unlike private corporations that are governed by clear audit committee guidelines from

legal requirements, corporate governance codes and stock exchange listing requirements, guidelines for public sector audit committees are very divergent from one geographical jurisdiction to another. In South Africa, for example, the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) (RSA 2003 and the the King III report complement each other in regulating the audit committees (Masegare and Ngoepe, 2018). In the USA the Government Finance officers Association gives guidance on municipal audit committees (Fitzgerald and Giroux, 2014) that are adopted voluntarily by entities. It is therefore imperative to conduct international comparisons of corporate governance in the public sector, particularly municipal councils audit committees, to establish international best practices from different political, economic and legal environments. This will come in handy in proposing a best model for the audit committees in Zimbabwe's municipal councils.

Studies on local authorities audit committees explored on different areas from different jurisdictions , inclusive of studies on their effectiveness (by Purcel, Fancis and Clark ,2014), motivation for voluntary use in jurisdictions where the committees are not mandatory (Fitzgerald & Giroux, 2014; Martkin ,2010)), Roles of audit committees (Zhang and Rich, 2016) and benefits of voluntarily using audit committees (Rich and Zhang, 2014). The Sarbanes Oxley Act require all listed companies to have audit committees in their structures, however the law doesn't apply to municipal councils who only appoint these committees on a voluntary basis (Fitzgerald & Giroux, 2014). Studies by Martkin (2010) in USA revealed that most of the committees were established to improve financial oversight, in response scandals and in order to remain current with the private sector. Zhang and Rich (2016) study revealed that municipal audit committees also play an advisory role on fiscal policy above their usual role of oversight over financial reporting. The investigation came up with a direct relationship between presence of audit committees in municipalities and use of own source finance. An Australian study of the effectiveness of audit committees in local authorities by Purcel, Fancis and Clark (2014) revealed that, among other issues, management relationship with councillors, management domination of the audit committee and the ability of the local authority to attract and retain members has effect on the effectiveness of an audit committees in local authorities. Municipalities that voluntarily use audit committees were also found to have fewer internal control deficiencies (Rich and Zhang, 2014). It is apparent that the scant literature available on municipal council audit committees rarely cover developing countries in Africa particularly Zimbabwe. This motivated the researcher to explore the gap with particular focus on a comparative analysis of Zimbabwe's local government audit committee frameworks with those of USA, UK and South Africa.

Municipal Council

A municipal council is the principal legal authority of an urban local authority and is an outcome of a democratic electoral process and is the representative of the citizens in the strategic administration of the local authority (Khaile, 2018). In the corporate world, the municipal council is the equivalent of the board and gives policy and the strategic direction of the organisation (Patterson, 2014). Different legal jurisdictions have varying requirements for coming up with the

municipal council. Some use democratic processes to elect councillors into office, some are appointed by a higher authority like the central government while others use a combination of the two. In the Zimbabwean context municipal councillors are elected through a democratic process every 5 years. In this study, the terms ‘municipal council’ and ‘urban local authority’ will be used interchangeably.

Audit Committee

A distinguishing feature of public sector governance and particularly local government, as compared to the private sector, is the focus on the dual requirements of performance, in terms of the delivery of community services and of compliance in the context of societal expectations of accountability, probity and transparency Thomas & Purcel (2018). In relation to local government, the audit committee’s oversight and outcomes are enacted on behalf of local community constituents and associated stakeholders and comprise three distinct groups, namely: councillors, independent members and management. An Audit Committee refers to an administrative body that is established to serve the purpose of overseeing the accounting and financial reporting processes and to also inspect financial statements of a company (Ball et al., 2008). Each member of the Audit Committee in a company must be a member of the Board of Directors and must be independent. Each company must have a specified number of Audit Committee members. Another way to define an Audit Committee is to take it as part of the board of directors established to give additional assurance regarding the standard and dependability of financial information used by the board (Anderson, Christ et al., 2012). A broader definition of an Audit Committee is a committee of the Board of Directors whereby the majority of the members are non-executive directors meant to oversee, review and keep an eye on the corporate financial reporting process and the audit activities (Shelton, 2018). The committee must be set up containing chiefly non-officer directors. The definitions suggest that the AC is a division of the board of directors and most of the emphasis is placed on the composition, background, and key responsibilities of the AC. The definitions also put emphasis on the inclusion of independent directors possessing the capacity to perform responsibilities of financial reporting and audit. The committee has a responsibility of monitoring and evaluation controls over the process of financial reporting. This partly tackles the agency problem where management can misstate the financial statements in order to fulfil their personal objectives. To summarize, the definitions focus on key attributes namely composition broken down to independence and competence and responsibilities of the audit committee as well as the mandate of the committee.

An investigation by Zhang and Rich (2016) on the effect of existence of council audit committees on the organisation’s funding policies concluded that there is a tendency for municipal councils with audit committees to finance themselves using internally generated resources as compared with those without the committees who use more debt finance. Hegazy and Stafford (2016) established, through a comparative study of two English public sector organisations, that audit committees have moved to a more strategic focus of the organisation. Thomas and Purcel (2017) noted some pitfalls in the appointment of public sector Audit committee members that have an

effect of stifling independence. These consist of executive members of one local authority appointed audit committee members of another municipal council, members which are politically connected, current or former external auditors, retired executives and members with close personal or professional relationships with councillors appointed into audit committees. This exposes the complexity of engaging a truly independent audit committee by local authorities as the professional and academic characteristics of the members appointed are as important as their personal standing. In the Zimbabwean context, audit committees are drawn entirely from the elected members of the governing council (UCA 29:15)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A purposive sample representing USA, UK South Africa and Zimbabwe local authority audit committee frameworks was selected. Key primary documents governing the audit committees were identified and analysed. Specifically, the following documents were identified: CIPFA Audit Committee guidelines (2014), Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). (2008). GFOA Recommended Practice on Audit Committees, Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) (RSA 2003, the the King III report and the Urban Councils Act (chapter 29:15) Zimbabwe. Information on the characteristics of the audit committees recommended by the regulations and statutory provisions was extracted, compared, and contrasted. Recommendations were made for the Zimbabwe urban local authorities audit committees from the findings. The information gathered from the primary documents consist of composition, size of audit committees, required qualifications of members, roles and responsibilities as well as financial experience of members.

Results

USA

While publicly traded USA entities are required by the Sarbanes – Oxley Act to come up with audit committees regulated by the law, there is no such requirement for municipal councils. According to Fitzgerald and Giroux (2014), large USA cities are however making use of Audit committees in their control structures. West and Berman (2014) postulates that audit committees act as a connection between elected officials and municipal management in the USA. Some municipal authorities use elected officials as part of the audit committee members while others combine such elected officials with members of the executive in form of finance officials. Appointed officials also compliment the audit committee with some of the required skills. GFOA (2008) came up with some recommended practice on audit Committees in USA states and local governments as follows; all local authorities should establish audit committees, The audit committee should be formally established by charter, enabling resolution, or other appropriate legal means, Ideally, all members of the audit committee should possess or obtain a basic understanding of governmental financial reporting and auditing, the audit committee should be allowed to have access to financial experts, all Audit Committee members should be members of the governing body, minimum of 3 members but not large enough to impede its efficient operation. The best practices guidelines issued by GFOA borrows from some of the statutory requirements

of SOX and are implemented by the municipal councils voluntarily (Fitzgerald and Giroux, 2014). Despite the absence of a legal framework governing the operations of Audit Committees, these are widely being in USA with most of the structures significantly different from those of the GFOA (Matkin, 2010).

South Africa

According to Masegare and Ngoepe (2018) Municipal Audit committees in South Africa are governed by the King iii report principles 2.1- 2.6 as well as sections 27 and 60 of the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) (RSA 2003. The act requires municipal councils to appoint members who are independent of the elected council into the audit committee. This audit committee will act in an advisory capacity to the board of elected councilors (Erasmus and Matsimela, 2020). On the hand, the King III report, a corporate governance framework for both private sector and public sector enterprises, also have specific provisions for municipal councils.

Zimbabwe

On the other hand, in Zimbabwe, UCA (Chapter 29:15) gives residents the rights to elect members into the council through a political process. Some members of the council will then be appointed into the AC and report to the full council (Jonga, 2014). Section 97 provides for the establishment of AC followed by Section 98 which provides for their functions which can be summarised as follows: to oversee the use of council finances, assets and resources, follow up on observations from the IAF and the external audit and recommend appropriate responses to the full council. The country’s Urban local authorities consist of Local Boards, and City Councils, Town Councils, Municipal Councils (World Bank, 2013). Although it is a legal requirement in Zimbabwe that all urban local authorities should have audit committees, this requirement raises questions on their effectiveness (Mutema, 2011; Muchadenyika (2014)). The Urban Councils Act (29:15) does not specify the criteria for one to elected as a councillor in terms of the professional and academic background. Worse still financial and accounting background is not a requirement for one to be elected to the council of a Local Authority. This renders the contribution of such elected councillors to the council business questionable. Professionally, there should be minimum requirements for qualifications for audit committee members (IoDSA, 2009).

United Kingdom

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guidelines as well as the Monitor Code of Corporate Governance are the key frameworks governing the appointment, composition, size, expertise and membership of Audit committee in UK local authorities.

Table 1: Provisions of the CIPFA Guidelines on Local Authorities Audit Committees (UK)

| | | CIPFA Guidelines on AC (2013) |
|-------------|-----|---|
| Composition | and | The size of the AC is encouraged to be between 3 and 5 members. |
| Membership | | |

| | |
|--|---|
| Appointment of AC members | The AC Membership should abide by the rules concerning the political structure of the LA which depends on its make-up and history. |
| Financial experience | Guidelines encourage the injection of an external view as independent members. |
| Make-up skills and experience of members | AC Chair should not be a member of the Council Executive for objectivity. An accounting background is less important than having a broad understanding of the financials, risk and controls, core activities and general CG issues. |

Source: CIPFA 2013

COMPARISON OF AUDIT COMMITTEE FRAMEWORK OF ZIMBABWE URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THOSE OF OTHER COUTRIES

Comparison of audit committee frameworks of different countries is crucial as this enables identification of the strength and weaknesses of each framework and in turn facilitate recommendations for adoption of best practices from different legal, political and cultural jurisdictions. This is not without challenges, however, in the public sector context of developing countries like Zimbabwe where such corporate governance frameworks are legislated, and any changes need to go through parliamentary processes. Such complications do not dispel the need for adoption and customisation of best practices from other countries even in the crafting of corporate governance legislation. It is against this background that the writer is making a detailed comparison of Zimbabwe’s audit committee framework in the urban local authorities against those of USA, United Kingdom and South Africa.

It is apparent that local authorities audit committees in both USA and UK are not governed by any statutory provisions (Fitzgerald & Giroux, 2014). Guidelines from professional public sector accounting bodies are therefore the main sources of reference for operationalisation of audit committees in the local authorities. These comprise of both the monitor code of corporate governance (2014) and the CIPFA guidelines (2013), for UK as well as the GFOA for USA. On the contrary, in the South African context, the King III report principles (a private sector initiative), as well the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) (RSA 2003 (statutory provisions), compliment each other in regulating the municipal councils audit committees. The Zimbabwean context is different in that the requirement for urban local authorities is just legislated through the Urban councils Act (Chapter 29:15). Guidelines from professional Accounting bodies that are specific to these audit committees are non-existent. The requirements of the different frameworks of urban local authorities audit committees are summarised using the table that follow;

Table 2: Findings From The Audit Committee Guidelines And Statutory Provisions

| | CIPFA Guidelines on AC (2022) UK | GFOA GUIDELINES (USA) | MFM ACT (2003) (South Africa) | Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) ZIMBABWE |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Composition and Membership | The size of the AC is encouraged to be between 3 and 5 members. | Minimum of 3 and not too large, Elected official, some executive members | At least 3 members majority of which should be outside council | Number not Specified but membership include Councillors excluding the Mayor, deputy mayor and chairpersons of other committees |
| Appointment of AC members | The AC Membership should abide by the rules concerning the political structure of the LA which depends on its make-up and history. | Municipal Council through a charter of legal instrument | Appointed by the full Council | Appointed by the full Council |
| Financial experience | Guidelines encourage the injection of an external view as independent members. | Basic understanding of government finance, Access to financial expert. | Appropriate Experience | Not Required |
| Make-up skills and experience of members | AC Chair should not be a member of the Council Executive for objectivity. An accounting background is less important than having a broad understanding of the financials, | should be educated regarding both the role of the audit committee and their personal responsibility as members, including their duty to exercise an appropriate | Appropriate Experience | Not Specified |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|--|
| | risk and controls, core activities and general CG issues. | degree of professional skepticism; | | |
| Frequency of Meetings | | | At least 4 times | Not specified |
| Scope of Work | 1)Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements. 2)Financial and governance reporting 3) Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance | appointment, compensation, retention, and oversight of the work of any independent accountants to provide independent review and oversight of a government's financial reporting processes, internal controls and independent auditors | internal financial control and internal audits; (ii)risk management;i) accounting policies; (iv) the adequacy, reliability and accuracy of financial reporting and information; (v) performance management; (vi) effective governance; (viii) performance evaluation | i)Enquire on use of Finances, Assets and human resources 2) Follow up on Internal and external Audit Observations iii) Recommend investment methods and custody of property iv) Asertain proper use of funds and Assets |

Source: Compiled by the author from literature review

DISCUSSION

Zimbabwe as a developing country has a lot to learn from advanced economies such as the United Kingdom and USA in terms of corporate governance in the public sector. Since the country has already employed a legalistic approach in regulating the Audit committees of urban local authorities through sections 97 and 98 of the urban councils Act (chapter 29:15), the writer is recommending that the new audit Committee framework be adopted by incorporating the best practices from other countries into the existing legislation.

On the contentious issue of membership of the audit committee, where the Act requires appointment of members from the governing council like any other committee of the council, there appears to be some complications. There is an apparent potential for failure to comply with the widely accepted norm, taking from the frameworks of the other 3 countries, that the majority of

the members should have some basic understanding of finance or accounting (GFOA, 2008; CIPFA, 2013). This is a possibility because the Zimbabwean Act has no requirement for academic or professional qualifications for one to qualify for election into council (Jonga, 2014). The South African legislation MFM Act (RSA) 2003 anticipated the problems associated with drawing audit committee members entirely from the governing council and gave a provision for hire of all-audit committee members from outside the council (Masegare and Ngoepe, 2018). While this gives room for acquisition of the required skills from a wide base, it defeats the whole purpose of having the governing council choosing the audit committee from among themselves. The South African situation is worsened by the legal provision that the committee is just an advisory body. This is the same requirement with the Zimbabwe legislation, the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15 section 98c). The governing council is free to accept, implement or discard the recommendations of the Audit Committee. The current developments in the creation of audit committees, however, are gravitating towards a more balanced committee where all skills are represented being it management, legal, information technology (Purcell et al, 2014). This brings to question the feasibility of coming up with an effective audit committee from elected officials.

Given the above scenario, it is recommended that the Urban Councils Act (chapter 29:15) Zimbabwe clearly stipulate the requirement for appointment of members with a diverse of skills that are relevant to the effective oversight of the municipal council business on all areas of the urban local authority. However at least one of the members, especially the Chair, should have proficiency in public Finance and Accounting. In the absence of such skills within council, request should be made to the responsible Minister to approve outsourcing of the missing critical skills from outside the council as per the South African legislation.

The current Zimbabwean Act just like the South African Act, GFOA, CIPFA guidelines advocate for an advisory audit committee. However because of the limitations of such an arrangement in the adoption and implementation of the committee recommendations it is recommended that provisions be made to bind the full council to comply with audit committee recommendations or to explain justifications for non-compliance in council resolutions.

On the size of the audit committee, research established mixed results in the relationship between audit committee size and different proxies of its effectiveness. Some came up with a positive (Güneş & Atılğan, 2016) relationship, on the other hand Tahervafaei & Tarighi(2018) failed to find any relationship, In addition studies by Sarpal (2017) established a curvilinear relationship where the effectiveness increases up to 4 members and start to be negative thereafter. A minimum of 3 appears to be reasonable as the odd number gives room for voting results if the need arises however for larger urban local authorities, 5 members are recommended to allow for the diverse skills in the committee.

CONCLUSION

Developing countries have been benchmarking their corporate governance practices to the best practices of developed countries such as the United Kingdom and USA and local government audit committees are not an exception. It is against this background that an international

comparison with these countries including South Africa becomes crucial in recommending best practice for Zimbabwe. Although the frameworks differ with developed countries relying more on professional bodies while developing countries such as Zimbabwe make use of statutory regulations, the ultimate goal remains that of improving the independence and oversight of the audit committees over financial reporting. The recommendations made through this research will assist the lawmakers in Zimbabwe to craft regulations that are in line with the international best practice

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