

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE LONGFOIRT
LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL



AUDIT COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT

**FOR YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER
2019**

May 2020

Section 1 - Background to Audit Committee

The concept of an Audit Committee was first introduced by ***section 122 of the Local Government Act 2001***. It was envisaged that an Audit Committee would have an independent role in advising the Council on financial reporting processes, internal control, risk management and audit matters, as part of a systematic review of the control environment and governance procedures of the Council.

Section 5 of the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Act 2006 amended the relevant provisions of the 2001 Act.

The 2006 Act enhanced the role of audit committees and allowed for the inclusion of outside expert membership on such committees. It was thought that the new provisions introduced by the 2006 Act reflected best practice and development in corporate governance in both the public and private sectors. In May 2007 the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government requested that each local authority make the appropriate arrangements to establish an Audit Committee.

The Executive of Longford County Council dealt with these recommendations in a timely fashion and at the monthly meeting of the Members of Longford County Council held on 18th June 2007 the Head of Finance outlined the requirements for the establishment of an Audit Committee as set out by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

It was agreed that the County Manager, in consultation with the Cathaoirleach and the Corporate Policy Group, would bring a proposal regarding the membership of the Audit Committee to the September meeting of the Council. At the September 2007 meeting of the Council the County Manager was in a position to inform Members that three external members had been nominated and he sought the nomination of two serving or retired Councillors as members of the Audit Committee.

Councillors Seamus Butler and Alan Mitchell were duly appointed, and the inaugural meeting of the Audit Committee took place on 14th May 2008.

The legislative framework for Audit Committees was significantly expanded by the ***Local Government (Audit Committee) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 244 of 2014)***, which came into operation on the 6th June 2014 and which imposed substantial additional obligations on members of the Audit Committee and further expanded the work to be undertaken by the Committee.

Section 2 - Role & Functions of the Audit Committee

The Audit Committee has an independent role in advising the Council on financial reporting processes, internal control, risk management and audit matters, as part of the systematic review of the control environment and governance procedures of the Council.

The Committee has a role in promoting good accounting practices, ensuring better and more informed decision-making, and improving the focus on value for money and costs saving throughout the organisation.

It also supports the work of the Internal Audit Unit and advises the Chief Executive in relation to the operation and development of the Unit.

Its role is advisory in nature and the Committee holds office for the duration of the Council term.

Matters discussed at Audit Committee meetings are confidential.

The functions of the Audit Committee are to:

- Review financial and budgetary reporting practices and procedures within the local authority;
- Foster the development of best practice in the internal audit function and, as part of this, to:
 - Review the internal audit charter and bring any recommendations to the attention of the Chief Executive;

- Review and assess the draft annual internal audit plan;
 - Monitor implementation of the internal audit plan on a quarterly basis and the extent to which audit objectives are being achieved;
 - Assess the outcome of the internal audit process, having regard to any findings and recommendations of the internal audit unit and management responses thereto;
 - Assess the implementation of agreed corrective actions by management having regard to follow-up audits;
 - Review the report of audit activities of the Internal Audit Unit within three months of the year end.
- Request special reports from Internal Audit as considered appropriate;
 - Review Local Government Auditors' reports, and assess management response and follow-up actions;
 - Assess and promote value for money/efficiency, including collection performance across income streams;
 - Consider whether processes are in place to manage risks efficiently, in accordance with organisational guidelines and business plans;
 - To review the council revenue and capital reports on a least a quarterly basis;
 - Review performance and expenditure reports from each Directorate as required;
 - Review performance indicators and value for money reports when prepared;

- Report to the council at least annually, and in any event within three months of the end of each calendar year, providing such advice and making such recommendations, if any, to the Council as the Committee considers appropriate.

The **Local Government (Audit Committee) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 244 of 2014)** placed additional obligations on its members as follows:-

- (a) The Chairperson is under a duty to ensure that each member of the Audit Committee undertakes an induction programme within three months of his or her appointment to the Committee;
- (b) The Chairperson must also ensure that the training needs of the Audit Committee and of individual members are reviewed on an annual basis and reported to the local authority and the Chief Executive;
- (c) To immediately report to the Chairperson any conflict of interest that arises during his or her membership of the Committee;
- (d) To put procedures in place to monitor and manage potential conflicts of interest of Committee members;
- (e) To adopt an Internal Audit Charter, which must be reviewed annually by the Audit Committee and the local authority.

The 2014 Regulations also provide that the Audit Committee shall prepare an annual work programme which shall be adopted with or without amendment by the local authority and shall include-

- (a) the approval of the annual internal audit plan;
- (b) a review of the annual financial statement;
- (c) a review of the audited financial statement and auditor's report;
- (d) the preparation of the annual report as provided for in **Regulation 15(1)** of the Regulations;

- (e) the review of periodic internal audit reports;
- (f) the review of relevant findings and recommendations of the National Oversight and Audit Commission (“NOAC”) and the response of the Chief Executive to such findings and recommendations and take further action as appropriate; *and*
- (g) any other actions necessary to discharge its functions.

In addition, the Audit Committee is required to meet separately at least annually with:-

- the Local Government Auditor,
- employees of the internal audit unit of the local authority, *and*
- the Chief Executive.

Of particular importance is ***Regulation 12(1) of the 2014 Regulations*** which provides:

- (1) that the Audit Committee shall ensure that procedures are in place whereby employees of the local authority may in confidence raise concerns about possible irregularities in financial reporting or other financial matters *and*
- (2) that the arrangements specified above shall include arrangements for the proportionate and independent examination of such matters.

The Committee has not been made aware of any concerns having been raised by any employee of the Council about possible irregularities in financial reporting or other financial matters.

The 2014 Regulations also provide that the Audit Committee shall undertake annually a review of its own effectiveness and shall report its findings to the local authority. Thereafter, it shall be a matter for the Chairperson, in

consultation with the Chief Executive and the Cathaoirleach, to ensure that appropriate follow-up action is undertaken by the Committee.

Section 3 - Membership of the Audit Committee:

The current membership of the Audit Committee is as follows:-

- Mr. James Morgan, Chairperson of the Committee, is a Chartered Accountant and based in Longford Town
- Ms. Luie McEntire, farmer and was formerly an elected member of Longford County Council
- Mr. Louis Belton, former Dail Eireann and Seanad Eireann representative and was formerly an elected member of Longford County Council.
- Ms. Mary Rose McNally, Solicitor, based in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.
- Ms Uruemu Adejmi, MBA from Athlone IT and is based in Longford Town.

Section 4 - Chairperson's Statement:

Statement of James Morgan, the Chairperson of the Audit Committee of Longford County Council.

This is the twelfth Annual Report of the Audit Committee of Longford County Council covering the period from 1st August 2019 to 31st December 2019.

The Corporate Policy Group of Longford County Council, following consultation with the Chief Executive, nominated us as members of the Audit Committee and this nomination was formally approved by the members of Longford County Council at it's meeting held on 10th July 2019.

The members of the Audit Committee took up office on the 1st August and had their inaugural meeting on 4th October 2018.

The Audit Committee is a vital component of good corporate governance. It is intended to provide an independent expert review, assessment and advice on financial management and reporting processes, internal control systems and procedures, risk management and audit matters.

It is wholly reliant on the competence and effectiveness of the internal audit function of the local authority in question.

The Committee's role is primarily an advisory one and we are not vested with any executive powers or any statutory powers of investigation or enquiry. The statutory functions of the Audit Committee are set out in **Section 122(2)(a) to (f) of the functions of the Local Government Act 2001 and in S.I. 244 of 2014** entitled **Local Government (Audit Committee) Regulations, 2014** and are more precisely defined in Section 2 of this report.

Throughout the second half of 2019 we have had various meetings with members of the Executive of Longford County Council.

We met with Paddy Mahon, the Chief Executive, on the 4th October 2019. We met with John McKeon, the Head of Finance, on the 4th October and 20th December 2019.

We met with Ms. Barbara Heslin, Director of Services on the 4th October 2019.

We met with Ms. Fiona Baskett, Internal Auditor on the 4th October and 20th December 2019.

Although we have our own independent agenda, the Committee continues to closely monitor the recommendations which are made each year by the Local Government Auditor.

We met with Ms. Anne Halion, the Local Government Auditor, on the 20th December 2019 and discussed her Statutory Audit Report for the year ended 31st December 2018 in considerable detail.

Thus, we complied with the provisions *of Section 60 of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014.*

We also met with John McKeon, the Head of Finance, at our meeting on the same date and we discussed Ms. Halion's report with him.

While this particular Audit Committee met twice during the five-month period from 1st August 2019 to 31st December, the previous Audit Committee met four times during the period from 1st January 2019 to 31st July 2019, a total of six Audit Committee meetings during 2019.

Furthermore, the incoming Audit Committee were fully briefed on the work of the previous Committee up to 31st July 2019.

Internal Audit Reports

The Internal Audit Department of Longford County Council is functioning to a very high standard. The quality of internal audit reports is excellent. We wish to commend Ms. Fiona Baskett, the Internal Auditor, for her professionalism, expertise and dedication in bringing this about. Longford County Council has an internal audit department amongst the best in the sector.

As well as carrying out various Internal Audit's under the Annual Audit Plan, Fiona is responsible for the co-ordination of NOAC Performance Indicators Reporting and also the Quality Assurance aspect of the Public Spending Code.

A special word of congratulations must go to Fiona for her successful entry into the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditor's in 2018.

This reflects very favourably both on herself and on the commitment and importance placed upon Internal Audit within Longford County Council.

Local Government Auditor's Report

In her report, the Local Government Auditor focused on nine main issues:-

(1) Financial Standing

- Statement of comprehensive income
- Financial Position
- Loans Payable

(2) Income Collection

- Summary of Major Revenue Collections
- Commercial Rates
- Housing Rents and Annuities
- Housing Loans

(3) Capital Account

- Capital Account Overview
- Capital Projects Expenditure

(4) Fixed Assets

- Fixed Assets Overview
- Transfer of Water and Sewerage Functions to Irish Water
- Property Interest Register

(5) Development Contributions

(6) Loans Payable

(7) Procurement

(8) Fire Charges

(9) Local Authority Companies

- Ms. Halion stated as follows in her Report:

“The internal unit was staffed by two staff members until late 2018 and is currently staffed by just one full-time officer.

The unit completed six reports from January 2018 to May 2019.

I have taken account of this work during the course of my audit.”

The Chief Executive’s response to this was as follows:-

“The establishment of the Control & Compliance Unit (CCU) which encompasses both Internal Audit and Procurement in 2017 has been very successful, and indeed the creation of such units have been welcomed as an exemplar within the sector.

This unit, together with the wider local authority, is further supported by an external consultancy service also appointed in 2017. A collaborative knowledge transfer approach exists between the consultancy service provider and the CCU.

It is a testament to the staff within the unit that they have embarked on a path of continuous upskilling and development, since the inception of this unit, and have been successful in obtaining a number of relevant technical professional qualifications over the last three years. This is adding tangible long-term value to the Council’.

With regard to the Audit Committee, Ms. Halion reported that it *“held six meetings in 2018. The work of the committee included approving the annual audit work plan for the year and reviewing internal audit reports, performance indicators and the Council’s financial budgetary reporting practices and procedures.*

The committee submitted their 2018 annual report to the members at their meeting in March 2019, in accordance with Section 60 of the Local Government Act 2014.

We will continue to monitor these matters (and indeed all other matters coming within our remit) over the coming year and, if necessary, we will request periodical reports from the relevant directorates.

Section 5 - Operation of the Audit Committee

In 2019, the Audit Committee met on the 4th October and the 20th of December. The Committee considered the internal audit reports which were prepared by the Internal Audit Department of Longford County Council.

It also:

- Considered the Annual Financial Statement (ASF) for year ending 31st December 2018.
- Considered the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) Statutory Report for the year ended 31st December 2017.
- Considered the Audit Committee Report for 2018/2019.
- Adopted the Audit Committee Charter.
- Agreed and adopted the Annual Audit Work Plan.
- Considered the Budget 2020 Report.
- Considered the Local Government Audit Service (LGAS) Statutory Report for the year ended 31st December 2018.
- Reviewed the relevant findings and responses from NOAC.

All members of the Audit Committee attended a ½ day Audit Committee workshop delivered by the Institute of Public Administration in October 2019.

Section 6 - Going forward

The annual work programme to be adopted by the Audit Committee will include:-

- (a) Ensuring that the internal audit function within Longford County Council is effective, efficient, fully resourced, independent and fit for purpose;
- (b) Reviewing all internal audit reports;
- (c) Fostering the development of best practice in the internal audit function;
- (d) Reviewing and considering both the Internal Audit Charter and the Audit Committee Charter and bringing any recommendations to the attention of the Chief Executive;
- (e) Reviewing and assessing the draft annual internal audit plan;
- (f) Monitoring implementation of the internal audit plan on a quarterly basis;
- (g) Assessing the extent to which audit objectives are being achieved;
- (h) Assessing the outcome of the internal audit process, having regard to any findings and recommendations of the internal audit unit and management responses thereto;
- (i) Assessing the implementation of agreed corrective procedures by management having regard to follow-up audits;
- (j) Reviewing the report of audit activities by the internal audit unit, within three months of the year end;
- (k) Requesting special reports from Internal Audit Unit as considered appropriate;
- (l) Reviewing the Council's financial and budgetary reporting practices and procedures;
- (m) Reviewing the Local Government Auditor's reports and assessing management response thereto and follow-up actions;
- (n) Meeting with the Local Government Auditor and discussing his report;
- (o) Assessing and promoting value for money/efficiency in all areas;

- (p) Assessing the existing processes for the effective management of risk;
- (q) Reporting to the Council at least annually and in any event within three months of the end of each calendar year, providing such advice and making such recommendations, if any, to the Council as the Committee may consider appropriate.
- (r) Assessing the effectiveness of existing protocols whereby employees of the local authority may in confidence raise concerns about possible irregularities in financial reporting or other financial matters;
- (s) Ensuring that those protocols include arrangements for the proportionate and independent examination of such matters;
- (t) Reviewing its own performance and effectiveness.

We are pleased to report that both management and staff have diligently and courteously worked with us throughout 2019.

The Committee wish to formally thank the Chief Executive Paddy Mahon, the Head of Finance, John McKeon, and all of the management and staff within the various directorates for their assistance and co-operation over the past twelve months.

We also wish to formally thank and congratulate the Internal Auditor Ms. Fiona Baskett, on her work throughout the year.

We also express our sincere thanks to Committee Secretary John McKeon, and to Claire McNabola, Staff Officer for their support and assistance throughout 2019.

Signed:

**JAMES MORGAN
(Chairperson)**

LUIE MCENTIRE

LOUIS BELTON

MARY ROSE MCNALLY

URUEMU ADEJNMI