

2020/21 Annual Report of the Audit Committee

Purpose of report

For decision.

Summary

The Audit Committee met on 8 June 2021. This annual report provides an overview of areas reviewed and work undertaken by the Audit Committee in 2020/21, in accordance with the Committee's terms of reference.

Recommendation

That the General Assembly note the annual report.

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2020/21 Annual Report of the Audit Committee

Introduction

1. The responsibilities of the LGA's Audit Committee are to:
 - 1.1. review the financial statements prepared for the LGA and its associated companies
 - 1.2. monitor the processes for managing risks, internal controls and corporate governance arrangements
 - 1.3. oversee the appointments of the external and internal auditors and commission and review their work
 - 1.4. consider issues of probity and conduct
 - 1.5. seek expert advice where necessary to provide independent internal or external assurance on key issues
2. The main focus of this Committee's work in 2020/21 has been to review the audited accounts of the LGA and its associated companies, to agree and review the findings and recommendations of the internal audit programme for the year.

Financial statements and external audit

3. PKF Littlejohn are the LGA's appointed external auditors for the LGA (now incorporating LGMB), IDeA, LGA (Properties), and LGA Commercial Services Ltd.
4. In June 2021 the LGA's consolidated accounts for 2020/21 and the audited accounts for the three associated companies were reviewed prior to these being adopted by the LGA Board and the relevant company boards.
5. The LGA's consolidated financial statements also disclose the position of the LGA as a standalone entity and include the LGA's income and expenditure accounts and balance sheet.
6. The consolidated accounts show the LGA and its related bodies made an operating deficit of £3.3m (2019/20 surplus of £11.6m), after interest and tax.
7. Over all income decreased by 0.9 per cent from £64.0m to £63.5m despite no reduction in core government funding, but rising subscription income (the first increases in many years), due to slightly lower income from other income, grants and investment/joint venture incomes.

8. The LGA's Geoplace LLP Joint Venture made another useful contribution to other income during 2020/21, making a dividend payment of £3.25m (compared to £1.75m in 2019/20).
9. The investment properties have been revalued at the year end. Layden House has decreased in value by £1.4m, with the redevelopment construction now complete, due to the condition of the Farringdon market, while 18 Smith Square has decreased in value by £3.25m reflecting the Westminster rental market position.
10. The overall pension fund deficit reported in the accounts has increased by £8.8m from £93.1m to £101.9m. The overall Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year shows separately the gains and losses that relate to changes in the actuarial assumptions used to calculate pension scheme assets and liabilities with the ongoing payroll contributions made to reduce historic deficits included within administrative expenses
11. It is standard practice for issues identified in the course of the external audit to be raised by the auditors with management and for these to be reported to the board members as "Performance Improvement Observations" in what is commonly known as the "Auditor's Report". We received this report from the auditors at its meeting on 8 June 2021, and will monitor progress with the recommendations arising from the 2020/21 external audit

Internal audit

12. TIAA are the LGA's internal auditors following a procurement exercise in 2018.
13. The Audit Committee is responsible for agreeing the annual internal audit strategy and programme at the start of each financial year, taking account of the key risks identified in the LGA's Strategic Risk Register.
14. The internal audit strategy and audit programme for 2020/21 was agreed in June 2020. The audit programme was split into two blocks and included a follow up of actions taken by the LGA in response to the recommendations of previous audits. TIAA have completed the programme and full reports were presented to this Committee in November 2020 and June 2021. TIAA's Annual report was presented to the Committee meeting in June 2021.
15. In their annual opinion for the year 2020/21, TIAA's Head of Internal Audit states "TIAA is satisfied that, for the areas reviewed during the year, Local Government Association has reasonable and effective risk management, control and governance processes in place".
16. The 2020/21 audit opinions are summarised below:

Internal audit assignment	Internal audit opinion
Key Financial Controls	Substantial assurance
UKMBA (assurance review)	Substantial assurance
Business Continuity (advisory review)	N/A
Debt Management	Substantial assurance
Governance and Risk	Substantial assurance
Procurement and Commissioning	Reasonable assurance

17. Overall the audit results have been positive. The advisory review of the Business Continuity plan was not given and assurance level, however the auditors were satisfied with the updated plan and the practices that have been put in place.
18. The Audit Committee has overseen the implementation of any recommendations via the follow up review conducted by TIAA on an annual basis.

Risk Management and internal control

19. The Strategic Risk Register is reviewed quarterly by the Strategic Management Team (SMT) and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) to ensure LGA's strategic and operational risks are identified and the associated scoring reflects the LGA's current situation. The Audit Committee has reviewed the Strategic Risk Register during the course of the year, in particular focusing on ensuring that key risks facing the organisation are being effectively managed.
20. The Audit Committee receives an annual report on any instance of fraud occurring and can confirm that there were no proven instances of fraud or corruption in 2020/21.
21. This Audit Committee can confirm that there have been no incidents of probity and conduct issues to be investigated and reported in 2020/21.

