



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD IN ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE ON TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER 2019 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor M Goodman
- Committee** : Councillors – A Bennington, P Hamill, and B Webb
- Independent Member** : G Nesbitt
- Non Committee Member Present** : Councillor R Wilson
- Officers Present** : Director of Finance and Governance – S Cole  
Director of Organisation Development – A McCooke  
Head of Internal Audit – P Caulcutt  
Head of Finance – J Balmer  
Head of Performance & Transformation – H Hall  
IT Systems Support – J Higginson  
Member Services Officer – S Boyd
- In attendance:** K Beattie – NI Audit Office  
A McMaw – ASM Accountants

**CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the quarterly Audit Committee Meeting and reminded all present of recording requirements.

**1. APOLOGIES**

None

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

### **3. ITEMS FOR DECISION**

#### **3.1 FI/AUD/2 REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE 2019/20**

Members were reminded that CIPFA's Audit Committee – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police, places a requirement on Audit Committees to “report regularly on their work, and at least annually report an assessment on their performance”.

Members were also reminded that in previous years, Members of the Audit Committee participated in a facilitated self-assessment review of the performance of the Audit Committee.

This self-assessment included the completion of an “Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Audit Committee’ checklist which enabled the Committee to undertake and report on the assessment of their performance throughout the year. This assessment and the Audit Committee Annual Report were then reported to the Audit Committee and Council.

The Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit Committee for 2019/20 is now due. To assist the Audit Committee in completing this review, we are proposing to facilitate a self-assessment session for Members on either 12 or 19 February 2020.

Councillor Webb requested that the review be held on the night of an existing Committee Meeting, the Head of Internal Audit clarified the anticipated duration of the proposed meeting and agreed to look into alternative dates.

Proposed by Councillor Hamill  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

- a) a facilitated self-assessment session be approved; and**
- b) a suitable date be agreed.**

*ACTION BY: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit*

### **4. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

#### **4.1 FI/FIN/SOA/05 NIAO: ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2018/19**

Members were reminded that in September 2019, the Audit Committee approved the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019.

The Local Government Auditor has now approved the Annual Audit Letter 2018/19 following completion of the audit of the Statement of Accounts by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). However the Annual Audit Letter has yet to be published by the NIAO.

The representative of the NIAO provided Members with an update and advised that all Annual Audit Letters for the eleven Councils would be issued together.

The Director of Finance and Governance agreed to circulate the letter to Members when received.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*ACTION BY: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance & Governance*

#### **4.2 FI/FIN/SOA/05 NIAO: REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE 2018/19**

Members were reminded that in September 2019, the Audit Committee approved the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019. Members were also provided with a copy of the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance.

The Local Government Auditor had issued the final Report to Those Charged with Governance (circulated) following completion of the audit of the Statement of Accounts by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

A representative of the NIAO was in attendance to answer Members' questions.

Proposed by Councillor Webb  
Seconded by Councillor Hamill and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.3 PT/CI/17 NIAO: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT 2019/20**

Members were reminded that Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 established that all Councils are under a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions.

The Local Government Auditor carried out an 'improvement audit' and an 'improvement assessment' in line with Sections 93 and 94 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and issued a Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2019-20 (circulated).

The report set out key audit and assessment findings as well as a proposal for improvement, although this was not a formal recommendation, and an

ongoing proposal that the Council continue working with other councils and the Department for Communities to agree a suite of self-imposed indicators and standards.

The report proposed that Council “should set out defined terms of success to better assess the achievement of objectives” in relation to Improvement Objective 5: We will encourage entrepreneurship across the Borough.

An Action Plan (circulated) had been developed, setting out how the Council intends to address the proposals identified in the NIAO's Audit and Assessment Report.

The Independent Member sought clarification on the timeline on the proposal for improvement relating to self-imposed indicators and standards, and asked if the Working Group's Terms of Reference could be provided to Members, which was agreed.

The NIAO Representative advised that the recommendation in relation to benchmarking across the Sector was for every Council and would require all Councils to establish a regional performance framework.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor Hamill and agreed that

**the Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2019-20 and Action Plan be noted.**

*ACTION BY: Helen Hall, Head of Performance & Transformation*

#### **4.4 PT/CI/024 CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2019-20 QUARTER 2 IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES PROGRESS REPORT**

Members were reminded that Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 puts in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

A second quarter progress report was circulated for Members' attention.

The report provides an overview on how we performed against:

- Our eight corporate improvement objectives, as set out in the 2019-20 Corporate Improvement Plan, which was approved by Council in June 2019;
- The seven statutory indicators and standards that were set by Central Government Departments for Planning Services, Economic Development and Waste Management – as defined in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 and;
- A range of self-imposed improvement objectives across all service areas

Proposed by Councillor Webb  
Seconded by Councillor Hamill and agreed that

**the Corporate Improvement Plan 2019-20 Quarter two progress report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.5 PT/CI/17 PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPORT**

The Northern Ireland Audit Office had recently published "Performance improvement in local Government. Learning the lessons of performance improvement: a good practice briefing", which was circulated for Members' information.

This document summarised some of the key learning from audit and assessments, during the previous three years, of performance improvement across all 11 Councils.

Antrim and Newtownabbey was noted as having demonstrated best practice in the following areas:

- "Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's performance management system was established in 2018. It provides baseline data to measure functional and service performance. Among other purposes, the Council is using the system to identify the areas which would benefit most from improvement."
- "Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council has introduced data verification of a small range of non-statutory performance indicators to ensure that they meet internal and external inspection standards to provide assurance that the information generated is robust.

The Council has also commissioned internal audit to undertake a review of different aspects of performance improvement over a period of two years."

- "Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council has used the information it gathers about its improvement objectives and its statutory and local performance indicators to compare its performance against other councils."

Proposed by Councillor Hamill  
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the Performance Improvement in Local Government Report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### 4.6 FI/AUD/2 UPDATE ON AUDIT COMMITTEE ACTIONS

As part of the reporting process to the Audit Committee, a progress update of actions raised from each Audit Committee was provided.

The following table provided a progress update on the actions raised.

Item	Action	Progress update	Anticipated Completion Date
<b>June 2019</b>			
<b>3.1 REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE</b>			
(i)	The Independent Member suggested that in order to keep track of action progress, an update report be provided to Members at the December Audit Committee Meeting.	<b>Complete</b> A progress report on actions has been included in this Audit Committee's agenda.	N/A
<b>September 2019</b>			
<b>3.2 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2019</b>			
(i)	Councillor Hamill sought clarity on the net cost of services attributed to Economic Development and requested that this be looked at in terms of creating more jobs and opportunities within the Borough.	<b>Complete</b> The Head of Economic Development provided information to Cllr. Hamill on the net cost of services of Economic Development.	N/A
(ii)	Councillor Bennington request that additional narrative be provided on the Financial Performance against budget. It was agreed that further details on this were to be provided to Councillor Bennington.	<b>Complete</b> Cllr. Bennington was provided with information in respect of the Financial Performance against budget variances at a meeting held for 3 December 2019.	N/A
<b>4.4 UPDATE ON AUDIT COMMITTEE ACTIONS</b>			
(i)	A response to be provided to Councillor Montgomery in relation to his outstanding PCSP information request.	<b>Complete</b> Information on how PCSP resourcing is allocated has been provided to Cllr. Montgomery.	N/A

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#### 4.8 MANAGING ATTENDANCE

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(i) Following requests from Members for periodic comparative figures to be provided in future reports, and, from the Independent Member in relation to the number of attendees at the First Mental Health Program, the Head of Human Resources confirmed this information would be provided at the next Audit Committee meeting.	<b>Complete</b> Information has been provided in the report on Mental Health Champions – Engagement and Wellbeing Strategy 2016 – 2020, which is included within the agenda of this Audit Committee.	N/A
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Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

**the Committee note the Previous Actions update.**

*NO ACTION*

#### 4.7 FI/AUD/1 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT

A report containing a summary of Internal Audit activity since the Audit Committee last met on 17 September 2019 was circulated. The report included the objectives and conclusions reached for each completed engagement and management comments as applicable.

The report also provided details of the progress of the implementation of agreed Internal Audit recommendations and the results of Internal Audit's Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP).

In response to a query from Councillor Hamill, the Head of Internal Audit provided assurance that the agreed action would be rolled out at the end of the month.

Proposed by Councillor Hamill  
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### 4.8 FI/AUD/2 REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE 2018/19 PROGRESS UPDATE

Members were reminded that in June 2019, the Audit Committee agreed the action plan coming out of the review of the effectiveness of the Audit Committee during 2018/19.

Members were also reminded that the Audit Committee requested that a progress update report on these actions be provided to the December 2019 Audit Committee.

The progress update report was circulated and outlined the progress of each of the agreed actions.

In response to a query from Councillor Bennington, the Head of Internal Audit provided clarification on the current narrative relating to the role and purpose of the Audit Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Hamill  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.9 FI/AUD/3 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

Members were advised that a report providing details of the Council's Corporate Risk Register, including changes made to the Corporate Risks, is presented to the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis.

The review and update of the Corporate Risk Register had been completed and a report setting out the Register and the changes made to the risks was circulated for Members information.

Proposed by Councillor Webb  
Seconded by Councillor Hamill and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.10 HR/LD/005 MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS – ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2016-2020**

A comprehensive health and wellbeing programme was underway for action between September 2019 and March 2020 (circulated).

Some of the initiatives, for which there has been a good response to date for all employees, have been Flu vaccinations, hearing tests and the launch of the Inspire Wellbeing Support Hub (web based information on mental health conditions, common medications and side effects). Information will also be provided specifically for men's health issues and some employees have already taken on the 'Movember Challenge' to raise money for charity.

In February 2020 the Action Cancer Big Bus would be in attendance with various appointments for all employees.



Members were reminded that the Council's Employee Engagement and Wellbeing Strategy has been designed to improve the wellbeing of employees which also supports the management of attendance across the Council.

Sickness absence was currently on track to achieve the corporate objective for 2019/20.

Absence statistics were categorised by reason and the top three reasons for sickness absence within the Council are:

- Stress, depression, mental health and fatigue (mainly not related to work)
- Other (flu, cold symptoms, stomach bug etc.)
- Muscular-skeletal problems

Mental health problems are by far the highest absence reason, accounting for approximately 40% of all absence and so initiatives in this area have been prioritised.

In October a campaign was launched to ask all staff and Elected Members if they were interested in becoming a Mental Health Champion.

Thirty-three people, including five Elected Members, volunteered and a one day training course for the Level 2 Award in First Aid for Mental Health was delivered during November in Mossley Mill and another will be held during December in Antrim Civic Centre. Any staff or Elected Members interested in achieving the Level 3 Award will be supported and there will be an ongoing campaign to increase the network of Mental Health Champions across the Council.

The Mental Health Champions would be provided with the knowledge and tools to provide support to staff and assist with highlighting all the health and wellbeing initiatives that are delivered throughout the year. They will also hopefully be equipped to signpost individuals to professional services where appropriate. The aim is to reach as many staff as possible and raise awareness of the benefits available to improve health and wellbeing throughout the Council and Community.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Hamill and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

**PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'**

Proposed by Councillor Hamill

Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**any remaining Committee business be taken in Confidence.**

## 5. ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

### 5.1 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/AUD/04 NIPSO: INVESTIGATIONS – COUNCIL SERVICES

There were currently no Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's investigations in respect to Council services for Members' consideration.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor Hamill and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

### 5.2 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/AUD/04 INVESTIGATIONS UPDATE

A report containing a progress update on investigations, since the Audit Committee last met on 17 September 2019, was circulated. The report included details of new, completed and ongoing investigations.

The Head of Internal Audit provided clarification to the Independent Member on the Complaints Procedure.

In response to a query from Councillor Bennington, the Chairperson advised that this would be dealt with by the Director of Operations.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*ACTION BY: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance & Governance*

### **PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'**

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

**any remaining Committee business be taken in Open Session.**

**The Chairperson advised that audio recording would resume.**

There being no further committee business the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance, wished them all the best for the Season and a Happy New Year, and the meeting concluded at 7.21 pm.

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**MAYOR**