



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE  
HELD IN ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE ON TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor S Ward
- Committee Members Present** : Councillors – A Bennington, A McAuley and S Wilson
- Committee Members Remote** : Councillors – M Goodman and B Mallon
- Independent Member Remote** : Ms Ashley Neill
- Non Committee Member Present** : Councillor B Webb
- Non Committee Member Remote** : Councillor M Brady
- Officers Present** : Director of Finance & Governance – S Cole  
Director of Corporate Strategy – H Hall  
Head of Internal Audit – P Caulcutt  
Head of Finance – R Murray  
ICT Helpdesk Officer – D Mason  
PA to Mayor and Deputy Mayor – S Fisher
- Officers Present Remote** : Head of ICT – G Smyth
- In Attendance** : Mr S Wade – NI Audit Office  
Ms J Lipton – NI Audit Office

**CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

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

The Chairperson further extended a welcome to Mr Seamus Wade and Ms Joanne Lipton from the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

## 1. APOLOGIES

None

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

## 3. ITEMS FOR DECISION

### 3.1 FIN/SOA/10 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023/24

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to obtain Members' approval of the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 and that the Statement be signed and dated by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

The Council was required to publish an Annual Governance Statement with its annual statement of accounts.

This statement was consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government,' and outlines how the Council was complying with the Framework.

This statement also met the requirements of Regulation 4(2) of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 in relation to the review of the system of internal control.

Regulation 4(4) of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 also required that "...a local government body as a whole or committee must approve an annual governance statement prepared in accordance with proper practices on internal control."

#### 3. Key Points

A copy of the draft (unaudited) Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 was presented at the June 2024 Audit and Risk Committee and this Statement, along with the draft Financial Statements, were submitted to the Department of Communities for external audit.

A number of minor amendments had been suggested by external audit to provide additional clarity, and management had agreed to make these.

A copy of the updated Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 was circulated.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Corporate Strategy

confirmed that the Corporate Theme of 'Planet', agreed as part of the updated Corporate Plan, would be included in next year's Annual Governance Statement.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

**the Annual Governance Statement for 2023/24 be approved and be signed and dated by the Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Committee.**

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

### **3.2 FI/FIN/SOA/10 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to obtain Members' approval of the Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2024 and that the Statements be signed and dated by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.**

#### **2. Introduction/Background**

The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 required that:

"8 (3)... a local government body must, no later than 30th September following the end of the financial year to which the statement relates:

- a) Consider either by way of a committee of that body or by the members of the body as a whole the statement of accounts;
- b) Following that consideration, approve the statement of accounts for submission to the local government auditor by a resolution of that committee or meeting;
- c) Following approval, ensure that the statement of accounts is signed and dated by the person presiding at the committee or meeting at which the approval was given..."

and

"(4) The chief financial officer must re-certify the presentation of the statement of accounts... before the relevant local government body approves it."

Members were reminded that the Council delegated authority in April 2015, to the Audit and Risk Committee to approve the Statement of Accounts.

### 3. Key Points

Details of the (unaudited) Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 were presented at the June 2024 Audit and Risk Committee and the Committee would be required to approve the audited Statement of Accounts at the September Committee.

The audited Statement of Accounts for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2024 were circulated.

The Head of Finance provided Members with an update on the Financial Statements, outlining the main changes.

The Head of Finance and the Director of Corporate Strategy also provided responses to Members' questions, with the Director of Corporate Strategy agreeing to provide Members with the Managing Attendance Action Plan.

Proposed by Councillor McAuley

Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2024 be approved and be signed and dated by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee and the Managing Attendance Action Plan would be shared with Committee Members.**

*ACTION BY: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy / Richard Murray, Head of Finance*

## 4. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

### 4.1 FI/FIN/SOA/10 NIAO: REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE 2023/24 (DRAFT)

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to note the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance 2023/24.**

#### 2. Key Points

The Local Government Auditor had completed the audit of the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 and had issued the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance (a copy of which was circulated).

A copy of the final 'Report to Those Charged with Governance', incorporating management responses, would be presented at the December Committee meeting.

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

Mr Wade of the NI Audit Office provided a summary of the report and the findings to Members.

Members did not request that the immaterial uncorrected misstatements be corrected, with the Director of Finance and Governance advising Members that management will review the report, provide management responses and bring these back to Members in December.

Proposed by Ms Neill  
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance 2023/24 be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.2 PT/CI/049 2023/24 ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT ON PERFORMANCE**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the Annual Self-Assessment Report on Performance (Final Draft) 2023/24.**

##### **2. Background**

Under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, Section 92(2)(b)(i) and (ii) of the Act required the Council to publish an assessment of its performance for 2023/24.

##### **3. Self-Assessment on Performance**

This report provided an assessment of the Council's performance for 2023/24 in relation to its statutory performance and self-imposed indicators. In line with the legislation, it included a comparison of performance against previous financial years and, where possible, benchmarked against other Councils.

The final draft of the Annual Self-Assessment Report on Performance 2023/24 was circulated for noting.

The Director of Finance and Governance and the Director of Corporate Strategy provided responses to Members' queries.

The Director of Finance and Governance agreed to a Member's request that a report setting out payment of suppliers performance by department be provided to the Policy and Governance Committee.

Proposed by Councillor McAuley  
Seconded by Councillor Wilson and agreed that

**the Annual Self-Assessment Report on Performance (Final Draft) 2023/24 be noted and information on payment of suppliers performance by department be provided to the Policy and Governance Committee.**

*ACTION BY: Sandra Cole, Director of Policy and Governance*

#### **4.3 PT/CI/060 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024/25 – QUARTER 1 PROGRESS REPORT**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25, Performance Progress Report, Quarter 1.**

##### **2. Background**

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 put in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25 was approved in June 2024. This set out a range of robust performance targets, along with identified improvement objectives and a number of Statutory Performance Targets.

##### **3. Previous Decision of Council**

As agreed at the August 2023 Council meeting, quarterly performance reports would be presented to the relevant Committee.

##### **4. Key Points**

First Quarter performance progress report for the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25 was circulated for Members' information.

In response to a question from the Independent Member, the Director of Corporate Strategy confirmed that the new HR Management System would provide better information enabling attendance to be managed effectively.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson

Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25, Performance Progress Report Quarter 1 be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.4 PT/CI/060 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT UPDATED TIMETABLE 2024/25**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the updated Corporate Performance Management Timetable 2024/25.**

##### **2. Background**

The Performance Management Timetable, which sat within the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25, outlined the Council's performance reporting deadlines and submission dates.

The timetable had been updated to reflect the dates of the 2024 Corporate Workshop.

A copy of the timetable was circulated.

Proposed by Councillor McAuley  
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the updated Corporate Performance Management Timetable 2024/25 be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.5 FI/AUD/02 UPDATE ON AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ACTIONS**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was for Members to note the progress on actions raised at previous Audit and Risk Committees.**

##### **2. Introduction/Background**

At each Committee meeting, a progress update on previous Committee actions was provided for consideration.

##### **3. Key Points**

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

Item	Action	Progress update	Anticipated Completion Date
<b>December 2022</b>			
<b>4.6</b>	<b>RECOVERY PLAN 2022/23 – PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT QUARTER 2</b>		
(i)	A review of how Council assessed customer satisfaction be undertaken.	<b>Complete</b> A Consultation and Engagement Strategy and associated Framework had been completed and was approved by P&G and Council in June.	N/A
<b>December 2023</b>			
<b>4.5</b>	<b>CORPORATE PERFORMANCE &amp; IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS REPORT QUARTER 2</b>		
(i)	Clarity to be provided in future reports that improvement targets are annual.	<b>Complete</b> The Corporate Performance Improvement reports had been amended to reflect this from Qtr 1 of 2024/25.	N/A
<b>March 2024</b>			
<b>3.1</b>	<b>REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE 2023/24</b>		
(i)	Additional information to be provided to the Committee that would encourage engagement and discussion from Members.	<b>Complete</b> Officers would provide relevant appropriate information as and when required.	N/A
<b>4.5</b>	<b>INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT</b>		
(i)	The new Contract Review report to be provided to CLT, to also be provided to the Audit & Risk Committee.	<b>In Progress</b> Development of a contract review report had been paused pending the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023. The implications of the Act needed to be considered once guidance had been issued, to assess how we would manage, monitor and report on contracts, ensuring compliance with the Legislation.	31/03/25
<b>June 2024</b>			
<b>3.1</b>	<b>AUDIT &amp; RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24</b>		
(i)	The Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report 2023/24 be provided to the June 2024 Council Meeting.	<b>Complete</b> The Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report 2023/24 was provided to the Council Meeting on 24 June 2024.	N/A



Item	Action	Progress update	Anticipated Completion Date
<b>3.2</b>	<b>UPDATE OF THE INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25</b>		
(i)	Updated the Internal Audit for 2024/24 and replaced the Food Safety audit with an Oil Stamp Scheme audit and the Theatres Cash Handling audit with a Facility Bookings audit.	<b>Complete</b> The updates to the 2024/25 Audit Plan had been actioned.	N/A
<b>4.4</b>	<b>UPDATE OF AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ACTIONS</b>		
(i)	The follow-up information provided to Cllr. Bennington be provided to all Committee Members.	<b>Complete</b> The following information was provided to Committee Members on 1 July 2024.	N/A

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Ms Neill and agreed that

**the progress on actions raised at previous Audit and Risk Committees be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.6 FI/AUD/01 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was for Members to note the Internal Audit activity since the Audit and Risk Committee last met in June 2024.**

##### **2. Introduction/Background**

A report providing a summary of the Internal Audit activity since the Audit and Risk Committee last met, would be presented on a quarterly basis.

##### **3. Key Points**

The circulated Internal Audit update 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 Member's query, the Head of Internal Audit provided confirmation and assurances to Members that the findings contained within his report did not result in financial loss to Council.

The Head of Internal Audit also agreed to discuss the possibility of digitising the Oil Stamp Scheme with the appropriate Head of Service.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson

Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the Internal Audit activity since the Audit and Risk Committee last met in June 2024 be noted and consideration be given to digitising the Oil Stamp Scheme.**

ACTION BY: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

#### **4.7 FI/AUD/03 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was for Members to note the updated Corporate Risk Register.**

##### **2. Introduction/Background**

A report providing details of the Council's Corporate Risk Register, since the Audit and Risk Committee last met, would be presented on a quarterly basis.

##### **3. Key Points**

All Corporate risks had been reviewed and updated in line with the review and reporting timeframe.

In accordance with the reporting protocol, a report setting out the Corporate Risk Register and the changes made to risks, was circulated for Members' review.

In response to a question from the Independent Member, the Director of Finance and Governance confirmed that all relevant documents are considered in the review of corporate risks.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson

Seconded by Ms Neill and agreed that

**the updated Corporate Risk Register be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.8 FI/AUD/146 NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE 2024-25**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to note the National Fraud Initiative 2024-25 report.**

## 2. Introduction/Background

The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) was a data matching exercise designed to help participating bodies identify possible cases of fraud and detect and correct under or overpayments from the public purse.

## 3. Key Points

The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland, head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), had statutory powers to conduct matching exercises for the purpose of assisting in the prevention and detection of fraud. These powers were contained in the Serious Crime Act 2007, which inserted Articles 4A to 4H to the Audit and Accountability (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

The Council must participate in this exercise and supply the following information for matching to that of other public sector bodies to identify possible fraud or error:

1. Payroll – total payments made to current employees and members from 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024; and
2. Trade Creditors payment history and standing data – payment history from 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2024 and the current Creditor information held at the date of date extract (from 1 October 2024).

Where a match is found, it would indicate that there was an inconsistency that may require further investigation to establish what caused the match and any further action that may be deemed necessary. Examples of possible matches were as follows:

- An employee with the Council who had second employment with another Council or public body;
- An employee who was also a supplier to the Council or had been paid through Creditors;
- Suppliers who were associated with other suppliers, e.g. through address.

### Results notification and possible action

Data extracted would then be matched with other Public Sector datasets and prioritised into the order of how closely the dataset matched; matches would be available from January 2025.

The Council would be responsible for investigating these matches. All matches would be considered by the Head of Internal Audit, who would determine further action, if appropriate, including invocation of the Fraud Response Plan.

## Data Transfer

Datasets must be provided to the Cabinet Office (responsible for the collection and processing of data on behalf of the C&AG) from 1 October 2024. Finance staff, in conjunction with the Finance software developer, TechnologyOne, worked on the reports to extract the information in the format required.

A secure electronic upload facility was available enabling data for NFI to be submitted directly from local computers. This facility was contained within the existing secure NFI web application and consequently provided the same controlled access environment. It featured an Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) 256 Secure Sockets Layer encryption and enabled data files to be password protected. No other method of data transfer to the NFI would be acceptable.

Access to the NFI website would be restricted to those officers deemed necessary by the Chief Executive.

## Participating bodies

Organisations which would participate in this exercise would be those that provide data for the purposes of a data matching exercise, which may be on either a mandatory or voluntary basis.

Mandatory bodies would be those bodies whose accounts would be required to be audited by:

1. the Comptroller and Auditor General, except for bodies audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General by virtue of section 55 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; or
2. a Local Government Auditor.

Since the Council's accounts were audited by a Local Government Auditor, the Council must supply the required information.

Other mandatory participants included Central Government, Education Boards, and Health Trusts throughout the United Kingdom.

Further information was available on the Council's website at:

<http://www.antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/Council/Procurement/National-Fraud-Initiative>

or by contacting Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit on 028 9446 3113 ext. 31395 or at [paul.caulcutt@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk](mailto:paul.caulcutt@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk).

Proposed by Councillor Bennington

Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

**the National Fraud Initiative 2024-25 report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.9 FI/AUD/01 NEW PUBLIC SECTOR INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was for Members to note the New Public Sector Internal Audit Standards report.**

##### **2. Introduction/Background**

Section 6(1) of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 stated, 'a local government body must undertake an adequate and effective internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of risk management, internal control and governance processes using internal audit standards in force from time to time'.

There was a statutory requirement for Internal Audit to work in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), which originally came into force in 2013, and was revised in 2017.

##### **3. Key Points**

The PSIAS were based on the International Professional Practice Framework (IPPF) and set out the mandatory elements for Internal Audit within the UK Public Sector. They were issued under the authority of the Relevant Internal Audit Standard Setters (RIASS), of which CIPFA, HM Treasury and the Department of Finance for Northern Ireland were members.

In January 2025, new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) would be implemented and would replace the IPPF.

The RIASS had agreed to use the new GIAS as the basis for internal auditing for the UK Public Sector and had asked the UK Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards Advisory Board (IASAB) to carry out a review of the GIAS with a view to developing new PSIAS suitable for UK Public Sector use.

The IASAB planned to hold an 8 week consultation in September and then prepare new Standards for application in the UK Public Sector later in 2024, with an effective date of 1 April 2025.

This would allow sufficient time for Internal Audit to prepare for implementation of the new Standards, ensuring conformance during 2025/26.

Further reports on the new PSIAS and their implementation would be brought to Members of the Committee as required.

The Head of Internal Audit provided a response to a Member's question regarding any significant changes to the Standards.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

**the New Public Sector Internal Audit Standards report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

**PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'**

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed

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

The Chairperson advised that the live stream and audio recording would now cease.

**5 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE**

**5.1 IN CONFIDENCE ICT/GEN/020 CYBER SECURITY UPDATE**

**1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on the current Cyber Security position of Council.**

**2. Introduction/Background**

An annual Cyber Security update report was provided setting out the risk to Council and the mitigations that were in place to manage this risk.

**3. Key Points**

Cyber Security remained a priority for the ICT Department, with a significant percentage of the ICT budget allocated to protecting Council's data and assets.

The Council also actively monitored the risk of cyber-attacks as part of the regular Corporate Risk Management process.

The circulated Cyber Security report provided Members with an assessment of the risk posed to Council and the mitigations that were in place in maintaining the Council's Cyber resilience.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of ICT confirmed that no Cyber Security breaches had occurred.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington  
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

**the Cyber Security report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

## **5.2 IN CONFIDENCE FI/AUD/04 CONCERNS RAISED AND INVESTIGATIONS UPDATE**

### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was for Members to note the update on concerns raised and investigations.**

### **2. Introduction/Background**

A report containing an update on concerns raised and investigations would be presented on a quarterly basis.

### **3. Key Points**

There had been no concerns raised or investigations completed since the last report in June 2024.

The ongoing investigation as at the last report was still under investigation.

Proposed by Councillor McAuley  
Seconded by Councillor Wilson and agreed that

**the update on concerns raised and investigations be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

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

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

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

The Chairperson advised that the audio recording would resume.

There being no further committee business the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance, and the meeting concluded at 7.27pm.

---

**MAYOR**