



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD IN
MOSSLEY MILL ON MONDAY 29 JUNE 2015 AT 3.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor T Beatty
- Committee Members Present** : Councillors - D Hollis, M Maguire, N McClelland and M Rea
- Officers Present** : Chief Executive - Mrs J Dixon
Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Governance - Mrs C McFarland
Director of Organisation Development - Mrs A McCooke
Head of Finance - Mr J Balmer
Internal Auditor - Mr P Caulcutt
Internal Auditor - Ms C Archer
ICT Officer - Mr A Cole
Senior Mayor/Member Services Officer - Mrs K Smyth
- In Attendance** : Independent Audit Committee Member - Mrs G Nesbitt

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman introduced and welcomed Mrs Grace Nesbitt, Independent Audit Committee Member and also advised of a slight change in proceedings, item 3.6 being considered first.

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor T Girvan.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor McClelland declared an interest in Item 3.6, having been Chair of CAN PEACE III.

3.6 STATEMENTS OF ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2015

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

The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 require that *"the Statement of Accounts.... shall be approved by a resolution of a Committee of a local government body or by a resolution of the members of the body meeting as a whole.... in any event before the 30 June immediately following the end of the financial year"* and *"following approval, the statement shall be signed and dated by the person presiding at the Committee or meeting at which that approval was given"*.

Copies of the undernoted Statements of Accounts were circulated.

- FI/FIN/5 - Antrim Borough Council for the year ending 31 March 2015
- FC/D/47 - Newtownabbey Borough Council year ending 31 March 2015
- FC/SC/1 - Antrim and Newtownabbey Shadow Council for the period ending 31 March 2015
- FC/STC/2 - Antrim and Newtownabbey Transition Committee for the period ending 19 June 2014
- FI/FIN/6 - GROW South Antrim Joint Council Committee for the year ending 31 March 2015
- FC/P/6 - CAN PEACE III Joint Committee for the year ending 31 March 2015

The Director of Finance and Governance spoke in detail to each set of accounts and confirmed the submission date to the Northern Ireland Audit Office was Tuesday 30 June 2015.

Proposed by Councillor Hollis
Seconded by Councillor Maguire and

RESOLVED - that the Statements of Accounts for CAN PEACE III Joint Committee for the year ending 31 March 2015 be approved.

Proposed by Councillor Hollis
Seconded by Councillor McClelland and

RESOLVED - that the Statements of Accounts for GROW South Antrim for the year ending 31 March 2015 be approved.

Proposed by Councillor McClelland
Seconded by Councillor Hollis and

RESOLVED - that the Statements of Accounts for Antrim and Newtownabbey Statutory Transition Committee for the period ending 19 June 2014 be approved.

Proposed by Mrs Nesbitt
Seconded by Councillor Hollis and

RESOLVED - that the Statements of Accounts for Antrim and Newtownabbey Shadow Council for the period ending 31 March 2015 be approved.

Proposed by Councillor McClelland
Seconded by Councillor Hollis and

RESOLVED - that the Statements of Accounts for Newtownabbey Borough Council for the year ending 31 March 2015 be approved.

Proposed by Councillor Hollis
Seconded by Councillor McClelland and

RESOLVED - that the Statements of Accounts for Newtownabbey Borough Council for the year ending 31 March 2015 be approved.

Proposed by Councillor McClelland
Seconded by Councillor Hollis and agreed

that the Director be permitted to progress some minor presentational changes.

Proposed by Councillor Hollis
Seconded by Mrs Nesbitt and

RESOLVED - that the six aforementioned Statements of Accounts be signed and dated by the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Chief Executive accordingly.

ACTION BY: John Balmer / Catherine McFarland.

The Head of Finance withdrew from the meeting.

3.1 FG/AUD/1 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT

Members were reminded that in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), the Internal Auditor is required to provide an annual opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control. This opinion was based upon and was limited to the work performed during the year.

It was reported that an annual opinion had been provided for each of the Legacy Councils in the respective Internal Auditor's Annual Report (copies of which were circulated) for the year ending 31 March 2015. That opinion was satisfactory for both Legacy documents.

Proposed by Councillor McClelland
Seconded by Mrs Nesbitt and agreed

that the Internal Audit Annual Reports for both Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Councils be approved.

ACTION BY: Paul Caulcutt.

Councillor Rea joined the Meeting during discussion of the next item.

3.2 FG/AUD/1 REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT

Members were advised that the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 required the Council to "at least once in each financial year conduct a review of the effectiveness of its system of internal audit" and that the results of this review be reported to and be considered by the Council's Audit Committee.

It was reported that the annual review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit had been completed for both Legacy Councils and copies of each were enclosed for Members' consideration.

In addition to the annual assessment and in order to provide the Council with independent assurance of the effectiveness of system Internal Audit, the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), requires an external assessment to be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team from outside the organisation.

Members were advised that an external assessment for both Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Councils had been completed for 2014/15 and the conclusion of this assessment had been incorporated into the reports mentioned above. The conclusion was that both Councils substantially conform to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the independent external assessment confirmed this for both Councils.

Proposed by Mrs Nesbitt
Seconded by Councillor McClelland and agreed

that the Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit for both Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Councils be approved.

ACTION BY: Paul Caulcutt.

3.3 FG/AUD/1 REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

Members were advised that the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, requires that "a Local Government Body shall conduct a review at least once in each financial year of the effectiveness of internal control" and that this review would be

reported to the Chief Executive and the Audit Committee to inform the approval of the Annual Governance Statement.

It was reported that the annual review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control had been completed for both Legacy Councils, copies of which were circulated for Members' consideration. The conclusion was that both Councils have adequate and effective systems of Internal Control.

Proposed by Mrs Nesbitt
Seconded by Councillor McClelland and agreed

that the Review of the System of Internal Control for both Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Councils be approved.

ACTION BY: Paul Caulcutt.

3.4 FG/AUD/1 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Members were advised that the Council was required to publish a Governance Statement with its annual statement of account. The statement was consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government,' and outlined how the Council was complying with the Framework. This statement also met the requirements of Regulation 2A of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 in relation to the publication of a statement on internal control.

It was reported that the Annual Governance Statements had been completed for both Legacy Councils, copies of which were circulated for Members' consideration. The Governance Statements for both Councils confirmed the arrangements for conducting business in accordance with proper standards.

Proposed by Councillor McClelland
Seconded by Councillor Rea and agreed

that item (b) on the report recommendation be amended to include the Chief Executive.

Proposed by Councillor Hollis
Seconded by Councillor Rea and agreed

that -

- (a) the Annual Governance Statements for both Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Councils be approved;**
- (b) the Statements be signed and dated by the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Chief Executive.**

ACTION BY: Catherine McFarland / Paul Caulcutt.

3.5 FG/AUD/1 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT

Reports containing a summary of Internal Audit activity for each of the Legacy Councils and for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, for the period March 2015 to June 2015 were circulated.

These reports included the objectives and conclusions reached for each completed assignment and management comments as applicable.

Proposed by Councillor Hollis
Seconded by Councillor McClelland and agreed

that the Internal Audit Update Reports be noted.

ACTION BY: Paul Caulcutt.

3.7 ST/G/215 REPORT ON ABSENTEEISM

BACKGROUND

Members were reminded that sickness absence for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough had been reported to the Committee in April 2015, for the period relating to 1 April 2014 to 31 January 2015. The purpose of this report was to provide an update on absence for the full annual reporting period from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

For comparison purposes the same period for 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 had been included.

ABSENCE UPDATE

Table 1 below set out the comparison of the absence days per employee for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2015 with a breakdown of long and short term absence.

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	
Month	1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013	1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014	1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015	Variance from period last year.
Number of Full Time Employees	668.67	681.92	706.88	+24.96
No. of days lost to sickness	8209.77	7786.69	7910.37	+ 123.68 days
Days lost to Long Term Absence	5663.12	5383.77	5626.41	+ 242.64 days
Day lost to Short Term Absence	2546.66	2402.92	2283.93	-118.99 days
Average Days Lost per Employee	12.28 days	11.42 days	11.19 days	-0.23

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A reduction in short term absence by 118.99 days and an increase of days in long term absence. Long term absence continued to be a priority for management and recently a number of cases had been dealt with under the Formal Case Review, which had led to contract terminations.

Overall there had been a small increase in absence by 123.68 days with the average days lost per employee reducing by 0.23 days.

Almost 50% of staff had 100% attendance which had recently been recognised by the Mayor at staff roadshows through prize draws and the award of complimentary spa passes at the Antrim Forum.

The top three reasons for absence for 2014 - 2015 were noted overleaf with current action being taken to address the reasons.

Reason	Action
Stress, depression, mental health and Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffcare, confidential counselling to all staff. • Cognitive behavioural Therapy (CBT) sessions for staff in appropriate cases. • Immediate letter sent to advise of Staffcare, • Immediate Meeting with employee and line manager alternative person if issue is with the Line Manager in WRS cases. • Referrals to Nurse Led Clinic and/or OH doctor • Regular Welfare Review Meetings to agreed action plans, Use of the Leisure Facilities, • Piloting of the Wellness Recovery Action Plan, helping staff to recognise stress earlier and the interventions that can be put in place to help • Harassment advisors available in all departments and various locations
Other Category e.g. Cancer Related Illness, Surgery and Post Op Debility etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well being Action plans for individual cases. • Phased returns variety of reduced hours, alternative work and/or adjusted duties. • Use of leisure facilities to help with returns from surgery in suitable cases. Eg Pool
Musculo-Skeletal problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manual Handling Training • Referrals to Nurse Led Clinic and/or OH doctor, • Regular Welfare Review Meetings to agreed action plans, • Access to Physiotherapy subject to OH recommendation. • Wellbeing action plans. • Phased returns variety of reduced hours, alternative work and/or adjusted duties.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work station/ergonomical assessments • Taster sessions of pilates • Investigation of workplace accidents and implementation of any appropriate recommendations
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Specific to the current year of 2015/16, table 2 below set out the average days lost per employee on a month by month basis, so far.

Month	Av days lost per employee April 2014 to March 2015	Av days lost per employee April 2015 to March 2016	Variance from period last year.
April	0.75	0.66	-0.09
May	1.5	1.41	-0.09
June	2.33		
July	3.22		
Aug	4.06		
Sept	5.16		
Oct	6.41		
Nov	7.48		
Dec	8.53		
Jan	9.6		
Feb	10.75		
Mar	11.19		

GENERAL UPDATE

Members were advised that the HR Team is piloting the Wellness Recovery Action Plan programme (WRAP) and this had been positively received by staff. The team would continue to monitor the effectiveness of this programme in the coming months. Further work would be progressed with Managers, the Health and Safety Team and Occupational Health to identify how we could further support the wellness of our staff and reduce absence.

A joint Health and Wellbeing initiative, known as the £ for lb Challenge, had been launched in January 2015 for twelve weeks. 48 employees from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council participated in this initiative to lose weight and raise money for charity. The initiative had been very successful with a total weight loss of 19 stone and £313 being donated to the Northern Ireland Hospice.

Members were advised that an Employee Wellbeing Action Plan, to include targets for the reduction of absence, would be reported soon to the Council for consideration.

Proposed by Councillor Hollis
 Seconded by Councillor McClelland and agreed

that -

- (a) the report be noted;

- (b) an absence update be submitted to the Policy and Governance Committee.

ACTION BY: Andrea McCooke.

The Chairman recognised the role of audit within the organisation and the contribution from all officers at all levels in improving governance and accountability. On behalf of the Audit Committee he asked that staff be thanked for their contribution.

There being no further Committee business the Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 5pm.

MAYOR