

Annual Audit Letter

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
2024-25

Date of issue

4 December 2025

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We have prepared this report for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's sole use. You must not disclose it to any third party, quote or refer to it, without our written consent and we assume no responsibility to any other person.

1. Key Messages

Audit of Financial Statements

The 2024-25 financial statements were certified without qualification as noted in my audit report. Key statistics from the accounts are outlined.

Work on economy, efficiency and effectiveness

The Council has in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources.

Governance

The governance statement reflects compliance with relevant guidance and standards.

Other Areas of interest

- Absenteeism figures for 2024-25
 - The Local Government Auditor's Report 2025 for audits of local councils during 2023-24.
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Outlook

- Financial resilience, cyber risk and climate change commitments

2. Introduction

1. As Local Government Auditor, I have a statutory responsibility to provide an opinion on the Council's financial statements. The results of my audit of the 2024-25 Statement of Accounts are summarised in this report.
2. The legislative role for the Local Government Auditor is contained in the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 and the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014. In addition, the Code of Audit Practice, published on 1 April 2021, prescribes the ways in which statutory audit functions are to be carried out. The Code of Audit Practice is supported further by a Statement of Responsibilities of Local Government Auditors and Local Government Bodies. Both of these documents are published on the NIAO website.
3. Management have specific responsibilities regarding the production of financial statements and are expected to have effective governance arrangements in place to deliver the Council's corporate objectives. The publication of the financial statements is an essential means to account for the stewardship and use of public money each year.
4. As external auditor, it is my responsibility to form an opinion on whether:
 - the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and its income and expenditure for the year then ended;
 - the financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the relevant accounting and reporting framework as set out in legislation, applicable accounting standards or other directions thereunder;
 - the parts of the remuneration report to be audited have been properly prepared in accordance with the Department for Communities' directions; and
 - the information given in the Narrative Report is consistent with the financial statements.
5. The Code of Audit Practice outlines a range of other matters that can be reported by exception. One of these items relates to the information published with the audited financial statements, such as the governance statement. I report if the governance statement is

not consistent with the information gathered during the audit including that gained from carrying out work on the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness of resources, and our work on performance improvement.

6. This report is solely based upon those matters that have come to my attention as a result of normal audit procedures. Consequently, our comments should not be regarded as a comprehensive record of all deficiencies that may exist or all improvements that could be made.

3. Audit of Financial Statements

Statement of Accounts

1. The accounts should be prepared in accordance with International Financial Accounting Standards as interpreted for Local Government in the, 'Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom'.
2. The financial statements were signed by the Chief Financial Officer and submitted for audit on 30 June 2025. Following the audit, the Statement of Accounts was approved by the Council and certified by me within the deadline of 30 September 2025. The Statement of Accounts is published on the Council's website.
3. On conclusion of the audit, the 2005 Order requires me to issue a certificate stating the audit is complete and to give an opinion on the Statement of Accounts. The audit certificate and opinion are contained within the Statement of Accounts.

Audit Certificate and Opinion

4. For the year ended 31 March 2025, I gave the following unqualified opinion on the financial statements.

In my opinion:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with relevant legal and statutory requirements and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024-25, of the financial position of the Council as at 31 March 2025, and its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
 - the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Department for Communities' directions issued thereunder.
5. At the end of the audit, I issue a Report to those charged with Governance, addressed to the Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer of the Council, on the results of the audit, noting the most significant issues, making recommendations and seeking comments. That report is presented separately to the Council's Audit and Risk Committee.

4. Key Statistics

Income and Expenditure	2024-25 £000	2023-24 £000	Variance £000
Total income	89,244	84,820	4,424
Total expenditure	86,529	86,705	(176)
Adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis	(2,704)	3,117	(5,821)
Net expenditure chargeable to the General Fund	11	1,232	(1,221)

Capital and Reserves	2024-25 £000	2023-24 £000	Variance £000
Capital expenditure in year	11,435	12,661	(1,226)
Usable Reserves	26,734	23,775	2,959
Long Term Assets	218,577	214,630	3,947
Loans Outstanding	50,561	54,006	(3,445)

Staff	2024-25	2023-24	Variance
	FTE	FTE	FTE
Staff numbers	582	566	16
	£000	£000	£000
Staff Costs (including agency costs)	31,786	31,853	(67)
Staff Absences	Days	Days	Days
• short term	2.63	2.37	0.26
• long term	11.68	11.20	0.48
• total	14.31	13.57	0.74

5. Work on economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Proper Arrangements

1. The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 requires me to be satisfied that the Council has in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources.
2. The Council is required to maintain an effective system of internal control that supports the achievement of their policies, aims and objectives, while safeguarding and securing value for money from the public funds and other resources at their disposal.
3. My review of the Council's arrangements for securing value for money covered a wide range of areas, including:
 - Strategic priorities, financial strategies and policies;
 - Financial reporting systems and sound financial internal controls;
 - Procurement strategies and policies to deliver sustainable outcomes and value for money;
 - Promoting a good governance environment including managing risks and systems of internal control;
 - Asset management strategies and policies to safeguard assets, deliver objectives and generate value for money; and
 - A framework to manage the workforce to effectively support the achievement of strategic priorities.
4. On the basis of my review this year, I am satisfied the Council has in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources. I raised one priority one finding and two priority 2 findings during the audit of the 2024-25 financial statements in respect of proper arrangements:
 - Priority 1 finding was in relation to fixed asset revaluations
 - Priority 2 findings were in relation to the timely agreement of the Minimum Revenue Provision, several Council policies which require review or update and the financial control environment.

6. Governance

Annual Governance Statement

1. The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 requires the Council to conduct a review, at least once in a financial year, of the effectiveness of its governance framework (including its system of internal control) and to then approve an Annual Governance Statement.
 2. I am required to report if the Annual Governance Statement:
 - does not reflect compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024-25;
 - does not comply with proper practices specified by the Department for Communities; or
 - is misleading or inconsistent with other information I am aware of from my audit.
 3. My review did not highlight any inconsistencies.
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Internal Audit

4. The 2015 Regulations also require councils to undertake an adequate and effective internal audit of its accounting records and of its systems of risk management, internal controls and governance processes using current internal auditing standards. The Council has an in-house Internal Audit function that conducted a review on the effectiveness of the systems of internal controls in place during 2024-25. The findings of this work were presented to the Council's Audit and Risk Committee for review and was considered by me as part of the audit process.
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Audit & Risk Committee

5. It is essential that Members exercise effective scrutiny of the internal control processes and procedures in place within the Council. One way that Members carry out this function is through the Audit & Risk Committee.
6. The Audit & Risk Committee is also invited to review my audit reports and my staff attend meetings to present audit findings.

7. Other areas of audit interest

Absenteeism

1. For the twelve months to the end of March 2025, the average number of day's sick absence in the Council was 14.31 days per full time employee as compared to 13.57 days in 2023-24. The Council has told me that the increase of 0.74 days was mainly due to higher levels of short-term sickness linked to seasonal colds, flu and ongoing COVID-19 circulation. Similar patterns have been reported nationally, with many public bodies experiencing increased minor-illness absence over the past year.

To address this, the Council has continued to strengthen attendance management arrangements and has taken the following steps:

- **Early-intervention welfare meetings** with an internal target of meeting employees absent due to mental-health-related illness within two weeks, all other absences within four weeks and holding monthly follow-up welfare meetings thereafter.
- **Enhanced focus from the specialist HR Absence Team** which leads on complex cases and supports managers to apply the Attendance Management Policy consistently.
- **Monthly HR Dashboard review meetings** with Heads of Service and Directors to scrutinise trends, identify concerns and ensure timely progression of cases.
- **Continued provision of physiotherapy, wellbeing checks and preventative health services** alongside the promotion of corporate wellbeing initiatives such as flu vaccinations and mental-health support.
- **Regular communication of health and wellbeing information** through iConnect and other internal channels.
- **Promotion of the Benenden Health scheme** providing faster access to treatment for employees who choose to use the service.

These measures aim to stabilise attendance levels and support employee wellbeing as the Council continues to monitor sickness absence closely.

2. The Local Government Auditor recommends that Council carefully monitors and manages absence levels on a continuous basis to improve operational efficiency and reduce lost productivity.
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Local Government Auditor's Report 2025

3. The annual Local Government Auditor's Report will be published in December 2025 and will be available on the NIAO website. The report will summarise my perspective on financial audits and performance improvement work during 2023-24.
 4. The Report will highlight areas of strength and areas for improvement within local councils. It will also consider important issues that may affect councils in the medium term. Once published the Council and its members should consider this report in the context of its own activities for any improvements that could be made.
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Performance improvement audit and assessment

5. Under the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 the Council has a statutory duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions and to set improvement objectives for each financial year.
 6. Each year councils are required to produce an Annual Improvement Plan for the year ahead and a self-assessment report for the year just past. The Local Government Auditor is required to audit the prior year self-assessment report and the incoming Annual Improvement plan and assess whether the Council is likely to have complied with the legislation.
 7. My [Annual Improvement Report for 2024-25](#) was published on 31 March 2025 and concludes that Council met its statutory duties in relation to publication of the 2023-24 self-assessment report and 2024-25 Annual Improvement Plan.
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WGA

8. Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) are consolidated financial statements for the whole of the UK public sector. The National Audit Office audits these accounts and sets the overall audit approach. As such the Council is within the band of organisations in 2024-25

where additional audit procedures were not required.

9. The Whole of Government Accounts annual return for 2024-25 has been submitted for HM Treasury's consolidation process.
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NFI

10. The Council participates in the National Fraud Initiative, a UK wide data matching exercise undertaken every two years that is designed to highlight savings for the public sector as a whole.
 11. The report summarising the results of the data matching exercise for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2024 was published on 22 October 2024 and is available on the [NIAO website](#).
 12. The 2024-25 data matching exercise is currently underway and the results are due to be published mid-2026.
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Audit Fee

13. The audit fees for the financial audit and performance improvement audit are in line with the estimate.

8. Outlook

The 2024-25 year was the tenth year of the current councils since reform in 2015. Councils have identified ongoing and future challenges regarding funding, increased cyber risk and climate change commitments. These challenges will require strong leadership and governance from Councils, both members and officers, to ensure success. The Local Government Auditor is happy to continue to provide advice and guidance to Councils to assist where possible.

And finally.....

1. I would like to thank the Council for its continued co-operation during the audit and look forward to working with Council during the year in preparation for next year's audit.