



11 September 2025

Committee Chair: Alderman J McGrath
Committee Vice-Chair: Councillor M Goodman
Committee Members: Alderman S Ross
Councillors – A Bennington, S Flanagan and S Wilson
Independent Member: Ms Ashley Neill

Dear Member

MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee will be held in the **Round Tower Council Chamber, Antrim Civic Centre on 16 September 2025 at 6.30pm.**

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Baker".

Richard Baker, GM MSc
Chief Executive, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council

PLEASE NOTE: a fork buffet will be available in the Café from 5.20 pm.

For any queries, please contact Member Services:

Tel: 028 9448 1301
memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

A G E N D A

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6.2 Post Project Evaluation Reporting

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6.4 Concerns Raised and Investigations Update

3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 FI/FIN/SOA/11 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/25

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to obtain Members' approval of the Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 and that the Statement be signed and dated by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.

2. Introduction/Background

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

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

This statement also meets 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 requires 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

Members are reminded that a copy of the draft (unaudited) Annual Governance Statement 2024/25 was presented to them at the June 2025 Audit and Risk Committee and that this Statement along with the draft Financial Statements were submitted to the Department of Communities for external audit.

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

A copy of the updated Annual Governance Statement 2024/25 is **enclosed**.

4. Recommendation

That the Committee approves the Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 and be signed and dated by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.

Prepared by: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

3.2 FI/FIN/SOA/11 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to obtain Members' approval of the Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 requires 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 are reminded that the Council delegated authority in April 2015, to the Audit and Risk Committee to approve the Statement of Accounts.

3. Key Points

Members are reminded that the (unaudited) Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025 were presented at the June 2025 Audit and Risk Committee and that the Committee would be required to approve the audited Statement of Accounts at the September Committee.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office has completed their audit of the Financial Statements, which has resulted in no change to the Council's financial position and the Local Government Auditor providing an unqualified audit opinion.

Officers are finalising the Financial Statements, including minor amendments in preparation for publication. Details of the Financial Statements (**enclosed**) are presented to Members of the Committee prior to seeking approval.

A complete copy of the Financial Statements will be provided to Members for information by email.

4. Recommendation

That the Committee approves the Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2025.

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

4.1 FI/FIN/SOA/11 NIAO: REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE 2024/25 (DRAFT)

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Members to note the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance 2024/25.

2. Key Points

Members are advised that the Local Government Auditor has completed the audit of the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025 and has now issued correspondence and the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance (**enclosed**).

A copy of the final Report to Those Charged with Governance, incorporating management responses, will be presented at the next Committee meeting in December 2025.

Representatives of the NIAO will be in attendance to answer Members' questions.

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance 2024/25 be noted.

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.2 FI/FIN/SOA/10 UPDATE ON ACTIONS TAKEN BY COUNCIL IN RELATION TO THE AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE NIAO IN THE REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Members to note the progress of actions taken in relation to the audit recommendations made by the NIAO in the Report to those Charged with Governance.

2. Introduction / Background

Further to the December 2024 report by NIAO: Report to those Charged with Governance, it was recommended an update on the findings raised within the report along with the agreed actions be provided to a future Audit and Risk Committee.

In line with this recommendation, a progress report is **enclosed** providing an update on actions taken by Council to address matters raised.

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that the progress made on the audit recommendations within the Report to those Charged with Governance be noted.

Prepared by: Liz Johnston, Deputy Director of Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.3 PT/CI/60 2024/25 ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT ON PERFORMANCE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members that the 2024/25 Annual Report Self-Assessment on Performance (Final Draft) is noted.

2. Background

Members are reminded that under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, Section 92(2)(b)(i) & (ii) of the Act requires the Council to publish an assessment of its performance for 2024/25.

3. Previous Decision of Council

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 several Statutory Performance Targets.

4. Annual Performance Report, Self-Assessment

This report provides an assessment of the Council's performance for 2024/25 in relation to its statutory performance and self-imposed corporate performance indicators and self-imposed performance indicators. In line with the legislation, it includes a comparison of performance against previous financial years and where possible, benchmarked against other Councils. The Annual Self-Assessment Report on Performance for 2024/25 is **enclosed** for Members' Information.

5. Governance

The Annual Self-Assessment Report on Performance for 2024/25 is reported to relevant Committees.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the 2024/25 Annual Self-Assessment Report on Performance for 2024/25 (Final Draft) is noted.

Prepared by: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Organisation Development (Interim)

4.4 PT/CI/066 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2025/26 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members to note the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2025/26, Quarter 1 Performance Progress Reports for overall Council.

2. Background

Members are 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.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2025/26 was approved in June 2025. This set out a range of robust performance targets, along with identified improvement objectives and several Statutory Performance Targets.

4. Key Points

First Quarter Performance Progress Report is **enclosed** for Members' information.

5. Governance

Quarterly performance progress reports are reported to relevant Committees.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Quarter 1 Performance Progress Report be noted.

Prepared by: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Organisation Development (Interim)

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

1. Purpose

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

2. Introduction/Background

Members are reminded that at each Committee meeting, a progress update on previous Committee actions is provided for consideration.

3. Key Points

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

Item	Action	Progress update	Anticipated Completion Date
March 2024			
4.5	INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT		
(i)	The new Contract Review report to be provided to CLT, to also be provided to the Audit & Risk Committee.	In Progress Development of a contract review report has been paused pending the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023 on 24 February 2025. The implications of the Act are being considered to assess how we will manage, monitor and report on contracts, ensuring compliance with the Legislation, with the first contract reviews under the new Legislation due by the end of September 2025.	31/12/25
December 2024			
4.2	NIAO: REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE		
(i)	An update on the findings raised be provided to a future Committee.	Complete An update is provided to this Committee.	N/A
June 2025			
3.1	AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25		
(i)	The Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2024/25 provided to the June 2025 Council meeting.	Complete The Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2024/25 was provided to Full Council on 30 June 2025.	N/A

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the progress on actions raised at previous Audit and Risk Committees be noted.

Prepared by: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.6 FI/AUD/01 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE REPORT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Members to note the Internal Audit activity since the Audit and Risk Committee last met in June 2025.

2. Introduction / Background

Members are reminded that a report providing a summary of the Internal Audit activity since the Audit and Risk Committee last met, is presented on a quarterly basis.

3. Key Points

The **enclosed** Internal Audit update report includes the objectives and conclusions reached for each completed engagement and management comments as applicable.

The report also provides 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).

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Internal Audit activity since the Audit and Risk Committee last met in June 2025 be noted.

Prepared by: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.7 FI/AUD/147 EQUALITY SCREENING AND RURAL NEEDS IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Members to note the progress update on the actions from the Equality Screening and Rural Impact Needs Assessment Audit.

2. Introduction / Background

The Equality Screening and Rural Impact Needs Assessment audit was presented to the Audit and Risk Committee in June 2025 with a limited level of assurance.

At this meeting, Members were advised that an update of the agreed actions would be brought back to a future Committee.

3. Key Points

Work has been undertaken by management to implement the agreed actions.

Internal Audit has completed a follow up review of the implementation and confirms all have been fully implemented.

The **enclosed** provides Members with a summary of the actions taken by management.

A further update will be provided to Members at a future committee, on completion of a review of compliance with the revised requirements to provide assurance that the Equality Assessment and Rural Needs Impact Assessment is completed appropriately.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the progress update on the actions from the Equality Screening and Rural Impact Needs Assessment Audit be noted.

Prepared by: Denise Brown, Audit and Risk Officer

Agreed by: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Members to note the results from participation in the National Fraud Initiative 2024-25

2. Introduction / Background

Members are reminded that the Council has been participating in the latest National Fraud Initiative exercise and has been investigating the matches provided as per the approach reported to the Audit & Risk Committee in March 2025.

3. Key Points

We have substantially completed our investigations and a progress report outlining the results of our work is **enclosed** for Members' information.

No frauds have been identified through the work undertaken during this National Fraud Initiative exercise.

The remaining matches yet to finalise are in relation to Payroll matches with other public sector organisations. The finalisation of these matches is dependent on the information flow to and from these counterparties.

The completion of these matches will be undertaken throughout the remainder of this year and will be finalised prior to the deadline of 31 March 2026. An update report will be provided to the Audit Committee where there is an outcome to any of the investigations.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the results from participation in the National Fraud Initiative 2024-25 be noted.

Prepared by: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.9 FI/AUD/03 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is 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, is presented on a quarterly basis.

3. Key Points

The review and update of the Corporate Risk Register by Directors has been completed and the updated risk register, agreed by the Corporate Leadership Team, is **enclosed** for Members' review.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the updated Corporate Risk Register be noted.

Prepared by: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4.10 FI/AUD/02 NIAO: MAJOR IT PROJECTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Members to note the Northern Ireland Comptroller and Auditor General's report into the review of Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland.

2. Introduction / Background

On 4 July 2025, the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) published the Comptroller and Auditor General's report (**enclosed**) providing an overview of the portfolio of major IT projects across Northern Ireland central government over the period April 2022 to March 2025.

During the period of review, Northern Ireland departments and their arm's length bodies, managed 29 major (greater than £25 million in whole life cost) IT projects, with a current total estimated whole life cost of £5.2 billion.

The report looks in detail at five such projects. One of those projects was the Department for Infrastructure's development and implementation of the new Planning Portal system, which replaced the previous Northern Ireland Planning Portal that had been in place since 2010.

3. Key Points

In overall terms, of the 29 projects covered in the report, the vast majority (24) aim to replace existing business critical legacy systems operating beyond their intended life.

In almost all cases, the legacy contract has been extended multiple times, with an average extension of around 8 years and the longest extension around 18 years.

The report notes that there can be valid reasons for extending contracts, but in many cases these extensions were not a strategically planned choice but made out of necessity to maintain continuity of service.

The report further highlights that extensions come at a cost, including missed opportunities to improve efficiency, functionality and performance, as well as risks of service disruption or vulnerability. Additionally, there are significant financial costs associated with extensions. Of the five projects detailed in the report, the contract extension costs totalled in excess of £573 million.

In respect of the Department for Infrastructure's Planning Portal system, the legacy contract was due to end in March 2014, but required £14.2 million in contract extensions to ensure continuity of service until the replacement system was implemented in December 2022.

The main reason for the extension was the delay in initiating the project and underestimating the time required to develop and procure.

As previously noted, the legacy Planning Portal was due to end in March 2014. Work to develop and procure a new system did not commence until 2016, with an initial expected go live date of 2019. However, the time required to initiate the project and complete the business case process was underestimated and the Outline Business Case was only approved in 2019, when it was envisaged the Planning Portal would be operational in early 2022.

The approach for implementation was amended in November 2021, delaying the implementation date to July 2022. Further delays followed with the final go live date of the Planning Portal being December 2022.

In addition to the delays in implementation, the costs of implementation also increased from £26.8 million estimated in the Outline Business Case, to £39.6 million in the Full Business Case, to actual cost of £43.1 million.

The increase in costs is attributed to the contract term being increased from 10 years to 20 years, changes in the joint procurement makeup and higher revenue costs due to inflation and an increase in the central team costs.

The report outlines a number of recommendations to change the approach to major IT projects, as if there is not change, the Comptroller and Auditor General concludes "will result in continued risk to value for money and missed opportunities to realise the benefits that can be delivered through over changing and evolving technologies".

Although these recommendations are tailored to Central Government departments and their Arm's Length Bodies, their lessons are relevant to Council's approach to the development and implementation of IT (and other) projects.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Northern Ireland Comptroller and Auditor General's report into the review of Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland be noted.

Prepared by: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

5 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Any Other Relevant Business (AORB) may be taken at this point.