

**NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Ref: AC/2024

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**Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 23 May 2024, at 2.00pm,  
in the Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick**

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**Chairperson:** Ms B Slevin, Independent Chairperson

**In attendance  
in Chamber:**

Councillor J Brennan	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor T Howie	Councillor C King
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor G Sharvin

**Officials in attendance  
in Chamber:**

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive  
Mrs J Kelly, Director Corporate Services  
Mr C Mallon, Director Economy, Regeneration & Tourism  
Ms S Murphy, Director Sustainability & Environment  
Mr A Patterson, Director Active & Healthy Communities  
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance  
Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director Capital and Procurements  
Ms E Cosgrove, Assistant Director of Administration (Acting)  
Ms C Hughes, Head of Performance and Improvement (Acting)  
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)  
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

**Also in attendance  
in chamber:**

Ms C Hagan	ASM
Mr S Wade	NIAO

**AC/028/2024: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Bowsie, Devlin and Quinn.

**AC/029/2024: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor King declared an interest in item 17 – Planning Update as per Action Sheet, item 21 – ASM Summary Report and item 28 – Planning – Review of Overturned Decisions.

Mrs Ward declared an interest in item 16 – Update on Kilbroney Pitches.

Ms Slevin declared an interest in item 8 – Annual Assessment of Chairperson's Performance.

**AC/030/2024: ACTION SHEET OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 1  
FEBRUARY 2024**

Read: Action Sheet arising from Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 1 February 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin it was agreed to note the Action Sheet for Audit Committee Meeting held on 1 February 2024.

**AC/031/2024: TO AGREE DATE AND START TIMES FOR 2024/2025**

Read: Proposed dates and start times for Audit Committee meetings for 2024/2025 **(Copy circulated)**

Following a query from Councillor Brennan regarding hybrid meetings, Mrs Kelly advised that meetings would continue to be in person until such time as legislation was updated.

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the start dates and times for Audit Committee meetings for 2024/2025.

**AC/032/2024: AUDIT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND TIMETABLE**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Audit Committee Terms of Reference and timetable for 2024/2025. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Byrne noted that terms of reference were updated in line with best practice, and any significant changes had been highlighted within the Officer's Report.

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Brennan, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to approve the Audit Committee Terms of Reference and to note the timetable for the year ahead.

**AC/033/2024: AUDIT COMMITTEE SELF ASSESSMENT**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Ms B Slevin, Independent Chair of Audit Committee, regarding Audit Committee Self-Assessment. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Slevin outlined the report and highlighted a few key issues that she believed required consideration moving forward. She noted in particular the continuity of Elected Members on a Committee, Elected Member training and referenced the need for reports from officers to allow time for Members to read the reports. She further noted the need to consider and outline the ways the Audit Committee added value to the organisation and requested that officers address that specifically.

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to approve the contents of the Officer's Report.

**AC/034/2024: UPDATE OF MEMBERS INTERESTS**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding the Register of Members' Interests. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Kelly reminded Members that they had a responsibility to keep Council up to date in relation to any potential conflicts of interest.

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor King, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the six-month review report.**

Having previously declared an interest, The Audit Chairperson, Ms B Slevin, left the chamber for discussion on the following item – 2.26pm

**Items restricted in accordance with Part 3 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during the following items which related to exempt information by virtue of Part 3 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during these items of business.**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to come out of Closed Session.**

**AC/035/2024: ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF CHAIRPERSON'S PERFORMANCE**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance and Performance, regarding the Annual Assessment of the Chairperson's Performance. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the assessment of the Chairperson's performance.**

The Audit Chairperson, Ms B Slevin, re-entered the chamber at this stage – 2.30pm

**CORPORATE SERVICES – OPEN SESSION**

**AC/036/2024: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER – CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE RISK REGISTER ALSO TO BE TABLED**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding the Corporate Risk Register. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Kelly advised that one Directorate had its risk register reviewed at an Audit Committee Meeting in line with best practice and outlined the updated Corporate Services Risk Register. She noted that the Senior Management Team had reviewed the Corporate

Services Risk Register and advised that although the overall risk assessment was similar to the last meeting, she highlighted the reduced risk in relation to industrial action as there was an agreement in place and an industrial relations framework was being progressed.

Following a query from Councillor Sharvin relating to an increased risk score within appendix 3, Ms Cosgrove advised that this had been reviewed and amended in line with the IT analysis of the all-staff mandatory training requirements.

Following a further query from Councillor Sharvin regarding implementing a type of league table for compliance in relation to the mandatory training, Mrs Kelly advised that she had had sight of the current compliance status, that Council had to be cognisant of Data Protection and advised that a department breakdown was being considered by the Senior Management Team.

Ms Slevin queried whether other issues should be reflected within the Risk Register or identified as an additional risk to that outlined in CR02 relating to non-compliance of legislative requirements such as health and safety and legionella.

Mrs Kelly advised that the Risk Register was a live document and the Senior Management Team addressed this regularly by looking at control measures and identifying standalone risks.

- AGREED:**
- On the proposal of Councillor Howie, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the following was agreed:**
- **to approve the updates to the Corporate Risk Register highlighted within the summary at Appendix 1. Full Corporate Risk Register can be evidenced at Appendix 2.**
  - **to note the revised Corporate Services Directorate Risk Register summary at Appendix 3 and detailed Corporate Services Risk Register at Appendix 4.**
  - **that Senior Management Team would be taking account of the risks identified in the ASM report within the next updated Risk Register.**

**AC/037/2024: PROMPT PAYMENTS**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding the Prompt Payment Statistics – Quarter 4 2023/24. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Byrne outlined the paper and highlighted the compliance of 95% of payments being completed within the required 30-day period and advised that the new software had enabled the compliance rate.

- AGREED:**
- On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the Quarter 4 Prompt Payment Statistics.**

**AC/038/2024: DRAFT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES 2024-2025**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director, Finance & Performance, regarding the Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-2025 **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Hughes advised that the Report had been considered and agreed by the SP&R Committee in April, with four of the five objectives being carried over from the previous year and one that had been amended to better reflect the economic development programme now in place. She highlighted an ongoing consultation in relation to the corporate objectives which would cease on 31 May 2024.

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to note the following:

- The five-point draft performance objectives 2024-25, as outlined in Appendix 1.
- The proposed approach and timetable for publishing the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25, as outlined in Appendix 2, including approval to commence the consultation and engagement process on 19 April 2024.

**Items restricted in accordance with Part 3 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014**

**Agreed:** On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on this matter which related to exempt information by virtue of Part 3 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during these items of business.

**Agreed:** On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to come out of Closed Session.

**CORPORATE SERVICES (CLOSED SESSION)**

**AC/039/2024: UPDATE ON AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS – TO INCLUDE RISK PROFILE**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Ms E Cosgrove, Assistant Director of Administration (Acting), regarding an update on Audit Recommendations. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor King left the meeting during discussion on this item – 2.34pm

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the update in relation to legacy audit recommendations.

Councillor King rejoined the meeting at this stage – 2.40pm

**AC/040/2024: DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director – Capital and Procurement, regarding DAC/STA Register – Quarter 4. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Brennan, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to note the Q4 update in relation to Single Tender Actions with an action plan to be brought to the September Audit Committee Meeting

**AC/041/2024: PROCUREMENT ACTION PLANS**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director – Capital and Procurement, regarding procurement action plans. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O’Hare, it was agreed to note the update in relation to the Procurement Action Plans for each Directorate.

**AC/042/2024: UPDATE ON FRAUD AND WHISTLEBLOWING (INCLUDING NFI)**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Fraud and Raising Concerns Update. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to:

- Note the update in relation to Fraud and Raising Concerns cases which have been detailed at Appendix 1 of the Officer’s Report.
- Note the National Fraud Initiative matches testing, with an update being brought to the July Committee in relation to the recouping the duplicate payments.
- Note the progress on actions arising from the NIAO Internal Fraud Risk self-assessment.
- Approve the revisions to the Fraud Policy and the Fraud Response Plan at Appendix 2 and 3 of the Officer’s Report.

It was also agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, that a report be brought to SP&R Committee regarding an issue with a repayment under the Covid-19 Revitalisation Scheme.

Having previously declared an interest, Mrs Ward left the chamber for discussion on the next item– 3.08pm

**AC/043/2024: UPDATE ON KILBRONEY PITCHES**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding an update on Kilbroney Pitches. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O’Hare, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to that the matter was closed and that no further independent audit services are engaged on this issue.**

Mrs Ward rejoined the meeting at this stage – 3.11pm

Having previously declared an interest. Councillor King left the meeting prior to the next item – 3.12pm

**AC/044/2024: PLANNING UPDATE PER ACTION SHEET**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Regeneration, regarding a Planning Department update. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Brennan, it was agreed to note the contents of the Report, and that Officers continue to table quarterly reports to update Members on progress or otherwise against actions as contained within the Officer’s Report.**

Councillor King rejoined the meeting – 3.14pm

**AC/045/2024: RECRUITMENT UPDATE PER ACTION SHEET**

The update had been provided under Item 17.

**AC/047/2024: LETTER TO NIAO RE NEWRY CITY CENTRE REGENERATION**

Read: Report dated 23 May 2024 from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding a Letter to NIAO. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the following:**

- **Response to the complaint correspondence to be issued shortly after the Audit Committee**
- **The Notice of Motion was discussed at SPR on 16 May 2024 and after a full debate, it was agreed that the Project should continue in line with the Outline Business Case and also in line with the other recommendations made at the SPR as noted in the officer’s report.**
- **When the Full Business Case is completed for the Newry City Centre Regeneration Project, the**

updated projected capital costs will go to the Programme Board, the SPR Committee and then to full Council for approval.

**NIAO (CLOSED SESSION)**

**AC/048/2024:            AUDIT STRATEGY 2023/24**

Read:                    Audit Strategy 2023-24 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:                    On the proposal of Councillor King, seconded by Councillor O’Hare, it was agreed to note the contents of the Audit Strategy for 2023-24.**

**INTERNAL AUDIT (CLOSED SESSION)**

**AC/049/2024:            ASM SUMMARY REPORT**

Read:                    Summary Report dated 23 May 2024 regarding a Summary Report to the Audit Committee.  
**(Copy circulated)**

**Councillor King left the meeting at this stage – 3.43pm**

**AGREED:                    On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the ASM Summary Report.  
It was also agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, that the recommendations contained with the ASM Summary Report regarding Planning – Review of Overturned Decisions be tabled at Party Reps Forum.**

**AC/050/2024:            ASM ANNUAL ASSURANCE REPORT**

Read:                    Annual Assurance Report dated 21 May 2024 regarding the Annual Assurance Report to the Audit Committee.  
**(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:                    On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor O’Hare it was agreed to approve the ASM Annual Assurance Report.**

**Councillor Brennan left the meeting at this stage – 4.32pm**

**AC/051/2024:            INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25**

Read:                    Internal Audit Plan 2024/25 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:                    On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to accept the Internal Audit Plan 2024/25.**



**AC/052/2024: ABSENCE MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2023/24**

Read: Absence Management 2023/24 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the Absence Management Review.**

**AC/052/2024: CONTRACTS MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

Read: Contract Management Review 2023/24 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the Contracts Management Review 2023/24.**

**AC/053/2024: NMDDC COMPLIANCE CHECKING – FACILITIES REVIEW**

Read: NMDDC Compliance Checking – Facilities Review. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the NMDDC Compliance Checking – Facilities Review.**

**AC/054/2024: LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP REVIEW**

Read: Labour Market Partnership Review 2023/24. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the Labour Market Partnership Review.**

**AC/055/2024: PLANNING – REVIEW OF OVERTURNED DECISIONS**

Read: Planning Review of Overturned Decisions. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the Planning Review of Overturned Decisions.**

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 4:37pm.

For consideration at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024.

**Signed:**                    **Ms J Kelly**  
                                      **Director Corporate Services**

**Signed:**                    **Ms B Slevin**  
                                      **Independent Chairperson**