

**NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Ref: AC/2024

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**Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 31 July 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 C Bowsie	Councillor L Devlin
Councillor T Howie	Councillor C King
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor G Sharvin

**Officials in attendance  
in Chamber:**

Mrs J Kelly, Director Corporate Services  
Ms S Murphy, Director Sustainability & Environment  
Mr A Patterson, Director Active & Healthy Communities  
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance  
Ms C Hughes, Head of Performance and Improvement  
(Acting)  
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

**Also in attendance  
in chamber:**

Ms K Doey	NIAO
Ms L Kerr	NIAO

**AC/056/2024: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

Apologies were received from Councillor O Hanlon, Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive and Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism.

The Chairperson welcomed both new and returning Audit Committee Members to the meeting.

**AC/057/2024: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Bowsie queried what items should be raised under Declarations of Interest, noting that only a small number of Elected Members had registered membership of a religious order and queried whether Councillors could be given guidance as to what memberships should be declared under Declarations of Interest.

Ms Slevin and Mrs Kelly asked if Councillor Bowsie's query was relevant to the agenda and advised that they would discuss the issue with Democratic Services and revert to Members with guidance and possible training if required.

**AC/058/2024: ACTION SHEET OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23 MAY 2024**

Read: Action Sheet arising from Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 23 May 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O’Hare, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet for Audit Committee Meeting held on 23 May 2024.**

**AC/059/2024: AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

Read: Report dated 31 July 2024 from Ms Brona Slevin, Independent Chair of Audit Committee, relating to the Audit Committee Annual Report. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Slevin presented the Annual Report of 2023 – 2024, noted that the Committee was performing to the required standard in line with best practice, was operating effectively and highlighted that the 2022 – 2023 financial statements had achieved an unqualified Audit. She asked if Members would consider four-year appointments to the Audit Committee, outlining that it can take some time to gain a full understanding of the remit of the Audit Committee.

Ms Slevin brought Members’ attention to the Internal Audit Report from ASM and highlighted the work that had been carried out to follow up on all Audit Recommendations. She asked Officers and Members to ensure that all legacy recommendations were carried out.

Ms Slevin thanked Members for the work and support to date and expressed her hope for the same work ethic over the coming year. Councillor Sharvin thanked Ms Slevin for her leadership in steering the Committee to date.

Mrs Kelly was delighted to announce that Ms Slevin would remain as Independent Chair following the recent completion of a recruitment process. Ms Slevin looked forward to continuing working alongside Councillors in ensuring an effective Audit Committee.

On proposing the Report, Councillor O’Hare noted her congratulations to Ms Slevin retaining her position as Independent Chairperson.

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O’Hare, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to approve the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2023-2024, and that the approved report be reported to Council.**

**CORPORATE SERVICES – OPEN SESSION**

**AC/060/2024: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER – S&E DIRECTORATE RISK REGISTER ALSO TO BE TABLED**

Read: Report dated 31 July 2024 from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding the Corporate Risk Register. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Kelly presented the Corporate Services Risk Register and noted that no new risks had been added. She highlighted that the Risk Register had been reviewed with consideration of

the two limited Internal Audit reports and noted that it was decided to incorporate actions and controls in the Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers, rather than add a new risk.

Councillor Sharvin queried the lack of comparative statistics for the previous year in relation to the processing times of Planning applications. Mrs Kelly advised that she would request that comparative statistics were noted within the next Planning update.

Councillor Devlin stressed the importance of these statistics and referenced the large number of complaints she was still receiving regarding planning application delays.

Councillor Sharvin queried the outcome and next steps following a meeting whereby seven Councils had been notified of a reduction in their Rate Support Grant (RSG). He stated that Council should write to the Department highlighting the continual decrease in the RSG, which had had been established for good reason and to echo the sentiments of other Councils. Mr Byrne advised that the Department Consultant had met with Council Officers recently and Ms Slevin said that SOLACE was already following up on the issue.

Mrs Kelly said that a Report could be brought to a future Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee regarding an update on the RSG issue, to which Councillor Sharvin confirmed he was content with this action.

Councillor Mathers then queried whether the internal review of overturned planning decisions took account of decisions made by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) or whether they solely related to the Planning Committee decisions and confirmed his belief that the Planning Committee Members had not received an opportunity to input into the review. Mrs Kelly advised that she would revert to the Member on his query.

Ms Slevin noted that there was an overall increase within the Sustainability & Environment Risk Register. She then queried the risk in relation to the operator license for the fleet Ms Murphy outlined the reason for the reflected risk level within the risk register and highlighted some significant improvements relating to the fleet operator license.

**AGREED:**

**On the proposal of Councillor King, seconded by Councillor Devlin, 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 S&E Directorate Risk Register summary at Appendix 3 and detailed S&E Risk Register at Appendix 4.**

**It was agreed to explore the inclusion for the next planning update of comparative statistics regarding planning application times for the previous year.**

**It was further agreed that a Report be brought to the SPR Committee regarding the impact of the Rates Support Grant reduction**

**AC/061/2024: PROMPT PAYMENT STATISTICS – QUARTER 1 2024/2025**

Read: Report dated 31 July 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Prompt Payment Statistics for Quarter 1 2024/2025. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the Q1 2024/2025 Prompt Payment statistics.**

**AC/062/2024: NMDDC ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK AND CODE OF GOVERNANCE**

Read: Report dated 31 July 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Assurance Framework and Code of Governance. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor King, seconded by Councillor O’Hare, it was agreed to note the Council’s Assurance Framework and the Code of Governance, illustrated and described at Appendix 1.**

**AC/063/2024: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Read: Report dated 31 July 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Performance Improvement Plan . **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Hughes advised that the Performance Improvement Plan had been approved by the Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee in June and published before the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 in line with statutory responsibilities.

Ms Slevin commended the work of Ms Hughes and her team in completing the Performance Improvement Plan.

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to note Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 (including the five performance improvement objectives), Consultation and Engagement Report 2024-25 and Objective Delivery Plans 2024-25.**

## **CORPORATE SERVICES (CLOSED SESSION)**

### **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 K Murphy, 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 K Murphy, it was agreed to come out of Closed Session.

#### **AC/064/2024: 2023/24 UNAUDITED ACCOUNTS AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

**Read:** Report dated 31 July 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance and Performance, regarding 2023/24 Unaudited Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. **(Copy circulated)**

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

- **Approve the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 at Appendix 1 (page 21-34)**
- **Note the draft Statement of Accounts and Financial Statements at Appendix 1.**

#### **AC/065/2024: PROCUREMENT ACTION PLANS**

**Read:** Report dated 31 July 2024 from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding procurement action plans. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to note the update in relation to the Directorate Procurement Action Plans.

**It was agreed that a standard template would be considered moving forward**

**Councillor Sharvin left the meeting at this stage – 3pm**

#### **AC/066/2024: UPDATE ON FRAUD AND WHISTLEBLOWING (INCLUDING NFI)**

**Read:** Report dated 31 July 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Fraud and Raising Concerns Update. **(Copy circulated)**

- AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor O’Hare, seconded by Councillor Devlin, 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 progress on actions arising from the NIAO Internal Fraud Risk assessment.

**INTERNAL AUDIT (CLOSED SESSION)**

**AC/067/2024: ASM SUMMARY REPORT**

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

- AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to accept the ASM Summary Report.

Councillor Howie left the meeting at this stage – 3.13pm

**AC/068/2024: INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25**

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

- AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to approve the Internal Audit Plan 2024/25.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 3:19pm.

For consideration at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024.

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

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