NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ref: AC/2025

Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 25 September 2025, at 2.00pm, in the Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

Chairperson: Ms B Slevin, Independent Chairperson

In attendance

in Chamber: Councillor C Bowsie Councillor J Brennan

Councillor O Hanlon Councillor K Murphy

In attendance Via Teams:

Councillor P Byrne Councillor L Devlin

Officials in attendance

in Chamber: Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services

Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director of Capital & Procurement Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance Mrs C McClean, Assistant Director of Corporate Services

Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager

Also in attendance

in chamber: Ms K Doey NIAO

Ms C Hagan Sumer NI

AC/077/2025: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Howie, King and O'Hare and from Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive and Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism.

AC/078/2025: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

AC/079/2025: ACTION SHEET OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 31

JULY 2025

Read: Action Sheet arising from Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting

held on 31 July 2025. (Copy circulated)

In response to a query from Councillor Bowsie, Mrs Kelly advised the update report on Mourne Mountain Gateway Project would come to a future Audit Committee following tabling at the SPR Committee Meeting.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by

Councillor Brennan, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet for Audit Committee Meeting held 31 July 2025.

AC/080/2025: ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE 2025/26

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance &

Performance, regarding Assessment of Performance 2025/26. (Copy

circulated)

In response to a query from Councillor Bowsie regarding the introduction of an employee satisfaction survey, Mrs Murphy advised that Council had an internal Health and Wellbeing Working Group who had plans to carry out an employee survey, stress risk assessment and review of health and wellbeing provision within the Council as well as reviewing the previously carried out risk assessment.

Councillor Bowsie welcomed the update stating it would be beneficial to receive comparisons from previous surveys to understand how staff satisfaction and morale was improving within the Council.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by

Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to note the

Assessment of Performance 2024-25, including the summary document 'Our Performance Looking Back,

Going Forward'.

CORPORATE SERVICES – OPEN SESSION

AC/081/2025: OFFICERS REGISTER OF INTERESTS

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding

Officer's Register of Interests. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Bowsie proposed that the ICO guidance stating that the content of senior officers' declarations of interest did not need to be uploaded to the website be tabled at the next Audit Committee. This was seconded by Councillor K Murphy.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by

Councillor K Murphy it was agreed that ICO guidance issued in respect of Senior Officers' Declarations of Interest be tabled at the next Audit Committee

Meeting.

Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Brennan, it was agreed to note the Conflicts of Interest Policy &

Procedure as approved by Council in 2023.

AC/082/2025: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER – S&E DIRECTORATE ALSO TO

BE TABLED

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding

Corporate Risk Register. (Copy circulated)

Mrs Kelly advised the Risk Register had been updated and informed by Assurance Statements and there had been no changes in the overall score.

CR12 - Councillor Brennan queried whether the Planning Department was now fully staffed or if there were still recruitment issues. Councillors Devlin and Hanlon stated there had been an increase in complaints regarding the processing of simple planning applications planning issues therefore asked whether the risk needed to be increased. Mrs Kelly advised she would ask the Director responsible to revert to the Councillor Brennan on the issue of recruitment. With regard to the need to increase the risk, Mrs Kelly stated the risk score reflected the fact that numbers were going down and more staff had been recruited however service delivery would be reflected at the next Review Report to be tabled at SPR and Audit Committees.

Councillor Hanlon queried whether there was enough staff resource to enable the delivery of the new cleansing schedule and whether the residual risk score reflected where Council was at currently. Mrs Murphy advised that the recent recruitment exercise was highly successful, however, there were a number of unfilled posts that remained. She advised interim solutions to fill posts were being implemented to ensure services remained operational pending permanent recruitment.

CR01 – Councillors Byrne and Devlin asked that the risk score and actions to mitigate to reduce the risk be looked at with regard to the BRCD projects. Mrs Kelly advised she would feed back the comments raised and SMT would look at the register to review the scores.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Brennan, 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 Directorate Risk Register at Appendix 4.

AC/083/2025: NMDDC STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2024/25

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance &

Performance, regarding NMDDC Statement of Accounts 2023/24.

(Copy circulated)

Mr Byrne advised the NIAO audits were almost complete and an unqualified audit opinion had been given. He stated there was one reclassification required on the balance sheet.

Mrs Slevin thanked Mr Byrne and his team for their work in preparing the accounts.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by

Statement of Accounts for year ending 31 March 2025 for signing by the Chief Executive and Chairperson.

<u>Items restricted in accordance with Part 3 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014</u>

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, 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 K Murphy, seconded by

Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to come out of Closed

Session.

The Chairperson advised the following had been agreed whilst in closed session:

NIAO – CLOSED SESSION

AC/084/2025: REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE 2024/25 -

DRAFT

Read: Correspondence from NI Audit Office, regarding Report To Those

Charged With Governance 2024/25 – Draft. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by

Councillor Brennan, it was agreed to note the draft Report To Those Charged With Governance 2024/25.

CORPORATE SERVICES (CLOSED SESSION)

AC/085/2025: <u>UPDATE OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS</u>

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance &

Performance, regarding an Update on Audit Recommendations.

(Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by

Councillor Brennan, it was agreed to note the progress

in implementing both internal and external audit

recommendations.

AC/086/2024: DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS REPORT

Read: Report Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Direct

Award Contracts. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to note the following:

• The Q2 Financial Year ending March 2026 in relation to Direct Award Activity.

• To note the DAC register as at 31 August 2025

 To note the developmental work bring carried out, including the Active DAC register as at 31

August 2025.

AC/087/2025: PROCUREMENT ACTION PLANS

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding

Procurement Action Plans. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by

Councillor Brennan, it was agreed to note the update and progress in relation to Procurement and the

Directorate Procurement Action Plans

AC/088/2025: UPDATE ON FRAUD AND WHISTLEBLOWING

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance &

Performance, regarding Update on Fraud and Whistleblowing. (Copy

circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by

Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the following:

• The update in relation to fraud and raising concerns cases as detailed at Appendix 1

• The progress on actions arising from the NIAO

Internal Fraud Risk self-assessment

• The update in relation to the National Fraud

Initiative

AC/089/2025: SUMER NI SUMMARY REPORT

Read: Sumer NI Summary Report (Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by

Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to note the Sumer

NI Summary Report including:

• HR Policy Review

PCSP Audit

Mid-Year Follow Up

AC/090/2025: <u>INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26 - REVISION</u>

Read: Internal Audit Plan 2025/26. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by

Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to approve the

Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 - Revised

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 3.30pm

For consideration at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 3 November 2025.

Signed: Ms J Kelly

Director Corporate Services

Signed: Ms B Slevin

Independent Chairperson