

**NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Ref: AC/2024

---

**Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 1 February 2024, at 2.00pm, in the Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick and via Microsoft Teams.**

---

**Chairperson:** Ms B Slevin, Independent Chairperson  
(Chamber)

**In attendance in Chamber:** Councillor O Hanlon      Councillor G Sharvin

**In attendance via Teams:** Councillor C Bowsie      Councillor L Devlin  
Councillor T Kelly      Councillor S O'Hare  
Councillor A Quinn

**Non-Committee Members in attendance via Teams:** Councillor P Campbell      Councillor J Tinnelly

**Officials in attendance in Chamber:** Mrs J Kelly, Director Corporate Services  
Mr A Cassells, Director of Sustainability & Environment  
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance  
Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director Capital and Procurements  
Estates and Capital Projects  
Ms E Cosgrove, Assistant Director of Administration (Acting)  
Ms C Hughes, Head of Performance and Improvement (Acting)  
Ms S McConville, Procurement Manager (Acting)  
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)  
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

**Officials in attendance via Teams:** Mr C Mallon, Director Economy, Regeneration & Tourism

**Also in attendance in chamber:** Ms C Hagan    ASM  
Mr S Wade    NIAO  
Ms K Doey      NIAO

**Also in attendance via teams:** Mr B Conway    ASM

**AC/001/2024:      APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

Apologies were received from Councillor King and Marie Ward, Chief Executive.

**AC/002/2024:      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Ms Hagan declared an interest in item 22 on the agenda.

**AC/003/2024: ACTION SHEET OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 21 SEPTEMBER 2023**

Read: Action Sheet arising from Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 21 September 2023.  
**(Copy circulated)**

*AC/070/2023 – Audit Committee Training*

Ms Slevin referenced the training on page 1 of the action sheet, and stated she would be keen for training to happen, given the number of new members on the Audit Committee. She queried the availability of both internal and external training.

Councillor Hanlon stressed the importance of training for Members of the Audit Committee, and urged Members to avail of training when it was provided.

Ms Kelly advised she was working closely with HR and Democratic Services and would bring recommendations to Members.

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor O’Hare, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet for Audit Committee Meeting held on 21 September 2023. It was further agreed that recommendations would be tabled at Committee regarding appropriate training for Members.**

**CORPORATE SERVICES (OPEN SESSION)**

**AC/004/2024: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER – ERT DIRECTORATE RISK REGISTER ALSO TO BE TABLED**

Read: Report dated 1 February 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding the Corporate Risk Register.  
**(Copy circulated)**

Ms Kelly presented her report, highlighting the appointment of two new Directors. She referenced the concerns regarding the Planning Department and advised there was a plan in place to address the recruitment issues, which had been tabled at a recent Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting.

Councillor Hanlon voiced her concern regarding the Planning Department and queried whether it was possible to track applications. She acknowledged the difficulties the HR Department were facing, but urged Council to take swift action to ensure that there were no further delays on planning applications.

Councillor Sharvin stressed the economic impact of planning application delays and queried the requirement for an internal audit of the number of planning application determinations that had been overturned. He further queried whether the new risk regarding recruitment should be a standing agenda item going forward.

Ms Kelly confirmed that recruitment was closely monitored and advised the matter had been added to the risk register.

Ms Hagan noted that an internal audit report had been issued to management and contained several recommendations. She stated it was currently being reviewed by legal services and would be tabled at the next Audit Committee meeting. Following a query from Councillor Devlin, she confirmed that the Report included a recommendation for a review of planning decisions overturned.

Ms Slevin concurred with the concerns raised regarding planning and requested that planning issues become a standing agenda item as proposed by Councillor Sharvin.

Mr Mallon noted the recommendation from Members was to table quarterly reports in line with NISRA statistics being issued. He queried whether Members wished these to be tabled at Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee, or the Audit Committee. Ms Slevin confirmed it should be tabled at both Committees.

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to approve the updates to the Corporate Risk Register highlighted within the summary at Appendix 1, and to note the revised ERT Directorate Risk Register summary at Appendix 3 and detailed at Appendix 4.**

**It was also agreed that Ms Kelly would see if a report could be brought back to Members regarding recruitment.**

**It was further agreed that the Planning Department Quarterly Report be brought to the Audit Committee.**

**AC/005/2024: PROMPT PAYMENTS**

Read: Report dated 1 February 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding the Prompt Payment Statistics – Quarters 2 and 3. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Kelly queried if Council could provide explanations regarding any payments that had not been processed within the specified timeframes, stating that it could help identify areas for improvement.

Mr Byrne advised that the report was presented in a format recommended by the Department for Communities and advised that any delay could be for a variety of reasons. He noted Council was trying to mitigate any delays, but they were inevitable in some cases.

Ms Slevin noted that there had been a definite improvement from previous reports, but the Committee would monitor this going forward.

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the Quarter 2 and 3 2023 – 2024 Prompt Payment Statistics.**

**AC/006/2024: MID-YEAR ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2023-24**

Read: Report dated 1 February 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director, Finance & Performance, regarding the Mid-Year assessment of Performance Improvement Plan 2023-2024 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the mid-year assessment of the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24

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

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

**CORPORATE SERVICES (CLOSED SESSION)**

**AC/007/2024:** **UPDATE ON AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS – TO INCLUDE RISK PROFILE**

**Read:** Report dated 1 February 2024 from Ms E Cosgrove, Assistant Director of Administration (Acting), regarding an update on Audit Recommendations. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the update in relation to legacy audit recommendations.

**AC/008/2024:** **DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS**

**Read:** Report dated 1 February 2024 from Ms Shona McConville, Procurement Manager, regarding DAC/STA Register – Quarter 3. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the quarter three update in relation to Single Tender Actions.

**AC/009/2024:** **PROCUREMENT ACTION PLANS**

**Read:** Report dated 1 February 2024 from Ms Shona McConville, Procurement Manager, regarding procurement action plans. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the update in relation to the procurement plans for each Directorate.

Councillor O'Hare left the meeting at this stage – 3.02pm

**AC/010/2024:** **S&E PROCUREMENT UPDATE**

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the update provided by the Director.

Councillor O'Hare rejoined the meeting at this stage – 3.05pm

Councillor Quinn left the meeting – 3.17pm

**AC/011/2024:** **KILBRONEY PITCHES**

Read: Report dated 1 February 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Kilbroney Pitches. **(Copy circulated)**

On a point of clarity, Ms Slevin advised there was a potential conflict of interest with Councillor Tinnelly being present and having asked to speak on the matter. She asked for a short recess in the meeting.

**AGREED:** It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor O'Hare to have a short recess.

The meeting did then recess – 3.37pm

The meeting did then resume – 3.51pm

It was agreed to postpone discussion on the item until later in the meeting.

Councillor Sharvin left the meeting – 3.52pm

**AC/012/2024:** **UPDATE ON FRAUD AND WHISTLEBLOWING (INCLUDING NFI)**

Read: Report dated 1 February 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 Devlin, it was agreed to note the following:

- The update in relation to Fraud and Raising Concerns cases which have been detailed at Appendix 1.
- The National Fraud Initiative matches testing, an update will be brought back to the April Committee in relation to the recouping the duplicate payments.
- The progress on actions arising from the NIAO Internal Fraud Risk self-assessment.

Councillor Kelly left the meeting at this stage – 3.55pm

### **NIAO (CLOSED SESSION)**

**AC/013/2024:**        **AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT 2023-24 – REPORT TO THE COUNCIL AND THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES UNDER SECTION 75 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2014**

Read:                    Audit and Assessment Report 2023-24 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:**            **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the contents of the Audit and Assessment Report 2023-24.**

**AC/014/2024:**        **NMDDC REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE 2022/23**

Read:                    Correspondence from NIAO dated 30 January 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:**            **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to approve the Report to Those Charged with Governance.**

**AC/015/2024:**        **NMDDC ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2022/23**

Read:                    Correspondence from NIAO dated 29 January 2024 regarding the Annual Audit Letter 2022/23. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:**            **On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the annual audit letter 2022/23.**

### **INTERNAL AUDIT (CLOSED SESSION)**

**AC/016/2024:**        **ASM SUMMARY REPORT**

Read:                    Summary Report dated 1 February 2024 regarding a Summary Report to the Audit Committee. **(Copy circulated)**

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

**AC/017/2024:**        **INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2023/24**

Read:                    Internal Audit Plan 2023/24 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:**            **On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to accept the Internal Audit Plan 2023/24.**

**AC/018/2024: RISK MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

Read: Risk Management Review. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the Risk Management Review.**

**AC/019/2024: FOLLOW UP OF 2021-22 IA RECOMMENDATIONS**

Read: ASM Internal Audit Summary Report dated 21 September 023  
**(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the follow up of 2021-22 IA Recommendations.**

**AC/020/2024: MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS REVIEW**

Read: Management Accounts Review. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the Management Accounts Review.**

**AC/021/2024: FLOOD GRANT VERIFICATION REVIEW**

Read: Report dated 1 February 2024 detailing the Flood Grant Verification Review. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed approve the Flood Grant Verification Review.**

**AC/022/2024: EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF INTERNAL AUDIT**

Read: Report dated 1 February 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding the External Assessment of the Internal Audit. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the External Assessment of the Internal Audit.**

**At this stage of the meeting, it was agreed to resume discussions around  
AC/011/2024: Kilbroney Pitches**

**AC/011/2024: KILBRONEY PITCHES**

Read: Report dated 1 February 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Kilbroney Pitches. **(Copy circulated)**

The Chairperson asked Councillor Tinnelly to leave the meeting at this stage due to the potential conflict of interest in the matter being discussed.

**Councillor Tinnelly left the meeting at 4.22pm**

A discussion was held on what and when information might come to the Audit Committee from the two external independent processes being undertaken.

**AGREED:**                   **On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to instigate an independent investigation into the complaint raised around Kilbroney Pitches as soon as possible.**

**CIRCULARS (OPEN SESSION)**

**Councillor Sharvin rejoined the meeting at 4.28pm**

**AC/023/2024:**           **CIRCULAR LG 25/2023 - CAPITALISATION**

Read:                       Circular attached. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:**                   **On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the circular.**

**AC/024/2024:**           **CIRCULAR LG 25/2023 – CONSOLIDATED COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES CIRCULAR**

Read:                       Circular attached. **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED:**                   **On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the circular.**

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 4:30pm.

For consideration at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 04 March 2024.

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

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