

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ref: AC/2025

**Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 20 February 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 L Devlin
Councillor O Hanlon	Councillor C King
Councillor A Mathers	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 of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs 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)
Mrs F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer
Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer

**Also in attendance
in chamber:**

Ms K Doey NIAO
Ms C Hagan NIAO

AC/001/2025: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

An apology was received from Councillor Howie.

Councillor Bowsie queried why Item 12, Planning Update was tabled as a closed session item despite the same report having been tabled at the February Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting in open session.

Mrs Kelly advised it had been tabled as a closed business item to allow for a discussion that could incorporate any items that should be held in closed session, such as staffing resource. She advised it could be moved to open session if preferred by Members.

Councillor Bowsie proposed to move the item to open session, which was seconded by Councillor Hanlon.

Ms Slevin advised she would take the item relating to the Planning Update in open session, as Item number 7.

AC/002/2025: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

AC/003/2025: ACTION SHEET OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 19 SEPTEMBER 2024

Read: Action Sheet arising from Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on Thursday 19 September 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Kelly highlighted an outstanding item on the action sheet and advised Democratic Services were sourcing training to be scheduled for March or April for Members.

Mrs Ward advised the training would be open to all councillors and urged Members to be conscious of who may be joining the Audit Committee at the upcoming AGM scheduled for June 2025 and to ensure they attended the training.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet for Audit Committee Meeting held on 19 September 2024.

PERFORMANCE

AC/004/2025: MID YEAR ASSESSMENT OF 2024/2025

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Procurement, regarding the Mid-Year Assessment of Performance 2024/2025. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Hughes advised the report had been tabled and agreed at the Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 14 November 2024.

Councillor Sharvin queried whether the detail surrounding the Newry Leisure Centre was solely due to the pool closure, or whether it accounted for unscheduled closures due to training days or adverse weather and whether these figures were a cause for concern.

Mr Patterson advised the leisure figures were predominantly related to the pool closure, taking account of the number of young people who would take part in health and wellbeing initiatives. He advised that the expectation was that these figures would be reversed when the facility had reopened.

Councillor Sharvin queried what measures were being put in place to improve on and ensure that enforcement targets would be met.

Mrs Murphy advised work was ongoing regarding the development of a recruitment plan that was reflective of the business-as-usual vacancies with the Directorate, alongside the additional vacancies following the service review and implementation of the new Sustainability & Environment structure. She advised that a recruitment process would be underway prior to the end of the financial year for these roles but stated that this would not be reflected in the fixed penalty notices issued until the 2025/26 financial year.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to note the Mid-Year Assessment of Performance 2024-25.

CORPORATE SERVICES – OPEN SESSION

AC/005/2025: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

Read: Report dated 19 September 2024 from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding the Corporate Risk Register. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Kelly advised the Corporate Risk Register had been updated within the past month by the Senior Management Team and confirmed there had been no change to the actual risks, while control measures and actions taken had been updated.

Following a query from Councillor Hanlon regarding CR 04 – Failure to Provide Robust and Timely Planning Decisions being recorded as amber and not red, Mr Mallon advised that the gross risk remained as red, while the residual risk was more reflective of the ongoing actions and performance improvement plan.

Councillor Hanlon stated she believed it should remain as red until such time as improvements were more visible within the statistics. Mr Mallon advised the risk was reflective of the previous risk register, but he would consider any changes prior to the next Audit Committee Meeting.

Mr Mallon then advised the Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Risk Register detailed 8 risks and actions, all of which remained unchanged from the previous review.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, 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 ERT Directorate Risk Register summary at Appendix 3 and detailed ERT Directorate Risk Register at appendix 4.

AC/006/2025: PROMPT PAYMENT STATISTICS

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Procurement, regarding Prompt Payment Statistics **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Byrne outlined the report, confirming that within Quarter 2, 94% of suppliers' invoices had been paid within 30 days, with payments being made on average within 12.39 days. He stated that within Quarter 3, 95% of suppliers' invoices had been paid within 30 days, with the average payment time reduced to 11.61 days.

Councillor Sharvin commended the officers involved in working hard to get the payment process into such a positive position.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 Prompt Payment Statistics 2024/25

AC/007/2025: PLANNING UPDATE

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director Regeneration, regarding a Planning Update. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Mallon outlined the report, reminding Members it had been subject to debate at the Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 13 February 2025.

Following a query from Councillor Devlin regarding the delays from statutory consultees and whether DFI or Central Government had any suggestions to improve on this, Mr Mallon advised Council was in regular contact with statutory consultees to try and resolve any issues, however they were also advising of resource pressures that impacted on their ability to respond to consultations in a timely manner.

Councillor Bowsie referenced his queries at the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee meeting and queried again if Council was considering possible reasons for staff retention issues, and if consideration should be given to pay scales.

Mr Mallon confirmed that an exit interview was carried out with every leaver with reasons for leaving varying from lifestyle changes to relocation. He advised Council had as many leavers to, and new starts from other local authorities. He stressed Council was now close to a full complement of staff following the approval of additional staff and expressed his hope that the next few months would see a marked improvement in the quarterly updates from the Planning Department.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the contents of the Officer's Report.

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 King, 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 Devlin, it was agreed to come out of Closed Session.

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

CORPORATE SERVICES (CLOSED SESSION)

AC/008/2025: RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Procurement, regarding the Risk Management Strategy Update. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to approve the revisions to the Risk Management Policy / Strategy in line with the Internal Audit Recommendations. It was also agreed to approve the Risk Appetite Statement at Appendix 3 of the Officer's Report.

AC/009/2025: UPDATE ON AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

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 Bowsie, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to note the progress in implementing both internal and external audit recommendations.

AC/010/2025: DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Direct Award Contracts. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 updates in relation to Direct Award Contracts.

AC/011/2024: PROCUREMENT ACTION PLANS

Read: Report Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Procurement Action Plans. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor King, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the update and progress in relation to the Directorate Procurement Action Plans.

AC/012/2025: UPDATE ON FRAUD AND RAISING CONCERNS

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

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

- The update in relation to Fraud and Raising Concerns cases detailed at Appendix 1 of the Officers Report
- The progress on actions arising from the NIAO Internal Fraud Risk Self-Assessment
- The update in relation to the National Fraud Initiative

AC/013/2025: UPDATE REPORT NCCR

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding an Update Report NCCR. **(Copy circulated)**

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

- The update on the Notice of Motion March 2024 on the NCCR Project
- The latest correspondence received and issued to the NI Audit Office on the Project.

It was also agreed on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, to write to the Local Government Auditor to express the concerns of the Audit Committee in relation to her communication referring specifically to the Quays shopping centre as a potential site for the Newry Civic Hub, particularly as the Council had previously highlighted detailed reports regarding site selection.

NIAO (CLOSED SESSION)

AC/014/2025: REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE 2023/24

Read: Summary Report dated 19 September 2024 regarding a Summary Report to the Audit Committee. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the Report to those Charged with Governance.

AC/015/2025: AUDIT AND ASSESSMENT REPORT 2024/25 – S95

Read: Correspondence received from Northern Ireland Audit Office
re: Newry, Mourne and Down District Council: Improvement
Audit and Assessment – Final Audit and Assessment Report
2024/25 **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor King, seconded by
Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the Audit and
Assessment Report 2024/2025**

AC/016/2025: ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER

Read: Correspondence received from Northern Ireland Audit Office
re: Annual Audit Letter 2023-24: Newry, Mourne and Down
District Council **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by
Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to note the Annual Audit
Letter 2023/2024**

AC/017/2025: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUDITORS REPORT 2024

Read: Local Government Auditor Report 2024 **(Copy circulated)**

Independent Chairperson Ms Slevin requested that officers prepare a brief report on the recommendations detailed on page 9 of the report for the next Audit Committee meeting.

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by
Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the Local
Government Auditor's Report 2024.**

INTERNAL AUDIT (CLOSED SESSION)

AC/018/2025: SUMER NI SUMMARY REPORT

Read: Sumer NI Summary Report **(Copy circulated)**

**AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by
Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the Sumer NI
Summary Report**

AC/019/2025: INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25

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

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

AC/020/2025: LEISURE SERVICES

Read: Leisure Services Report. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the Leisure Services Report

AC/021/2025: CAR PARKING

Read: Car Parking Report. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the Car Parking Report

AC/022/2025: USER ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Read: User Access Management Report. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the User Access Management Report

AC/023/2025: FLOOD GRANT VERIFICATION

Read: Flood Grant Verification Report. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Devlin, it was agreed to note the Flood Grant Verification Report

Cllr Bowsie left the meeting at this stage – 4.05pm

AC/024/2025: GLOBAL INTERNAL AUDIT STANDARDS

Read: Global Internal Audit Standards Report. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to note the Global Internal Audit Standards Report

CIRCULARS

AC/025/2025: CIRCULAR LG 15/2024 – CONSOLIDATED COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES

Read: Circular LG 15/2024 – Consolidated Councillor Allowances Circular.
(Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to note the Consolidated Councillor Allowances Circular

AC/026/2025: THE NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE IN NORTHERN IRELAND 2024

Read: The National Fraud Initiative in Northern Ireland 2024 Circular.
(Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to note the National Fraud Initiative in Northern Ireland 2024 Circular.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 4.21pm

For consideration at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 7 April 2025.

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

**Signed: Ms B Slevin
 Independent Chairperson**