

**AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD
WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2024**

Table of Recommendations

No	Item	Summary of key Recommendations	Estimated Timescale for completion
1.	Apologies	Alderman Callan, Stewart, Councillor McMullan	
2.	Declarations of Interest	Senior Manager, Cavanagh Kelly and Audit, Risk and Governance Manager	
3.	Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held Wednesday 18 September 2024	Confirmed as a correct record	
4.	Northern Ireland Audit Office Report		
4.1	NIAO Annual Audit Letter 2023-24	To recommend that Council note the reports 4.1-4.4 inclusive	
4.2	NIAO Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24		
4.3	s.95 Improvement Audit and Assessment – Final Audit and Assessment Report 2024-25		
4.4	Draft Report to those Charged with Governance 2023-24		
5.	Audit Progress Report (Monitoring)	To recommend that Council note the work completed to date in respect of the 2024/25 financial year; That Council approve the	June 2025

No	Item	Summary of key Recommendations	Estimated Timescale for completion
		<i>procurement for a specialised ICT audit to be undertaken subject to cost.</i>	
6.	Direct Award Contracts	Noted	
7.	Audit Committee Effectiveness	Noted	July 2025
8.	Correspondence		
8.1	NIAO Local Government Auditors Report 2022-23	Noted	
8.2	NIAO The National Fraud Initiative in Northern Ireland 2024	Noted	
9.	Matters for reporting to Partnership Panel	Nil	
	‘In Committee’ (Items 10 - 17 inclusive)		
10.	Internal Audit (CavanaghKelly) Reports		
10.1	Animal Welfare	Noted	
11.	Internal Audit (CavanaghKelly) Reports		
11.1	Enforcement, Development Control and Development Plan	Noted	
11.2	Building Maintenance	Noted	
11.3	Risk Management	Noted	
12.	Prior Year Recommendations	Noted	
13.	Transformation Action Plan		
13.1	Independent Advisor Final	Noted	
13.2	Project Closure Report	To recommend that Council notes the content of this report, accepts Closure of the Transformation Action Plan and	

No	Item	Summary of key Recommendations	Estimated Timescale for completion
		<i>agrees the forward-looking actions</i>	
14.	Absence Report (Quarter 2)	<i>Noted</i>	
15.	Corporate Risk Matrix and Register	<i>To recommend that Council note and approve the changes to the Corporate Risk register</i>	
16.	Audit Risk and Governance resourcing paper	<p><i>To recommend that Council approve the proposed restructure of the Audit Risk and Governance service, to ensure Council meets its statutory obligations and meet the increasing demands placed on the service, as follows;</i></p> <p><i>to recommend to Council that consideration is given to increasing the contract with the external provider, as and when required to cover additional demands on Internal Audit;</i></p> <p><i>to recommend to Council that an additional resource is added into the</i></p>	<i>June 2025</i>

No	Item	<i>Summary of key Recommendations</i>	<i>Estimated Timescale for completion</i>
		<i>Council's current organisation structure to fulfil the role of the Governance Officer</i>	
17.	Raising Concerns/Fraud	<i>None</i>	
18.	Any Other Relevant Business (notified in accordance with Standing Order 12(o))	<i>None</i>	
19.	Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 12 March 2025	<i>Received</i>	<i>12 March 2025</i>

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF
THE AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AND VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE ON
WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER 2024 AT 7.03PM**

In the Chair: Councillor Chivers (C)

Members Present: Councillors N Archibald (C), Callaghan (R), Huggins (C), Kane (R), Mairs (C), Jonathan McAuley (R), McGurk (R), McQuillan (C), Storey (C), Wisener (C),

L Mitchell, Independent Member (C)

Officers Present: D Jackson, Chief Executive (R)
M Quinn, Director of Corporate Services (C)
A McPeake, Director of Environmental Services (R)
D Wright, Chief Finance Officer (R)
A Ruddy, Audit, Risk & Governance Manager (C)
S Chambers, Risk Officer and Assistant Internal Auditor (C)
J McCarron (R), Performance and Transformation Officer (R)
S Duggan, Civic Support & Committee & Member Services Officer (C)

In Attendance: P Barr, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office (R)
C McHugh, Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly (R)

A Lennox, ICT Officer (C)

Press 2 no. (R)

Key: (R) = Remotely in attendance
(C) = Attendance in the Chamber

Substitutions: Councillor Kane substituted for Alderman Stewart.

The Director of Corporate Services undertook a roll call.

The Chair advised Audit Committee of its obligations and protocol whilst the meeting was being audio recorded.

During the course of the meeting there were ~~IT~~ difficulties with the microphones within the Council Chamber.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were recorded for Alderman Callan, Mc Auley, Stewart and Councillor McMullan.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Elected Members.

Prior to consideration of Item – ‘Audit Risk and Governance resourcing paper’, Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly declared an Interest and left the meeting.

Prior to consideration of Item – ‘Audit Risk and Governance resourcing paper’, the Chair advised the Audit, Risk and Governance Manager declared that she potentially, had an Interest. The Audit, Risk and Governance Manager did not leave the meeting during consideration of the Item.

3. MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD WEDNESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2024

Copy, previously circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Huggins
Seconded by Councillor McQuillan

AGREED - The Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held Wednesday 18 September 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE REPORT

Reports were previously circulated and presented collectively as read by the Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO):

4.1 NIAO Annual Audit Letter 2023-24

4.2 NIAO Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24

4.3 S.95 Improvement Audit And Assessment – Final Audit and Assessment Report 2024-25

4.4 Draft Report to those Charged With Governance 2023-24

Director, NIAO, advised these were the outputs of the Local Government Auditor in relation to the Accounts, that is provided for publication. It presented the findings and complied with the Legislation required by the Local Government Auditor in relation to the review of the accounts.

Director, NIAO referred to the NIAO Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, the Audit completion letter and Audit certificate, the output of the Audit which gave the Opinion and showed there were no modifications and no issues specifically with the Audit.

Director, NIAO referred to the Section 95 Improvement Audit and Assessment, there was one small minor issue for improvement to do with the ratification pre-publication of the report.

Director, NIAO, referred to the Draft Report to those Charged With Governance 2023-24, referring to an issue - the management responses to the actions.

The Independent Member referred to the NIAO Annual Audit Letter, section 7, page 9, the absence rate for the Council and asked how did that compare for 2023-24.

Director, NIAO advised the average across Councils was between 16 to 18 days, that Council was not the highest, and there was graphical information provided in the Local Government Auditors report, illustrating the difference between the Councils across all the provinces.

Independent Member referred to Section 95 Improvement Audit and Assessment, advising she was pleased to see an unqualified opinion, referred Audit Committee to Annex B, page 10.

Independent Member commented on the Draft Report to those Charged With Governance 2023-24, advising she was pleased to see an unqualified opinion. Independent Member referred Management to page 12, relating to the highest paid suppliers. Independent Member questioned what action was going to be taken in relation to this particular area.

The Chief Finance Officer clarified Officers were looking at a new procurement software package portal, which would provide full governance trails from inception to completion, to be implemented from 1st April 2025. The Chief Finance Officer advised the Procurement Officer would be conducting a quarterly review of all procurements which had taken place in all departments and larger procurements, to be completed with internal audit support. The Chief Finance Officer advised a new Policy would come into effect on 1st March 2025 when the new procurement effect would come in, as the Procurement Act had been deferred until February, and the policy also deferred.

Independent Member asked the Chief Finance Officer to take Audit Committee through the unadjusted items in order to understand the context and to make a decision to approve, or not approve.

Chief Finance Officer clarified they referred to the sale of the Dunluce Centre and advised that Officers had provided a debtor account because the contracts had been signed, a deposit had been paid, which had been banked, Officers had provided a debtor for the remainder of what there was, it was a disagreement of opinion between the Audit Office and finance staff, the Chief Finance Officer clarified the detail of this transaction.

Councillor Huggins referred to the Section 95 Improvement Audit and Assessment regarding a Council report that was not ratified prior to its publication and to ensure it was not repeated.

Councillor Huggins referred to the Draft Report to those Charged With Governance 2023-24 Findings on the highest paid suppliers. Councillor Huggins referred to three out of the five where paperwork had not been available to show; that it did not say whether or not they were actually going to look for the paperwork she questioned what was Council going to do to rectify that finding or was it lessons learned and carry on?

Director, NIAO advised the Findings had been identified, they make recommendations and the management response to that would outline the approach that management were going to take in terms of putting additional controls in place or how they would plan to deal with the issue that had been identified. Director, NIAO clarified the draft report would be finalised when management responses were provided.

The Director of Corporate Services illustrated the final draft via Presentation and cited the management responses:

Finding 1 Procurement, (A), (B), (C), (D)
Highest Paid Suppliers - Priority 1 Recommendation

“The procurement officer in conjunction with the CFO are currently looking at new procurement software package that will provide a full governance trail from inception to completion.

The procurement officer will conduct a quarterly review of all procurements which have taken place in all departments, for larger procurements this will be completed with internal audit support.

A new procurement policy is being prepared for 1st March when new the new procurement act comes into effect”.

Finding 2 Management of Council Land and Buildings, Priority 2
Recommendation

The Director of Corporate Services cited the Recommendation and Management responses as follows:

“Recommendation

a) Council should ensure outstanding commercial lease renewals are brought to completion.

Council should review non-commercial leases and obtain clarification and agreement from the Department on whether Council instructs a valuer to carry out rental valuations in light of value for money.

b) Timely implementation of audit and other recommendations should be carried out.

Management Responses

a. Work has commenced on rent reviews and renewals for non-commercial leases under Tranche 2 of the review of Councils leases and licences. A report will be presented quarterly to the Land and Property Sub-Committee in January, April, June and September 2025 to update elected members of the progress of rent reviews and renewals of Councils non-commercial leases. The Land and Property section will liaise with the department and send the current list of Council’s non-commercial leases to obtain clarification and agreement on whether Council instructs a valuer to carry out rental valuations in light of value for money.

b) The revised Estate Strategy and Land and Property Policy were approved by Council on Tuesday 5th November.

The independent review containing 20 recommendations regarding Land and Property were included in the Transformation Action Plan, which was presented to the Transformation Plan Sub-Committee on a monthly basis, providing Members with an update and progress. The recommendations were also presented to the Land and Property Sub-Committee monthly, from January 2024 to November 2024. All actions are now complete, as reported to Council on Tuesday 5th November.

A quarterly report will be presented to Land and Property Sub-Committee to further embed the recommendations and review progress

Finding 3 Limited Assurance Internal Audit Reports Priority 2 Recommendation

The Director of Corporate Services advised there was no management response in as yet and had just received them and provided a verbal update.

- Concessionary trading units - all recommendations had now been completed

- Recycling- Commercial Waste review and Procurement ; - were all in the process of being completed, the Recommendation accepted and progressing towards implementation.

Finding 4 Bank and cash, Priority 3 Recommendation – *“Bank reconciliation correctly includes these cheques as technically these suppliers are still owed money. The year end mix up involved 2 cheques whose reference numbers had been wrongly recorded, no amendment to processes is being recommended as a result of an administrative error”*.

Finding 5 Proper arrangements, Priority 3 Recommendation – *“Medium Term Financial Plan was adopted by Council in November 2023”*

The Chair declared a recess at 7.32pm due to technical difficulties.

- * **The meeting reconvened at 7.40pm.**
- * **The Chief Executive left the meeting at 7.40pm.**

Councillor Huggins referred to Draft Report to those Charged With Governance 2023-24 and sought clarification of whether the missing paperwork for the highest paid suppliers would be searched for.

The Chief Finance Officer advised it was unsatisfactory the paperwork was not able to be found for the particular procurements, which was concerning for any sort of procurement exercise and hence the recommendation for the upgrade of the portal to ensure sure that copies of all documentation was held centrally and could not be either removed or deleted by any employee.

The Performance and Transformation Officer provided information on the proposal for improvement within the Section 95 report which he advised was a procedural issue and could be corrected quickly and provided a timeline of the events. The Performance and Transformation Officer advised the Item could be taken to the Special Annual Accounts Meeting in September.

Proposed by Councillor Storey
Seconded by Councillor Wisener and

AGREED – to recommend that Council note the reports 4.1-4.4 inclusive.

- * **The Chief Executive left the meeting at 7.40pm.**

5. AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT (MONITORING)

Report, previously circulated, was presented by Audit, Risk and Governance Manager.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Audit Committee members on the audit work completed by the Audit team in delivering the audit plan for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council during 2024-25.

The work complete is based on the audit needs assessment for the Council as detailed in the Audit Strategy 2023–2027.

Internal Audit Plan 2024/25

The audits scheduled for 2024/25 and the progress to date were shown in the table below:

Audit Area	Auditor	Status
Environment Services Directorate		
Building Maintenance	CavanaghKelly	Limited
Building Control	CavanaghKelly	Outstanding
Capital Projects	In-house	Ongoing
Waste Services	CavanaghKelly	Outstanding
Finance Directorate		
Accounts Payable & Creditors	CavanaghKelly	Satisfactory
Fixed Asset Register and Management	In-house	Outstanding
Corporate Services Directorate		
ICT	To be tendered	Outstanding
Land and Property	CavanaghKelly	Carry Forward
Risk Management	CavanaghKelly	Satisfactory
Leisure and Development Directorate		
Arts & Cultural Centres	In-house	Outstanding
Planning		
Enforcement, development control & development plan	CavanaghKelly	Satisfactory
Performance		
Corporate Health & Safety	CavanaghKelly	Ongoing
Statutory Audit Requirements		
Policing and Community Safety Partnerships	In-house	Outstanding
Labour Market Partnerships	CavanaghKelly	Outstanding
Total Assignments	14 (total)	4 Complete 3 Ongoing 7 Outstanding

It is proposed that the ICT internal audit is contracted out to specialist ICT firm who will evaluate the cyber security of the Council systems to ensure that they are operating as anticipated. Internal audit are considering

conducting an internal audit in the area of Maintenance contracts which can be included as audit coverage for the 2024-25 financial year.

The table below contains the status of the backlog audits brought forward:

Audit Area	Auditor	Status
Freedom of Information	CavanaghKelly	Carry Forward
Governance	CavanaghKelly	Carry Forward
Fuel Stamp Duty	In-house	Ongoing
Animal Welfare	In-house	Satisfactory

We have commenced fieldwork on the following service areas:

- Fuel Stamp Duty (backlog)
- Health and Safety
- Capital Projects

Internal audit will continue to closely monitor the necessary audit work required to ensure achievement of the audit plan.

Key Performance Indicator(s)

The Internal Audit section reports to the Audit Committee on three key performance indicator(s):

- 70% of the annual audit plan will be delivered in line with the timetable.
We will continue to track the delivery of this KPI for 2024/25.
- Internal audit will deliver the actual dates in accordance with the annual audit plan.
We are on track to meet this KPI.
- 100% of audit recommendations from internal audit reports accepted by management.
We are on track to meet this KPI.

It should be noted that key performance indicators are on track to be met.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Audit Committee note the work completed to date in respect of the 2024/25 financial year.

Audit Committee approve the procurement for a specialised ICT audit to be undertaken.

Audit, Risk and Governance Manager referred Audit Committee to Section 2 within the report, the planned audit work for the year, progress to date, the total assignments, 4 had been completed to date, 3 were work in progress and 7 outstanding. It was also included within the report that Officers will conduct a separate additional assignment on the procurement maintenance contracts within the Council that had been included in the original plan for the year. Audit, Risk and Governance Manager advised that also included within the plan was an ICT audit this year and it was good practice to go out to the market to procure a specialist ICT audit. It was envisaged that there would be adequate audit coverage to determine an assurance rating for the year.

Councillor Storey queried the cost for an ICT Audit.

The Audit, Risk and Governance Manager advised she did not know the cost, until the market was tested. The Audit Risk and Governance Manager advised that she would bring costs back to the March Audit Committee for their consideration prior to making an appointment.

Proposed by Councillor N Archibald
Seconded by Councillor Storey and

AGREED – to recommend that Council note the work completed to date in respect of the 2024/25 financial year;
That Council approve the procurement for a specialised ICT audit to be undertaken subject to cost.

6. DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

Background

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council approved an updated Procurement Policy in November 2023.

Detail

The revised policy had addressed a number of recommendations that had been made in reference to the old policy. One such recommendation was the inclusion of guidance around single tender actions or Direct Award Contracts (DAC). The policy gives guidance and sets out a procedure to follow in such circumstances.

DAC Process

In all cases where council staff are considering the use of the award of a contract without competition, they must seek guidance from the procurement officer before proceeding as such an approach will be easily challenged in the courts unless rigorously supported by appropriate documentation and completed in accordance with the legislative requirements.

Authorisation required

When a member of council staff has spoken with the procurement officer - and discussed all the alternative options available - and wishes to proceed with the award of a contract without competition the staff member should seek approval of their approach from the Senior Management Team before seeking Council approval to award.

A detailed report should be completed by the member of staff requesting the contract award explaining their rationale and the consideration given to all alternative options in conjunction with discussions between the staff member and the procurement officer. The template provided in Annexe 6 – Direct Award Contract Form should be fully completed by the member of staff requesting the contract award.

Once completed, this document will require authorisation from the Senior Management Team before proceeding to the relevant committee for consideration. Upon agreement from the Council the staff member should contract the procurement officer to assist with the contract award to the chosen supplier.

DAC Approvals

The purpose of this short report is to inform members of those DAC's which have been approved since 1 April 2024 and these are listed below, it should be noted that eight of these required Council approval at the point of award which was granted, there have been five DAC's awarded since the last Audit Committee in September.

The Independent Member queried the Direct Award Contract of £124,000 that related to Christmas lights.

The Chief Finance Officer advised the Item had been considered at Environmental Services Committee in September 2024 and it was regarding refurbishment of existing motifs or elements of the lights in Ballymoney and procurement of new ones for Kilrea. The Chief Finance Officer advised Officers had to go back to the company who had originally supplied them and there was a time element of extensive refurbishment to be done in time for Christmas.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

- * **Councillor McQuillan left the meeting at 7.52pm-7.54pm during consideration of the Item.**

7. AUDIT COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Audit, Risk and Governance Manager.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update the Audit Committee on the results of the Audit Committee effectiveness checklist for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council for the year 2024/25.

An effective Audit Committee supports the delivery of the Council’s Strategic Plan by seeking assurances that the Council’s risk management, internal control and governance arrangements are sufficient and operating effectively.

Background

CIPFA published guidance on the function and operation of Audit Committees in local authorities and police bodies and this represents good practice for Audit Committees.

The original effectiveness questionnaire was presented to Audit Committee at its meeting held on 18 September 2024 and issued to Audit Committee members via a survey monkey on 14 November 2024. The Audit Risk and Governance Manager facilitated a self-assessment workshop (25 November 2024) to take Audit Committee members through the self-assessment questionnaire and answer any questions members may have.

In total eight responses were received which represents approximately 40% of the individuals surveyed.

Result(s)

Previously circulated at Appendix 1 is the results from the Effectiveness Questionnaire presented in bar chart format and percentage table detailing the answers.

Results were consistent among all respondents, with a small number of questions requiring further action by the Committee based on the responses received.

Question 12 ‘Has the committee met privately with the external auditors and head of internal audit in the last year?’ 50% of respondents noted minor/moderate improvement required.

Action required: Schedule a meeting separate to management for the 2024/25 financial year with the NIAO and internal auditor.

Question 13a ‘Has the committee been established in accordance with the 2022 guidance as follows:

Questions 13:	No further improvement	Some Improvement
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13a. AC separate from Executive	62.5%	37.5%
13b. AC size that is not unwieldy and avoids use of substitutes	62.5%	37.5%
13c. Inclusion of a lay/co-opted	75%	25%

Action: Present a proposals paper to the Corporate Policy & Resources (CP&R) Committee reviewing the current size and structure of the Audit Committee.

Action: Continuously monitor the use of substitutes to prevent it from becoming a routine practice. Ensure all substitutes have the necessary training and skill set.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Audit Committee approve the attached self assessment questionnaire outcomes, along with any actions identified to enhance its effectiveness, as appropriate.

Audit Risk and Governance Manager referred back to Councillor Storey's query regarding the cost of the ICT Audit and clarified there was a cost within the current plan for CavanaghKelly and any procurement may be less, a calculation would be made and brought to the next Audit Committee meeting.

Audit Risk and Governance Manager referred Audit Committee to the report on the Audit Committee effectiveness, it was good practice to complete a questionnaire to review performance as an Audit Committee against required standards, the questionnaire was distributed a via SurveyMonkey, and a workshop held for Elected Members.

Audit, Risk and Governance Manager advised 8 responses had been received, representing 45% of the Audit Committee. Two questions had been identified for further actions and one was that the Committee should meet separately with the External and Internal Auditors annually in the absence of management, to allow for open discussions, a meeting would be scheduled in advance of an Audit Committee.

Audit, Risk and Governance Manager advised the second item to be reviewed was in relation to the size and structure of the Audit committee, it was good practice in the code to reduce or consider reducing the number of Committee Members, for a more strategic view on the audit papers. A report would be brought to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee and if approved would feed into Council's Annual meeting. Audit, Risk and Governance Manager advised this would allow the Audit Committee to work in smaller numbers, with a greater focus.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

8. CORRESPONDENCE

8.1 NIAO Local Government Auditors Report 2022-23

Copy, previously circulated, presented as read by the Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Director, NIAO, advised the report by the Local Government Auditor, when the outcomes of all Council audits were done and provided information across the whole Local Government landscape in Northern Ireland.

Audit Committee NOTED the correspondence.

8.2 NIAO The National Fraud Initiative in Northern Ireland 2024

Copy, previously circulated, presented as read by the Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Director, NIAO, advised the correspondence was a data matching exercise carried out on behalf of The Cabinet Office looking at a range of data sets across Public Sector organisations and matches those to try and identify any potential error.

Audit Committee NOTED the correspondence.

9. MATTERS FOR REPORTING TO PARTNERSHIP PANEL

There were no matters to report to the Partnership Panel.

Proposed by Councillor Huggins
Seconded by Councillor McQuillan and

AGREED – that the Audit Committee move *'In Committee'*

*** Press left the meeting at 7.57pm.**

The information contained in the following item is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Chair advised Audit Committee of its obligations and protocol whilst the meeting was being audio recorded *'In Committee'*.

10. INTERNAL AUDIT (CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS BOROUGH COUNCIL) REPORTS

10.1 Animal Welfare

Confidential Report, by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was previously circulated, presented by Audit, Risk and Governance Manager.

Audit, Risk and Governance Manager referred to Page 3 of 12 overall, a Satisfactory Level of Assurance the service delivered on behalf of Causeway Coast and Glens by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. There were 3 priority 2 and two priority 3, low risk recommendations. Audit, Risk and Governance Manager drew Committees attention that funding was 100% cut to deliver the animal welfare service. The decision subject to a Judicial Review, there was a one off offer of 50% by DAERA, for funding for this year, going forward, there would be a cost to Council of approximately £132,000 for Elected Members to raise with Party Leads or Ministers.

Audit, Risk and Governance Manager referred to an issue of the Service Level Agreement which was outdated, required updating and resigned. It was suggested that on an annual basis, Elected Members would obtain the number and nature of animal welfare issues in the Borough in order to aid decision making. Audit Committee was referred to Item 6.3 and 6.4 to do with how Council performance manage how Mid and East Antrim was delivering this service on their behalf. The final issue was in relation to having a procedure of what cases Council were proceeding to Litigation and who would make those decisions, how arrived at, in case of any allegations at a later date of bias. Overall there was a Satisfactory Level of Assurance.

The Chair considered the issue may be a matter for the Partnership Panel.

The Director of Corporate Services considered the opportunity for the Partnership Panel may have passed, the matter was with SOLACE and a there were a number of bodies involved and engaged in progressing.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

11. INTERNAL AUDIT (CAVANAGHKELLY) REPORTS

11.1 Enforcement, Development Control and Development Plan

Confidential Report, previously circulated, was presented by Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly.

Senior Manager CavanaghKelly advised they had looked at the process, procedures and controls around the planning application process itself and also governance around decision making and was happy to report that good processes were in place, good controls operating effectively. She stated Council's Planning department had made very good progress in moving towards meeting the deadlines for processing applications. All councils across Northern Ireland struggled to meet these deadlines for processing applications, Council's Planning Department had put an action plan in place and were gradually reducing the amount of time being spent on processing applications. Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly commended this.

Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly was satisfied around Governance that all key controls were in place, Schemes of Delegation, Terms of Reference, meetings were taking place and being administered as they should. Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly advised that the Planning Committee meetings were very lengthy and the longest time spent compared to other Planning Committees, there was a risk that it may not be the most efficient use of people's time with Officers and Elected Members, whilst understanding the need for discussion. It was recommended that was looked at and considered, if there were ways to reduce the length of the meeting. Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly stated overall a Satisfactory assessment.

Councillor Huggins requested the Audit Committee was reported back to, when the matter had been discussed at Planning Committee.

Independent Member stated Council and Management need to be commended for the outcome of the Audit, the additional information on other councils was helpful to the Planning Committee.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

11.2 Building Maintenance

Confidential Report, previously circulated, was presented by Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly.

Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly referred Audit Committee to Page 3 Executive Summary, that focused on how building maintenance was planned and managed, and overseen, aspects of health and safety and made five priority 2 recommendations and three priority, 3 recommendations, overall a Limited Assurance. Senior Manager, CavanaghKelly advised the issue that there was a need for a more strategic approach to make better use of the Tab system, where all types of building maintenance was logged, to monitor progress and

the workload. Prior to the Audit, Management had advised they were aware they could be doing better.

Senior Management, CavanaghKelly advised that in relation to health and safety, some training was not up to date for all staff, risk assessments had not been reviewed and updated, maintaining records around training and risk assessments slipped due to staffing matters stated and this had been accepted by Management.

Independent Member referred to dates within Tab's that were scheduled into 2025.

The Director of Environmental Services clarified they would wish to achieve these in greater time scale and considered whether some should have stated 2024 for urgent elements, this would be reviewed with CavanaghKelly to make adjustments.

Councillor Huggins advised the Tabs issue had been discussed at Environmental Services Committee. Councillor Huggins stated it had stood out for her there was no buildings maintenance Strategy in place. Councillor Huggins referred to employees on the ground and the public regarding the health and safety reviews, stating she would like a report to come to Environmental Services Committee with regards to health and safety and risk assessments and the building maintenance strategy.

Councillor Storey asked for an explanation of the correlation between building maintenance and condition surveys as Council had a contract for three years and how they were prioritised, he asked how Council were so far behind.

The Director of Environmental Services clarified 65 condition surveys had been completed, prioritised on the basis of user numbers and prominence eg leisure centres, community centres. He advised the actions coming out of the Surveys were being added to the Tab system and would become planned processes moving forward. The Director of Environmental Services stated that would allow Officers to put in place a 10-year plan for each building, a proactive approach. The Director of Environmental Services referred to finances and that it was only now that they were in the position to undertake a long term approach.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

* **Councillor McQuillan left the meeting at 8.19pm.**

11.3 Risk Management

Confidential Report, previously circulated, was presented by Senior Management, CavanaghKelly.

Senior Manager CavanaghKelly referred Audit Committee to page 3, Executive Summary which highlighted the risks considered and recommendations made. There were two priority 2 recommendations and two priority 3 recommendations, overall, a Satisfactory Level of Assurance. She stated some good work had been undertaken, helped by the appointment of a Risk Officer able to dedicate time and resource to addressing previous recommendations.

Senior Manager Cavanagh Kelly advised some of the recommendations were about trying to bring risk into people's minds in a more ongoing basis rather than a periodic review every quarter and made a recommendation to consider adopting a specific risk management system. Senior Manager Cavanagh Kelly advised recommendations had been made around including risk management as agenda items, especially in team meetings going forward. Also, a recommendation that the Corporate Risk Register, as well as all the detail that came to Audit Committee, a summary highlighting the changes was also incorporated.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

12. PRIOR YEAR RECOMMENDATIONS

Confidential Report, by virtue of paragraph(s) 2 of Part 1 of Schedule Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was previously circulated, presented by the Director of Corporate Services.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update in terms of progress made/being made in relation to recommendations made in Previous Internal Audits.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Audit Committee recommends to Council to note the Prior Year Recommendations Progress Report.

Director of Corporate Services referred Audit Committee to the summary table in Section 3, which listed the Internal Audits, 36 recommendations completed in this quarter with 38 due to be completed by the end of March 2025.

Independent Member stated the table at Section 3 was helpful, simple to understand and gave all the information needed. The Independent Member referred to the vast majority of the recommendations to be completed by March 2025, sought reassurance it was not unrealistic.

The Director of Corporate Services clarified this was a key priority for the next few months for Senior Management Team, a report would be brought on a monthly basis, it was in everyone's interest to close off the backlog.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

13. TRANSFORMATION ACTION PLAN

13.1 Independent Advisor Final

Confidential Report by virtue of paragraphs 3 & 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was previously circulated, and presented by the Performance and Transformation Officer.

Purpose of Report

This report is the Final update report of the independent adviser appointed to support, challenge, and scrutinise the transformation programme and its implementation. This report has been provided to the Department for Communities and to the Oversight Panel at Causeway Coast and Glens as agreed in the specification of the role.

Performance and Transformation Officer advised the reports had been recommended by the Transformation Programme Implementation Oversight Panel and Corporate Policy Resources Committee during November and by Council at the beginning of December.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

13.2 Project Closure Report

Confidential Report, by virtue of paragraphs 3 & 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was previously circulated, and presented by the Performance and Transformation Officer.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present to Members of Audit Committee, for Decision, the Project Closure Report for the Transformation Action Plan.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council notes the content of this report, accepts Closure of the Transformation Action Plan and agrees the forward-looking actions.

Councillor Storey referred to the previous audits and work that had not been done, he stated workload had been triggered by the Extraordinary Audit, none of the issues had been raised in previous audits. Councillor Storey stated the individual who triggered the Extraordinary Audit bore a huge responsibility and caused Council almost £700,000.

Proposed by Councillor Huggins
Seconded by Councillor N Archibald and

AGREED – to recommend that Council notes the content of this report, accepts Closure of the Transformation Action Plan and agrees the forward-looking actions.

14. ABSENCE REPORT (QUARTER 2)

Confidential Report, by virtue of paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was previously circulated, and presented by Director of Corporate Services

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with Quarter 2 (1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024) information regarding Absenteeism throughout the Council.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council notes the report presented.

The Director of Corporate Services provided Committee Members with three updates for their attention; Progress to date quarter 2 to September 2024; advised that OD/HR Department introduced a HR Newsletter, and that Council have provide Westfield Healthcare cover to employees and Elected Members.

The Director of Corporate Services referred to the absence number of days lost, a slight decrease compared to the same quarter last year, the challenge long term absence 90% and less than 10% was short term absence.

Audit Committee NOTED the report.

15. CORPORATE RISK MATRIX AND REGISTER

Confidential Report, by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was previously circulated and presented by the Director of Corporate Services.

Purpose of Report

This report compares the September risk register to the December risk register documenting the escalation of some risks whilst other risks facing the Council are unlikely to materialise.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Audit Committee notes and approves the changes to the Corporate Risk Register.

The Director of Corporate Services provided commentary on the report.

Proposed by Councillor Mairs

Seconded by Councillor Wisener and

AGREED – to recommend that Council note and approve the changes to the Corporate Risk Register.

- * **Senior Manager, Cavanagh Kelly declared an Interest and left the meeting at 8.34pm.**

16. AUDIT RISK AND GOVERNANCE RESOURCING PAPER

Confidential Report by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was previously circulated, and presented by the Director of Corporate Services.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to review the current resources within the Audit, Risk and Governance service, including the Co-Sourcing arrangement, and seek Council approval for a revised structure, including an additional member of permanent staff to meet Council statutory obligations and improve service delivery. This will help further embed the recommendations within the Transformation Plan and ensure adherence to CIPFA Best Practice of Good Governance, Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), and Implementation of the new Global Internal Audit Standards.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Council approves the proposed restructure of the Audit Risk and Governance service, to ensure Council meets its statutory obligations and meet the increasing demands placed on the service, as follows.

It is recommended that consideration is given to increasing the contract with the external provider, as and when required to cover additional demands on Internal Audit.

It is recommended that an additional resource is added into the Council's current organisation structure to fulfil the role of the Governance Officer.

The Director of Corporate Services presented the following paragraphs within the confidential report:

- Current Position
- Audit
- Risk Management
- Governance
- Proposed Budget 2025/26

Councillor Storey paid tribute to the Audit work undertaken which he stated was fundamental to the operation of every aspect of the work of Council. Councillor Storey referred to the work of the Auditor General, where 30% of their work was outsourced. Councillor Storey stated appreciation to the staff.

The Chair advised of the work being under pressure for a long time and stated that it should have happened a long time ago.

Proposed by Councillor Huggins
Seconded by Councillor Storey and

AGREED – to recommend that Council approve the proposed restructure of the Audit Risk and Governance service, to ensure Council meets its statutory obligations and meet the increasing demands placed on the service, as follows;

to recommend to Council that consideration is given to increasing the contract with the external provider, as and when required to cover additional demands on Internal Audit;

to recommend to Council that an additional resource is added into the Council's current organisation structure to fulfil the role of the Governance Officer.

17. RAISING CONCERNS/FRAUD

The Audit, Risk and Governance Manager advised there were no new cases and no updates on current cases.

18. ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS (NOTIFIED IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 12(O))

There were no items of Any Other Relevant Business.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH 2025

Audit Committee NOTED the date of the next meeting.

MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN PUBLIC'

Proposed by Councillor N Archibald
Seconded by Councillor Storey and

AGREED – to recommend that Council move '*In Public*'.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 8.45pm.

Chair