

**AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD
WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2026**

Table of Recommendations

No	Item	Summary of key Recommendations	Estimated Timescale for completion
1.	Apologies	Alderman Brown Stewart, Councillor Callaghan	
2.	Declarations of Interest	Nil	
3.	Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held Thursday 17 June 2026	Confirmed as a correct record	
4.	Northern Ireland Audit Office Reports		
4.1	Draft Report to those charged with governance 2025/26	Noted	
4.2	NIAO – Local Government Auditor's Report 2026	Noted	
5.	Direct Award Contracts	Noted	
6.	Annual Accounts 2025-26	Noted	
7.	Risk Management Strategy	To recommend that the Audit Committee recommends to Council the adoption and amendments of the Revised Risk Management Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 (circulated)	

No	Item	Summary of key Recommendations	Estimated Timescale for completion
8.	Internal Audit Plan 2026-27	Noted	
9.	Quarterly Complaints Report	Noted	Completed
10.	Correspondence		
10.1	Letter from NIAO regarding Council's participation in the National Fraud Initiative in Northern Ireland - Data Matching Exercise 2026-27	Noted	
11.	Matters for Reporting to the Partnership	Nil	
	'In Committee' Items 12 to 17		
12.	Recruitment of Independent Member	To recommend that the Audit Committee recommends to Council the appointment of Alison Rankin as Independent Member.	
13.	Internal Audit (McHughLindsay)		
13.1	Cemetery Management	Noted	
13.2	Energy Management – Electricity	Noted	
13.3	Fleet Management	Noted	
14.	Prior Year Recommendations Progress	Noted	N/A
15.	Absenteeism Report - Quarter 1 2026-27	Noted	
16.	Corporate Risk Register and Matrix	Noted	N/A
17.	Raising Concerns/Fraud	Noted	

No	Item	Summary of key Recommendations	Estimated Timescale for completion
18.	Any Other Relevant Business (notified in accordance with Standing Order 12(o))	Nil	
19.	Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 16 December 2026	Wednesday 16 December 2026	

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF
THE AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AND VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE ON
THURSDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2026 AT 7.05 PM**

In the Chair: Councillor Storey (Chair)

Members Present: Alderman Callan (R), Hunter (R)
Councillors N Archibald (R), Kane (R/C), Huggins (C),
McGurk (R), McMullan (C), Peacock (R), Mairs (C),
Wisener (C)

Officers Present: 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)
M McElhatton, Risk and Governance Officer (C)
U Harper, Senior Democratic Services Officer (C)
J Keen, Democratic Services Officer (C)

In Attendance: C McKeown, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office (C)
C McHugh, Partner, McHughLindsay (R)
P O'Sullivan, Northern Ireland Audit Office (R)
L Mitchell, Independent Member (C)

L Boyd, ICT Officer (C)
C McTaggart, ICT Officer (C)

Key: (R) = Remotely in attendance

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.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were recorded for Alderman Brown Stewart and Councillor Callaghan.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD THURSDAY 17 JUNE 2026

Copy, previously circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Huggins

Seconded by Councillor Mairs and

AGREED - That the Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held Thursday 17 June 2026 were confirmed as a correct record.

4. NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE REPORTS

4.1 Draft Report to those charged with governance 2025/26

For information report, previously circulated, was presented by Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office provided an overview of the report previously circulated the key points of which were:

- Subject to the satisfactory completion of audit procedures, it is proposed that a local government audit will report on the 2025/26 financial statements with an unqualified audit opinion.
- The Local Government Auditor will be signing off on the accounts in two weeks, with procedures still to be completed in the intervening period.
- Following the satisfactory resolution and completion of the accounts, along with management review, the Northern Ireland Audit Office will request that the Chief Financial Officer signs a statement of accounts along with the letter of representation.
- No significant issues in relation to management override of controls were identified.
- Council has strengthened its procurement framework this year with a new procurement policy being introduced at the start of the year and subsequently updated in May. Audit testing then was generally supported by appropriate documentation and evidence of compliance with Council's policies and procedures, and no significant concerns were identified.
- In relation to extended producer responsibility the Northern Ireland Audit Office are content with how the Council are accounting for it.
- There are 9 findings, 5 priority twos and 4 priority threes, which are best practice points.
- In relation to issues with the draft financial statements, the recommendation is in relation to improving management review of draft accounts submitted for audit going forward.

- There is a more recent finding in relation to VAT control and review procedures. There was a minor discrepancy of about £10,000, as an unreconciled difference in relation to the VAT debtor balance.
- The Council recently received a suspended penalty from HMRC in relation to VAT of just under £130,000 which was received by Council in August 2026 in relation to inaccuracies and VAT returns submitted in previous periods. The penalty has been suspended for a period of one year subject to Council meeting specified conditions.
- Findings 3 and 4 relate to items within the draft financial statements - landfill provision and assets not valued at year end, both are related to valuations, the appropriateness of the valuation period and timetable for the purposes of including figures in the annual report and accounts. Some work to do for the NIAO to satisfy themselves that there is no material impact to allow the Northern Ireland Audit Office to put judgments on the file in relation to those.
- Finding 5 is in relation to IT systems. The IT Auditors believe a good, strong control framework is important, particularly given risks such as cyber risk, and this is red on many public sector risk registers.
- Section 5 of the report relates to the client and audit adjustments that have been made to the draft financial statements as seen on pages 23 to 26.
- The Northern Ireland Audit Office ask of the Audit Committee is to review the findings set out in this report, including the draft letter of representation and audit certificate attached at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of the report and to satisfy themselves that the one unadjusted error mentioned in section 6 continues, they're content for it to continue to be unadjusted in the final financial statements.

The Chief Finance Officer clarified that the VAT penalty has been suspended for 6 months until February 2027.

The Independent Member stated that an unqualified opinion is a good position for Council. The Independent Member stated that there are no procurement issues and there has been good work in this area. She referred to findings 3 and 4 in relation to landfill and revaluation and queried if there was any risk these may become a material risk.

In response to the Independent Member the Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office stated that there is some risk, that the Audit Office are still trying to satisfy themselves and that the bar is continually being raised. The Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office further stated that the management review is still outstanding and that the caveat remains.

In response to questions from an Elected Member regarding the number of agency staff engaged by Council the Director of Corporate Services stated that

vacancies within the Operations Department had been advertised, the interviews will be in the next few weeks and that there will be a reserve list. The Director of Corporate Services stated that progress is being made with recruitment and to reduce the reliance on agency employees.

In response to questions regarding the level of absenteeism the Director of Corporate Services referred to the relevant table in the Local Government report and stated that Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is in the middle and there have been improvements in the level of absenteeism. The Director of Corporate Services stated that there is a report later on the Agenda which considers absenteeism and further details can be considered there.

Committee NOTED the report.

4.2 NIAO – Local Government Auditor’s Report 2026

For information report, previously circulated, was presented as read by the Chair.

This report has been prepared under Article 4 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005.

The Local Government Auditor has statutory authority to undertake comparative and other studies designed to enable him to make recommendations for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services by local government bodies and to publish his results and recommendations.

Committee NOTED the report.

5. DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS

For information report, previously circulated, was presented by the Chief Finance Officer.

Background

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council approved an updated Procurement Policy in June 2025.

Detail

The revised policy had addressed the commencement of the Procurement Act which came into force in February 2025. The new policy still has inclusion of guidance around single tender actions or Direct Award Contracts (DAC 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 Appendix B – 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 the last Audit Committee in June 2026, there have been three DAC's awarded since then (table circulated).

The Chair stated he wished the meeting to go 'In Committee' so he could seek further details regarding one of the Direct Award Contracts.

MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN COMMITTEE'

Proposed by Councillor Huggins

Seconded by Councillor Wisener and

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

* **The meeting moved 'In Committee' at 7:21pm**

Discussion ensued in relation the Direct Award Contract for Leisure and Development.

In response to questions the Director of Corporate Policy and Resources and the Chief Finance Officer stated that they did not have specific details regarding the current status of the situation.

Alderman Callan requested that the Director of Leisure and Development provide further details of the current status at the next Council Meeting.

The Chief Executive advised it was a working process and stated that the Director of Leisure and Development could be asked to present to the Council meeting.

In response to questions the Chief Finance Officer advised that the Direct Award Contracts had been awarded and that this report is for noting.

Committee NOTED the report.

- * **Councillor Kane joined the meeting in the Chamber at 7.30pm after having attended remotely.**

MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN PUBLIC'

Proposed by Councillor Kane

Seconded by Councillor McMullan and

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

The meeting moved 'In Public' at 7:32pm

6. ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2025-26

The Chief Finance Officer provided a verbal update on the Annual Accounts, the key points of which were:

- The annual accounts are nearly completed and will be finalised before the deadline of 30 September 2026. The final draft has been tabled for the upcoming Special Council Meeting.
- Debt has been reduced and there have been good levels of income.
- Reserves are in a good position.
- In terms of the report for those charged with governance, there will be a response prepared for the Audit Committee in December.

The Chair provided thanks to those who have been working on the Annual Accounts.

Committee NOTED the verbal update.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Director of Corporate Services.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Members with the Revised Risk Management Strategy for consideration and recommended for approval. The changes made relate to the introduction of the new Council Plan (2026-2031).

Background

The Risk Management Strategy forms part of the Causeway Coast & Glens Brough Council's internal control and corporate governance framework. The Strategy has been developed to provide clarity and direction on current and future risk management activity across Council. The Revised Risk Management Strategy is attached in Appendix 1 (previously circulated).

It is recognised as good governance for Council to have a documented Risk Management Strategy that sets out a clear and consistent framework for the identification, assessment, management and monitoring of risks. A formal strategy helps ensure that risk management is embedded within governance arrangements, supports informed decision-making, and promotes the achievement of organisational objectives while maintaining an appropriate balance between risk and opportunity.

This Strategy has been developed in line with the principles outlined in HM Treasury's *Orange Book: Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts* (May 2023), which provides established guidance on the UK Government's framework for effective risk management and encourages the integration of risk considerations into strategic and operational planning processes, performance management and organisational culture.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Audit Committee recommends to Council the adoption and amendments of the Revised Risk Management Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 (circulated).

Proposed by Councillor Huggins

Seconded by Councillor Wisener and

AGREED – to recommend that the Audit Committee recommends to Council the adoption and amendments of the Revised Risk Management Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 (circulated).

8. INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2026-27

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

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present the annual programme for the provision of Internal Audit services in Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council for the financial year 2026/27. This plan is based on our audit needs assessment as detailed in the Internal Audit Strategy for 2023-2027 for the current term of Council.

In accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS), the Audit Committee is being asked to review and approve the proposed plan.

Further information was detailed within the report.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Audit Committee note:

- The programme of planned work for 2026-27 and
- Indicative timescales to deliver the planned Internal Audit assignments

Committee NOTED the report.

9. QUARTERLY COMPLAINTS REPORT

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Director of Corporate Services.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the Complaints Handling Data for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council from 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026 (Quarter 1), with further details included in Appendix 1 - Complaints Handling Data 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

Background

The information contained in the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)'s Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) Parts 1-3 was

adopted in full by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in October 2023 to ensure it meets NIPSO's MCHP test of compliance.

Council has a process for the internal reporting of complaints information, including analysis of complaints trends. Regularly reporting the analysis of complaints information helps to inform management of areas where services need to improve.

- The Council's definition of a complaint is "An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council."
- Stage 1: Frontline Response provides the opportunity to resolve or respond to complaints quickly and effectively. The procedure is:
- Inform corporate support for logging purposes and identify service manager/ officer to deal with Stage 1 response. Aim to resolve within 5 working days (or 10 if extension is appropriate). Corporate Support will acknowledge within 48 hours from next working day.
- Stage 2: Investigation is appropriate where the customer is dissatisfied with the frontline response. It will require a more in-depth and detailed investigation to establish the relevant facts given the complexity or serious nature of the issue.

Complaints Data 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026

Stage 1: Frontline

The following is the Complaints Data for the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026, for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.

- Number of Stage I complaints received and closed out – 11 received and 10 closed within the first quarter of 2026.
- Number of Stage I complaints rectified within target time (5 days) – 9 of these met the deadline of 5 working days or less to rectify (90%).

Stage 2: Investigation

The following is the Complaints Data for the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026, for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.

- Number of Stage II complaints received and closed out – 9 opened and 5 closed within the first quarter of 2026.
- Number of Stage II complaints rectified within target time (20 days) - 2 of these met the deadline of 20 working days or less to rectify (40%).

Outcomes

Complaint Outcomes

Complaints received for the period 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026 were investigated in line with statutory guidelines and closed based on the following outcomes:

Complaint Outcomes	
Resolved	0
Upheld	3
Partially Upheld	2
Not Upheld	10

Complaints by Directorate

Directorate	
Chief Executive	0
Corporate Services (including Planning)	5
Environmental Services	8
Leisure and Development	2
Finance	0

Recommendation

It is recommended that Audit Committee notes the Complaints Handling Quarterly Report for 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026.

Committee NOTED the report.

10. CORRESPONDENCE

10.1 Letter from NIAO regarding Council's participation in the National Fraud Initiative in Northern Ireland - Data Matching Exercise 2026-27

Copy, previously circulated, was presented as read by the Chair.

Correspondence re: National Fraud Initiative (NFI) in NI: Data Matching Exercise 2026-27

Committee NOTED the correspondence.

11. MATTERS FOR REPORTING TO THE PARTNERSHIP

There were no matters to report to the Partnership Panel.

MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN COMMITTEE'

Proposed by Councillor Huggins

Seconded by Councillor Mairs and

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

* **The meeting moved 'In Committee' at 7:39pm**

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*'.

12. RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER

Confidential report, by virtue of paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was presented by the Audit, Risk and Governance Manager.

Purpose of Report

Council agreed the appointment of a new Independent Member to the Audit Committee at the June meeting. The advertisement appeared in NI jobs, social media and Council's website on 24 July 2026, with a closing date of Monday 10 August 2026 at 4 pm.

Further information was provided within the report.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Audit Committee recommends to Council the appointment of Alison Rankin as Independent Member.

The Audit, Risk and Governance Manager thanked the Independent Member for work with the Audit Committee and wished her well in the future.

Councillor Kane and the Chair offered thanks to the Independent Member for her work with the Audit Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Kane

Seconded by Councillor Mairs and

AGREED – to recommend that the Audit Committee recommends to Council the appointment of Alison Rankin as Independent Member.

13. INTERNAL AUDIT (MCHUGHLINDSAY)

Confidential report, by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 was presented by Partner McHughLindsay.

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that the Independent Member has added a lot of value to the Audit Committee and wished her well in the future.

13.1 Cemetery Management

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that burial administration and record keeping, health and safety around cemetery operations and burial capacity and planning were looked at. These areas received overall satisfactory level of assurance with 3 priority 2 recommendations and 2 priority 3 recommendations.

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, highlighted risks found and stated recommendations made to address these. Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that Management accepted all the recommendations within the report and are working to implement them.

In response to questions regarding capacity of cemeteries, Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated she did not make any recommendations for this because Council Officers and Elected Members are considering options and further reports will be brought to the relevant Committee for consideration of the best way forward.

Committee NOTED the report.

13.2 Energy Management - Electricity

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that arrangements for energy management, specifically electricity, governance and accountability, electricity procurement, billing, financial management and monitoring and reporting of electricity consumption were looked at. These areas received overall satisfactory level of assurance with 2 priority 2 recommendations and 3 priority 3 recommendations.

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, highlighted risks found and stated recommendations made to address these. Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that Management accepted all the recommendations within the report.

Independent Member stated that it was good to see a satisfactory assurance and queried of the data being gathered by the Energy Officer was being used for efficiencies.

In response to the Independent Member Partner, McHughLindsay, stated that work is being completed on this.

Discussion ensued regarding how Council use alternative energy.

The Chief Finance Officer confirmed Council's plans for using renewable energy sources where appropriate on new building projects and significant refurbishment.

Committee NOTED the report.

10.3 Fleet Management

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that management of the fleet across the organisation, including use of fuel for vehicles, fleet utilization, replacement of the fleet, vehicle maintenance, statutory compliance, and management oversight and reporting were looked at. These areas received overall satisfactory level of assurance with 1 priority 2 recommendations and 3 priority 3 recommendations and a point for management.

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, highlighted risks found and stated recommendations made to address these. Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that Management accepted all the recommendations within the report.

The Independent Member stated that it is pleasing to see satisfactory assurance in the report. Independent Member queried if controls in place were enough to mitigate against theft with the rising cost of fuel.

Partner, McHugh Lindsay, stated that there are controls in place to reduce the likelihood of fuel theft and that anomalies are investigated.

Committee NOTED the report.

14. PRIOR YEAR RECOMMENDATIONS PROGRESS

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

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the progress made, and ongoing actions being undertaken, in implementing recommendations arising from Previous Internal Audits.

Further information was provided within the report.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Audit Committee recommends to Council to note the progress in addressing the Internal Audit Recommendations.

In response to questions from Alderman Callan regarding the timescale for addressing the recommendations in previous audits the Audit, Risk and Governance Manager stated how the recommendations were being addressed and provided reassurance that the number of recommendations being worked on is not unusual.

Alderman Callan requested that further information is presented within the report to provide context surrounding the issues of meeting the recommendations.

The Independent Member commended the Risk and Governance Officer for the document provided.

Committee NOTED the report.

15. ABSENTEEISM REPORT - QUARTER 1 2026-27

Confidential report, by virtue of paragraph(s) 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, previously circulated, was presented by the Director of Corporate Services.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with Quarter 1 absenteeism information for the period 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026 and to highlight key trends, performance against targets and the actions being taken to address sickness absence across the Council.

Further information was provided within the report.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council notes the Quarter 1 report presented.

Councillor Schenning praised the initiatives in place to support staff wellbeing and stated she was thankful to see them in place.

Committee NOTED the report.

16. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER AND MATRIX

Confidential by virtue of paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, previously circulated, was presented by the Director of Corporate Services.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this Report is to present the Audit Committee with the Risk Register as at September 2026.

Further information was provided within the report.

Recommendation

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

Committee NOTED the report.

17. RAISING CONCERNS/FRAUD

The Audit Risk and Governance Manager provided a verbal update.

The Audit, Risk and Governance Manager advised there is 1 alleged fraud misrepresentation and confirmed that this is under investigation.

Committee NOTED the verbal update.

TO PROCEED 'IN PUBLIC'

Proposed by Councillor Kane
Seconded by Councillor Huggins and

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

The meeting moved 'In Public' at 8:36pm

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

There was no other relevant business.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER 2026

Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 16 December 2026

There being no further business the Chair thanked Elected Members for their attendance, the meeting concluded at 8:36pm

Chair