

LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on Wednesday, 20th March, 2024 at 6:00 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor R McLernon (Chairperson)
Mr E Jardine (Independent Member and Vice-Chairperson)

Aldermen O Gawith and S P Porter; and

Councillors D Bassett, S Burns, D J Craig,
A P Ewing, J Gallen, A Givan, C Kemp,
P Kennedy, S Lowry, M McKeever and A Martin.

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Alderman J Tinsley and Councillor G Hynds.

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive (remote)
Director of Organisation Development and Innovation
Acting Director of Environmental Services
Head of Communities
Head of Economic Development
Head of Finance
Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development
Acting Head of Parks and Amenities
Internal Audit Manager (remote)
Acting Emergency Planning, Corporate H&S, Risk & Business
Continuity Manager
Member Services Officers

Northern Ireland Audit Office
Mr R Ross

Ross Boyd Accountants
Mr B Stewart

Commencement of the Meeting

The Chairperson welcomed everybody to the meeting.

1. Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Deputy Mayor Councillor G McCleave and Councillor P Burke.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Report by Performance Improvement Officer

(In the absence of the Performance Improvement Officer, the Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development presented reports 3.1 to 3.5.)

3.1 Comments, Complaints & Compliments Report – Quarter 3 2023/24

(Alderman S P Porter and Councillors A Ewing and A Martin entered the Chamber at 6.03pm.)

The Committee was provided with a copy of a comparative report which detailed the comments, complaints and compliments received in Quarter 3 (October – December inclusive) of 2023/24.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development undertook to provide further information on a query which had been raised regarding the number of complaints received in respect of the Regeneration and Growth directorate.

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the report.

In addition, it was proposed by Alderman O Gawith, seconded by Alderman S P Porter, and agreed that the dashboard (appendix 1) and the full comparative report (appendix 2) would continue to be presented at each meeting.

3.2 Service KPIs - Quarter 3 2023/24 (all directorates)

The Committee considered a report, together with several appendices, which gave an overview of each department's performance against the key performance indicators (KPIs) for the period October to December 2023 (inclusive).

The Acting Director of Environmental Services and the Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development clarified several queries which had been raised by Members.

The Head of Finance responded to queries regarding the figures reported for the payment of invoices within the 10-day target. The Committee was given an overview of the challenges that existed in this regard in advance of the introduction of a new finance system. It was added that officers continued to work with suppliers to streamline processes and that the reported figure was subject to constant review.

The Committee agreed to note the information provided.

3.3 Performance Improvement Objectives, Case Studies & Associated KPIs – 3rd Quarter Review

The Committee considered the following:

- (a) a quarterly monitoring document (covering 1st October to 31st December 2023) on the projects which had demonstrated improvement against the 2023/24

Performance Improvement Objectives, including the relevant Performance Improvement KPI. An additional section was included detailing case studies and customer feedback that had demonstrated improvement during Quarter 3; and

- (b) a report generated by the 'Performance Management System' detailing the Performance Improvement Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) outcomes for the Council from 1st October to 31st December 2023 inclusive.

It was noted that eleven of the Council's sixteen Performance Improvement Objectives had been met by the end of December 2023, and that four of the five remaining objectives were anticipated to be met by the end of the financial year.

The Committee agreed to note the information which had been provided.

Arising from discussion, Councillor S Lowry, expressed her gratitude to those Council officers who had been involved in the delivery of the 'Grand Choice' participatory budget event, which had taken place in St Mary's Church of Ireland Hall, Ballybeen, on Saturday 9th March, an event which, she added, had been an excellent example of corporate leadership and community engagement. The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, endorsed the comments of Councillor Lowry and added that the initiative, which was overseen by the Policing and Community Safety Partnership, had proved to be most successful across all the Council's District Electoral Areas.

3.4 Draft Performance Improvement Objectives & Projects 2024/25

The Committee considered a report which had identified several Draft Performance Improvement Objectives and Projects for 2024/25. It was reported that the objectives had been identified in accordance with an observation of the Northern Ireland Audit Office suggesting that the Council should enhance its processes by undertaking additional comparison with previous years' performance. It was reported that public consultation exercises in relation to the draft objectives would be undertaken early in the financial year, with a view to presenting a final report to the Committee in June 2024.

It was proposed by Councillor D J Craig, seconded by Councillor M McKeever, and agreed that the Committee approve the Draft Performance Improvement Objectives & Projects for 2024/25.

3.5 NI Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) Model Complaints Handling Procedure

The Committee was informed that a review of the Council's Customer Care Procedure had been undertaken to ensure that it was compliant with the Model Complaints Handling Procedure, which had been introduced by the NI Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) in 2023. That procedure had recommended that a standardised two-stage complaints procedure be introduced across the public sector, a measure which the Council had been applying since 2021. In accordance with the revised procedure, it was recommended that the Council adopt the revised templates and the two-step procedure as recommended by NIPSO, copies of which had been appended to the report.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development clarified a matter raised regarding the recording of service requests, as opposed to complaints, and the data used within the associated screening document, together with the steps that would be implemented in making the associated information more accessible to residents across the Council area.

It was proposed by Councillor S Lowry, seconded by Councillor D Bassett, and agreed that the Committee adopt the revised templates and the two-step procedure as recommended by NIPSO.

4.0 Report from the Acting Emergency Planning, Corporate H & S, Risk & Business Continuity

4.1 Corporate Risk Register

The Acting Emergency Planning, Corporate H & S, Risk & Business Continuity Manager, outlined the principal aspects of a report which provided an update in respect of the quarterly review of the Corporate Risk Register.

Members noted the contents of the report and the Corporate Risk Dashboard.

In addition, it was proposed by Alderman O Gawith, seconded by Councillor D Bassett, and agreed that Cyber Security and the redevelopment of Dundonald International Ice Bowl be the subject of in-depth reviews as part of the management of the Corporate Risk Register in 2024/25.

Arising from discussion, the Acting Director of Environmental Health addressed a matter regarding the steps undertaken to meet targets associated with landfill disposal capacity.

5. Report by Internal Audit Manager

5.1 Governance and Audit Committee Self-Evaluation Outcome Report

The Committee was provided with a copy of an Outcome Report in respect of a Governance and Audit Committee Self-Evaluation exercise, which had been undertaken in February 2024.

The Committee agreed that the report be noted.

It was agreed further, at the request of Mr E Jardine, that the CIPFA guidance on best practice for Audit Committees, as contained within the "Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities" be circulated for Members' information.

In addition, it was agreed to consider the provision of further training for Members of the Governance and Audit Committee.

(Councillor G Hynds left the Chamber at 6.33pm and returned at 6.35pm.)

(The Acting Director of Environmental Services, the Head of Communities, the Head of Economic Development and the Acting Head of Parks and Amenities left the meeting prior to the commencement of Confidential Business.)

6. Confidential Business

The matters contained in the confidential report were considered “in committee” since they contained information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) as specified within the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

“In Committee”

It was proposed by Councillor D Bassett, seconded by Councillor A Ewing, and agreed that the following matters be considered “in committee” in the absence of members of the press and public.

6.1 NIAO/NIPSO – Adjudication Hearing Correspondence

The Chief Executive presented a report which related to the findings of an adjudication hearing regarding a breach of the ‘Code of Conduct for Councillors’ by a former elected Member of the Council. The Committee was provided with an overview of the process that would be undertaken at a corporate level to address several issues which had been highlighted to the Council in respect of the outcome of the hearing.

The Committee noted the report and the comments of the Chief Executive in relation thereto.

It was noted also that a further report in the matter would be presented to Members at the conclusion of the process.

6.2 Draft Audit Strategy 2024/29 & Draft Operational Plan 2024/25

The Committee considered the draft Audit Strategy for 2024/29 and the Draft Operational Plan for 2024/25, in respect of both documents the Internal Audit Manager outlined the principal aspects.

It was proposed by Alderman S P Porter, seconded by Councillor D Bassett, and agreed that the Committee approve the Draft Audit Strategy for 2024/29 and the Draft Operational Plan for 2024/25.

6.3 Internal Audit Progress Report – March 2024

The Committee considered the Internal Audit Progress Report to March 2024. The report summarised the internal audit work which had been carried out and progress achieved against the Operational Plan since the previous meeting of the Committee in 2023.

The Committee agreed that the Internal Audit Progress Report be noted.

6.4 LCCC Audit Strategy 2023/24

The Committee considered a report which related to the above-mentioned strategy. Mr B Stewart of RB Chartered Accountants, the company contracted by the NIAO to draft the Strategy, attended in connection with this matter and outlined the principal aspects of the document.

The Committee agreed that the Audit Strategy for 2023/24 be noted.

6.5 Annual Audit Letter for 2022/23

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the Council's Annual Audit Letter for 2022/23.

7.0 Any Other Business

7.1 Legal Matter

Following a query by Councillor Gallen, the Director of Organisation Development and Innovation outlined the position in regard to this matter, which was confirmed by Alderman S P Porter.

Resumption of Normal Business

It was proposed by Councillor D Bassett, seconded by Councillor A Givan, and agreed to come out of committee and resume normal business.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.15pm.

Chairperson