

# Audit Panel

Tuesday, 13th January, 2015

## MEETING OF AUDIT PANEL

Members present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairman);  
Councillors Jones and Mullan; and Mr. D. Bell.

In attendance: Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;  
Mr. A. Harrison, Head of Audit, Governance and  
Risk Services;  
Mr. M. McBride, Head of Finance and Performance;  
Mr. L. Mulholland, Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services Manager;  
Mrs. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager;  
Mr. T. Wallace, Financial Accounting Manager;  
Mr. R. Allen, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;  
Mr. A. Knox, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit  
Office;  
Ms. L. Francey, Democratic Services Officer; and  
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apology**

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman M. Campbell.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of 16th September and 21st October were taken as read and signed as correct.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services**

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel, congratulated Mr. Andrew Harrison on being appointed recently to the post of Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services and wished him well in the role.

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**Report to those charged with Governance 2013/2014**

The Panel was advised that the Council had received from the Local Government Auditor her Report to those Charged with Governance for 2013/2014. The report summarised the system/control issues which had been identified as a result of an audit of the Council's financial statements for that period.

The Director of Finance and Resources reported that the Northern Ireland Audit Office had, within the Audit Strategy which it had published in February, 2014, following an assessment of the Council's operation and control environment, identified three significant risks. Those risks related to the identification of provisions and their recording within the accounts, to the incurring of ineligible expenditure on European Union funded projects which did not adhere to the terms and conditions set out within their Letter of Offer and to the effective delivery of the Council's Investment Programme, should key staff continue to be occupied with managing Local Government Reform rather than undertaking their normal activities.

In addition, the Local Government Auditor had made recommendations in relation to sixteen areas, five of which had been identified as being 'Priority One' in nature, in that they had the potential to result in material weakness in internal control and required immediate attention by the Council. Those related to the North Foreshore Landfill Site, impairment balances and asset revaluation, Sections 37 and 40 expenditure, an unaccounted for asset (landfill gas) and a measured term contract tender advertisement. Of the remaining eleven areas, four had been designated as 'Priority Two' status, which required them to be addressed by management within their areas of responsibility, and seven had been designated as being 'Priority Three', which were considered to be of a more minor nature which represented best practice.

The Director of Finance and Resources confirmed that management would monitor the progress made in addressing the three significant risks and the sixteen recommendations which had been identified by the Local Government Auditor and that the Audit Panel would receive regular updates on those issues through the Audit Recommendations Monitor Report.

After discussion, the Panel noted the information which had been provided and that a copy of the Northern Ireland Audit Office's Report to those charged with Governance 2013/2014 was available on the Mod.gov website.

**Annual Audit Letters 2013/2014**

The Panel was informed that the Local Government Auditor, as an independent auditor of the Council, sought to ensure that the Council had appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources and that public money was properly accounted for.

The Director of Finance and Resources reported that Article 13 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 required the Council to publish, as soon as was reasonably practicable, an Annual Audit Letter setting out the findings by the Northern Ireland Audit Office of its audit of the Council's accounts. Annual Audit Letters had now been issued for 2013/2014 for both the Belfast City Council and the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee.

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In terms of the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee, he pointed out that there had been no significant, important or best practice findings arising from the audit and that the accounts had been given an unqualified opinion by the Chief Local Government Auditor. In addition, the Annual Governance Statement had been found to be in compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2013/2014 and with the practices specified by the Department of the Environment and was not misleading or inconsistent with other information within the audit.

The Director of Finance and Resources pointed out that, in relation to Belfast City Council, the Chief Local Government Auditor had noted a number of minor and material adjustments to the draft accounts for 2013/2014, which had been given an unqualified opinion. The Annual Governance Statement had been found to comply with the relevant requirements and a review of five of the ten areas which were used within the Northern Ireland Audit Office's Code of Practice to assess value for money had confirmed that the Council had appropriate arrangements in place. The Chief Local Government Auditor had highlighted the fact that there had, since 2005, been a significant reduction in the Council's sickness absence figures and that the robust, fair and consistent management of attendance continued to be a priority for the organisation.

During discussion, a Member suggested that the Annual Audit Letter for Belfast City Council should include a comment confirming that the Council's reserves were at a level which would be expected by the Northern Ireland Audit Office and highlighting the importance of maintaining them at that level.

In response, Mr. Allen confirmed that the Northern Ireland Audit Office would examine ways in which it could communicate that information in future. The Director of Finance and Resources added that it was not considered to be good practice to use general reserves to finance recurring expenditure and pointed out that the report which would on 16th January be presented to the Shadow Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the setting of the rate for 2015/2016 would provide information on the Council's reserves and recommend that they be maintained at their current level.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided in relation to the Annual Audit Letters for 2013/2014 and that copies of the documents could be viewed on the Mod.gov website.

**Corporate Risk Management**

The Panel considered the following report:

**"1 Relevant Background Information**

**The purpose of this report is to:**

- a) advise the Audit Panel of the main issues arising from the review by Chief Officers of the corporate risks and**

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to present the updated corporate risk register for the quarter end September, 2014 for review and approval

- b) report to the Audit Panel on the assurance provided by Directors, in consultation with their departmental risk champions on the risk management processes within their department
  
- c) report to the Audit Panel on the findings from the recent AGRS reviews of the management of four key corporate risks.

**2 Key Issues**

**Updates to the Corporate Risk Register and Compliance with Risk Management Processes**

- 2.1 Following the quarterly review, Directors have confirmed that they are content that the corporate risk register reflects the key risks facing the Council and that they are appropriately assessed. The main updates arising from this review are as follows:

**2.2 Emergency Planning**

The Head of Environmental Health and Lead Compliance Officer highlighted that the new Council area will bring with it more flooding hotspots and that they are considering the resource implications.

**2.3 EU / External Funding**

The Director of Property and Projects emphasised the risks around EU / external funding for major projects in terms of the impact of project implementation and the corporate approach to programme management. An internal audit of the capital programme is underway and will examine programme management arrangements in more detail.

- 2.4 AGRS can confirm that, for the quarter ending September 2014, all Chief Officers have signed their Quarterly Assurance Statements, confirming compliance with the quarterly risk review process. For this quarter, the Finance and Resources Department focussed the quarterly risk review process on the departmental risks only and the update of all risk actions within the department.

- 2.5 Regarding project risk management, the Director of Property and Projects confirmed that the risk registers and action plans for the 12 'high risk' projects have been updated for the QE September 2014. The Director did not consider it necessary to

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escalate any specific project risks for consideration for inclusion in the Corporate Risk Register.

**2.6** The corporate risks are displayed below and were agreed by CMT on 3rd December, 2014 and by the Assurance Board on 6th January, 2015.

**Corporate Risk Register for Q/E September 2014**

Ref.	Risk Name	Risk Owner	Impact	Likelihood	Current Rating
1	Information systems & procedures	DFR	4	4	High
2	Sustain & enhance the rate base *	DFR	5	3	High
3	Local government reform *	DFR	4	3	Major
4	Failure to attract EU / other external funding *	DPP	4	3	Major
5	Failure to manage the City's waste	Head of EH and LCO	4	3	Major
6	Health and safety of employees and others	DFR	5	2	Major
7	Leisure transformation programme *	DPL	5	2	Major
8	Poor financial planning	DFR	4	2	Significant
9	Rates	DFR	3	3	Significant
10	Investment programme	DPP	3	3	Significant
11	Business continuity	DFR	3	3	Significant
12	Failure to manage staff resources	DOD	3	3	Significant
13	Good governance	DFR	4	2	Significant
14	Failure to strategically manage the Council's assets	DPP	4	2	Significant
15	Major incident response – emergency planning	Head of EH and LCO	4	2	Significant

**Independent Assurance on the Management of Key Risks**

**2.7** In the Annual Governance Statement for y/e March 2014, 7 significant issues were declared, 4 of which related to the following corporate risks, which are marked with an asterisk in the register above:

- Sustain and enhance the rate base (summary at paragraph 2.9)
- Local government reform (summary at paragraph 2.14)
- EU / other external funding (summary at paragraph 2.18)

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- Leisure transformation programme (summary at paragraph 2.25)
- 2.8 Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) has carried out reviews of the progress being made to manage these 4 corporate risks. The full reports on each review may be found at appendices 2 – 5, which have been forwarded to the Panel and a summary of the results is provided below.**
- 2.9 Sustain and Enhance the Rate Base and Manage the Rate Setting Process for the Shadow Council**
- 2.10 We can confirm that the risk has been subject to regular review. We found that key controls are in place and working effectively and this is reflected in the relatively high degree of accuracy in setting the Estimated Penny Product (EPP) on which the rate is based, and the fact that recent Actual Penny Product (APP) outturns have resulted in positive settlements for the Council.**
- 2.11 There is a high degree of inherent risk associated with the sustaining the rate base / managing the rate setting process in the current financial year given the impact of local government reform and the revaluation of non domestic properties. However, it is our view that management are taking reasonable steps to attempt to manage this uncertainty. Setting of the rate will continue to represent a challenge in future years in the light of ongoing budget cuts in local and central government.**
- 2.12 We can confirm that satisfactory progress is being made to implement the risk actions and that there are generally robust sources of assurance in place.**
- 2.13 Recommendations arising from our work relate to:**
- reviewing the risk assessment
  - developing continuity arrangements for the work done in terms of reviewing and challenging information from Land & Property Services (LPS)
  - identifying and recording the risk causes (and controls) related to failure to enhance the rate base
  - requesting information from LPS on the financial impact of the programme of vacancy inspections.
- 2.14 Local Government Reform**

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**2.15 We can confirm that the risk has been subject to regular review, that the risk assessment is reasonable, that the risk causes have been identified, that key controls are in place and working effectively, that satisfactory progress is being made to implement the risk actions within the external constraints in place and that there are generally robust sources of assurance in place.**

**2.16 Key factors that impact on the management of this risk include:**

- **agreeing the transferring budgets from central government (budgets proposed to be transferred by central government have been lower than expected and may be reduced further by proposed central government budget cuts; there is also uncertainty as to how budgets will be agreed for future years; negotiation and due diligence continues)**
- **the transfer of urban regeneration and the Laganside Weir has now been delayed to 1 April 2016**
- **the housing powers are not now going to transfer on 1 April 2015**
- **a decision is still required internally as to the committee system to be used**
- **for the transfer of planning there are concerns around availability of the planning portal to develop and test processes. AGRS are carrying out a separate review in this area.**

**2.17 Given the approaching deadline of 1st April, 2015, we recommend that the current reporting regime is supplemented with regular reports (at least monthly) to the LGR Programme Board (the Transition Management Team) as to whether or not the Council is on track against the overall implementation plan for service convergence and transfer of functions.**

**2.18 EU / External Funding of Capital Projects**

**2.19 There are 7 EU funded projects in particular to which this risk relates, which account for approximately £44 million in external funding.**

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**2.20 The main factors affecting the management of this risk are:**

- two letters of offer have not yet been agreed
- where letters of offer have been agreed, the timescale for project delivery is very tight and there is a risk that expenditure will not be defrayed within external funding timescales.

**2.21 We highlight a number of further actions relating to potential 'at risk' expenditure that need to be undertaken as a matter of priority in order to move the risk towards its target risk rating of amber. These are:**

- improve the monitoring of 'at risk' expenditure on the projects still awaiting letters of offer; and
- commence a process for quantifying, projecting and reporting on the amount of 'at risk' expenditure on all EU / externally funded projects where the Council may potentially be unable to claim all expected funding (because of non compliance with funding requirements such as agreed expenditure profiles or deadlines) and may be left with responsibility for meeting funding shortfalls. This is essential for effective financial planning.

**2.22 The prompt implementation of these actions will provide valuable sources of assurance around the Councils potential financial exposure for these projects.**

**2.23 We have also recommended that management consider what further actions are required at this stage to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of funding that relate to delivery of outcomes in order to avoid potential claw back.**

**2.24 AGRS understands that currently management focus is on delivery of the ongoing externally funded projects. However, we recommend that management ensure that appropriate resources are put in place on a timely basis to begin preparation for the 2014-2020 round of European funding applications to ensure the risk is managed at an earlier stage in future, should the Council decide to seek external funding in this period. Lessons learned from the current externally funded projects should also be identified and feed into this process. Management should also consider whether a new Risk Action Plan should be put in place to manage the risks associated with the grant application process for the 2014-2020 round of funding. This risk may initially sit better at Departmental level than at Corporate level.**



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**2.25 Inability to deliver the Leisure Transformation Programme**

**2.26** The current risk action plan and our review concentrates on the arrangements to have a contract in place for the operation of the leisure centres by 31 December 2014. This risk will now have to be reviewed to ensure that it reflects the new phase of the programme to include monitoring of the operations being delivered alongside the ongoing capital work.

**2.27** We can confirm that this risk has been subject to regular review and that the current assessment of the risk is reasonable and progress towards the target risk rating is satisfactory. Risk causes have been properly identified, with controls found to be adequate and effective in helping to manage the risk.

**2.28** The controls currently focus on agreement of the contracts, and will soon be updated to focus on the controls to be established over the contract management/assurance function.

**2.29** Satisfactory progress is being made to implement the outstanding risk actions. Given the proximity to the date of transfer, it is imperative that the following actions are completed:

- interim client side arrangements to be set up including robust assurance frameworks
- completion of due diligence exercise to include separate risk analysis of pensions
- business continuity planning to manage the following risks associated with 61 employees having been agreed for voluntary redundancy on 31 December 2014
- completion of the due diligence review of the draft contracts by Deloitte by 12 December 2014.

**2.30** In the opinion of AGRS, the implementation of the outstanding actions will help to move the risk towards its target risk rating.

**2.31** There are robust sources of assurance in place which demonstrate how the risk is being managed

**2.32** The Leisure Transformation Programme has been planned in such a way for efficiencies to be achieved to enable investment in the leisure estate. AGRS recommend that as

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costs and budgets become finalised, management perform a review to provide assurance over the value for money to be achieved by phase 1 of the programme

**2.33 Information Systems and Procedures**

**2.34** AGRS has not undertaken a detailed review of this risk and this risk was not declared in the annual governance statement for the year end 2014. However bearing in mind the origin of the risk and the continued high risk rating, we undertook a quick review of the risk action plan which indicates that while good progress has been made in the delivery of training, there continue to be delays in:

- the development of policy and procedures on data protection, freedom of information, environmental information and records management
- identifying and putting in place the required resources
- developing and undertaking a programme of data protection compliance audits of Council information systems
- finalisation of the information security policy.

**2.35** AGRS highlights the importance of establishing approved policy and procedures in this area, particularly in the context of the preparations for the new Council and ensuring that appropriate resources are attributed to this area.

**2.36 Transferring Functions**

**2.37** AGRS has facilitated the Planning Panel in their review and update of the risk register for the transfer of Planning, with risks grouped under the headings of programme, governance, staff transfer, capacity building, processes and support systems (IT, finance, procurement and information).

**2.38** In addition AGRS has reviewed progress against the plan for the transfer of planning and has reported on the outcome of this exercise to the Planning Panel and the Director of Finance and Resources and Deputy Chief Executive. This review highlighted a number of serious issues regarding the plan and the preparations for implementation of the new processes on 1st April, 2015. It is essential that these issues are addressed as a matter of urgency and that any unresolved issues are escalated to the transition management team as soon as possible. We will continue to undertake regular reviews of this key area.

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2.39 In addition AGRS has provided advice on the development of the risk registers for the transfer of off street car parking and for the human resources work strand of the overall LGR programme.

2.40 MK Insight – Risk Management Module

2.41 The roll out of the MK insight risk management module is now complete, with all departments using the new system.

2.42 Business Continuity Management

2.43 As at 25th November 2014, 11 of the 15 critical services have submitted 'BC Exercise Planning' reports setting out how they plan to exercise their business continuity arrangements during 14-15. Building Control, Democratic Services, Digital Services and Fleet Management have not yet submitted their BC Exercise Planning reports. This has been brought to the attention of the relevant Directors at the recent round of quarterly meetings with the Head of AGRS and to CMT on 3 December 2014.

2.44 To date, 3 critical services have undertaken their exercise for 14-15 and have submitted a report, they are; Cleansing, Births Deaths Marriages and Civil Partnerships and Bereavement Services.

2.45 Regarding LGR, AGRS has developed the Business Continuity section of the Transition Plan Checklist which aims to ensure that services can respond effectively to an incident. We have also ensured that business continuity is included within the risk registers for Planning and off street car parking.

3 Resource Implications

Financial  
None

Human Resources  
None

Asset and Other Implications  
None

4 Equality Implications  
None

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**5 Recommendations**

**The Audit Panel is requested to:**

- (i) review and approve the updated Corporate Risk Register for the quarter ended September, 2014; and**
- (ii) note the findings arising from the AGRS review of the four corporate risks.”**

During discussion, concern was expressed around the serious issues which had been identified by Audit, Governance and Risk Services, following its review of the plan for the transfer on 1st April to the Council of the planning function. The Panel concurred with the Service's recommendation that those issues, including staffing arrangements, should be addressed as a matter of urgency in order to ensure that the Council was in a position on that date to fully discharge its responsibilities in relation to planning.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided and agreed that the Senior Responsible Officer tasked with overseeing the transfer of planning powers to the Council be requested to submit to the Shadow Planning Committee a state of readiness report on the matter.

**Audit, Governance and Risk Services Progress Report**

The Panel considered a report which provided an overview of the work which had been carried out over the previous three months by Audit, Governance and Risk Services.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager confirmed that audits had been finalised in relation to key corporate risks, the Council's arrangements for compliance with the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, Police and Community Safety Partnerships, Payroll, the management of waste disposal contracts, the 2015 Tall Ships event and Visit Belfast (follow up). Audit Governance and Risk Services were in the process of completing audits in relation to corporate complaints, the Super Connected Belfast Programme, Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Arts, control and security arrangements around fuel and financial controls relating to Cemeteries and the Roselawn Crematorium and to the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Halls. The Service was managing also planned audit assignments in respect of accounts payable and receivable, the Capital Programme and Treasury Management, which were being delivered on its behalf by an external firm of auditors.

He provided details in respect of a review which had been undertaken by Audit, Governance and Risk Services of the project plan associated with the transfer of planning powers to the Council. Three recommendations had been made around the reviewing and updating of the plan, the monitoring and updating process and the frequency of meetings of the Transfer of Planning Panel and those had either been implemented or were in the process of being implemented. The Service had facilitated also the development of a risk register in relation to the transfer to the Council of off-street parking and had reviewed the draft service level agreement and the income and debt management procedures.

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In addition, Audit, Governance and Risk Services had reviewed guidance which had been published by the Northern Ireland Audit Office in relation to whistleblowing and would address any suggested improvements in conjunction with any recommendations which would emerge from an ongoing external review of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements. The Service was continuing to deliver training on fraud awareness and would, in February and March, be holding awareness sessions for Members on the role of the new Audit and Risk Panel, fraud and bribery. Finally, he provided an update on ongoing investigations.

After discussion, the Panel noted the information which had been provided.

**Update on Audit Panel Workshop**

The Panel was reminded that a workshop had been held on 10th November to consider its future role, in the context of the introduction of Local Government Reform and the Council's emerging governance arrangements. The Director of Finance and Resources reported that it had been agreed that, from 1st April, 2015, the Panel be referred to as the Audit and Risk Panel and that it should operate as a Panel, rather than as a Standing Committee. It had been agreed also that the Panel would have an enhanced profile and additional reporting powers, which would include the submission on a quarterly basis of a report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee outlining the key issues discussed by the Audit and Risk Panel. The proposed changes had in November been communicated to each Political Party on the Council, as part of the round of briefings on future governance arrangements.

He explained that it was now proposed that the terms of reference for the Audit and Risk Panel be drafted in line with those of the new Committees and that they be presented in March for approval by the Audit Panel, together with a programme of business for 2015/2016, which would include a plan of work to develop the profile and effectiveness of the new Audit and Risk Panel.

Noted.

**Update on Corporate Health and Safety Performance**

The Corporate Health and Safety Manager provided the Panel with an update on the corporate health and safety performance and associated activities for the second quarter of 2014/2015. She confirmed that 108 employee accidents had been reported over the course of the quarter, which represented an increase of six on the previous three months. Nineteen accidents had been categorised under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, which equalled the figure for the previous three months. The accidents had, in December, been reviewed by the Corporate Health and Safety Committee, which had confirmed that there had been no clear reason for the increase.

In terms of progress against key performance indicators for the quarter, which was reported through the CORVU performance management system, she pointed out that 54% of corporate healthy and safety recommendations had been implemented, which was significantly below the target figure of 80%. However, as a result of extensive

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work which had been undertaken across Departments, 75% of the recommendations had now been implemented. She added that the Corporate Health and Safety Unit was working on a project to develop health and safety assurance reports, which would enhance the information provided to both the Audit and Risk Panel and the Health and Safety Assurance Board on the management of key corporate health and safety risks.

After discussion, the Panel noted the information which had been provided.

**Update on First-Aid Arrangements**

The Panel considered the Undernoted report:

**“1 Relevant Background Information**

**At the meeting of the Audit Panel on 16th September 2014, it was requested that a report be submitted to the next quarterly meeting on the arrangements in place for providing first-aid to employees and members of the public at Council facilities and in particular in relation to City Hall.**

**2 Key Issues**

**Legal Position**

**In accordance with the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982, the Council has a duty to ensure that there is provided such equipment and facilities as are adequate to enable first aid to be rendered to its employees if they are injured or become ill at work.**

**There is no statutory requirement to provide first aid to members of the public. However, in line with best practice, the Council includes non employees within its first aid provisions.**

**First Aider Arrangements**

**In accordance with the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982 and the associated Approved Code of Practice, all line managers are required in the first instance to carry out a first aid needs assessment for their relevant unit / service / location.**

**The purpose of this assessment is to determine the level of first aid cover required and the level of first aid qualification required. This is based on a risk assessment of the level of risk associated with the work activity, the number of staff involved and the accessibility to emergency facilities. A standard template is provided for this assessment.**

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**As a result of this assessment, each service is required to ensure a minimum of an Appointed Person is available at all times for their staff. This Appointed Person may be trained or untrained and is required to look after the first aid equipment and call the emergency services when required.**

**Where there are higher risks associated with the work activity, then an Emergency First Aider or full First Aider is required. These first aiders are trained to provide immediate assistance to casualties with injuries or illnesses and to summon an ambulance or other professional help.**

**There are approximately 450 first aid qualified staff within the Council.**

**Public Venues**

**The Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall provide 24/7 first aid cover through their external Security provision. For events with anticipated audiences over 500, they also have additional third party first aiders in attendance. The City Events Unit similarly will appoint an external first aid company to provide first aiders at all their events. For other events, such as large events within our Parks, then details of the first aid cover provided is requested as part of the event approval arrangements.**

**Within the City Hall, the Facilities Management Unit maintain a list of all the first aiders within the building at reception and the Control Room. In addition to this, a number of Security Officers are also trained to provide emergency first aid and to operate the defibrillator.**

**First Aider Training Arrangements**

**First aid training arrangements within the Council have changed from 1st January, 2015. Historically the Council was an approved training centre for First Aid International Ltd and first aid training was provided in-house by a combination of Corporate Health and Safety Unit and Leisure Services staff. However further to Leisure Transformation (and the transfer of relevant trainers to GLL) and internal secondment arrangements within Corporate Health and Safety, there is no longer sufficient first aid trainer / assessors available to continue this in-house arrangement. Therefore, an interim local quotation process has been undertaken and an external first aid trainer has been appointed to meet the Council's training needs until a full tender exercise can be undertaken in 2015/2016.**

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As part of the preparation for this tender exercise, the Corporate Health and Safety Unit will be working closely with Services to review their first aider requirements, taking into consideration staff working patterns and provisions for the public. This will enable the Corporate Health and Safety Unit to more accurately profile future training requirements and provide assurance on the level of first aid cover in place across the Council.

**First Aid Arrangement Monitoring**

As part of the WIRES Inspection and Audit programme undertaken annually by the Corporate Health and Safety Unit, first aid assessments, first aider availability, first aid signage and first aid materials are routinely checked across the Council with any recommendations for improvement tracked through the MK Insight programme and health and safety recommendations performance indicator on CORVU.

**3 Resource Implications**

**Financial**

None

**Human Resources**

None

**Assets and Other Implications**

None

**4 Equality and Good Relations Implications**

None

**5 Recommendation**

**The Panel is requested to note this report.”**

The Panel adopted the recommendation.

**Employee Costs 2014/2015**

The Director of Finance and Resources submitted for the Panel’s consideration a report which provided an overview, on a corporate and departmental basis, of staffing, overtime and agency costs for the second quarter of 2014/2015. He reported that staff costs had accounted for £44,355,996 over that period, which represented an overall underspend of £366,681 (0.82%) of the annual budget. Overtime costs and agency costs had accounted for £2,193,837 (4.95%) and £1,945,849 (4.39%) of direct employee costs, respectively.

Noted.



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**Absence Rates 2014/2015**

The Panel considered a report providing information in respect of the absence figures for the second quarter of 2014/2015. The Director of Finance and Resources reported that sickness absence per employee for that period had been 5.15 days, which meant that the Council would be slightly above its agreed target of 10 days for the current year. He pointed out that the number of absences which had been classified as long term (20 days or more) during the quarter had been 64%, as opposed to 61% for the corresponding quarter in 2013/2014. Furthermore, there had been an increase in the number of staff with recorded absence, viz., 36.26%, compared to 32.89% in the same quarter in the previous year.

He reviewed the sickness absence figures for each of the Council Departments for the quarter and confirmed that Corporate HR conducted fortnightly meetings with all Departments to ensure that timely and appropriate action was taken to manage sickness absence effectively. He added that over three hundred employees had now been vaccinated against influenza.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided.

**Mr. Rodney Allen**

The Chairman reported that Mr. Rodney Allen was attending his last meeting of the Panel, as he would be transferring shortly to another area of work within the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

On behalf of the Members, he thanked Mr. Allen for the valuable contribution which he had made to the work of the Panel over the course of the past four years and wished him every success in the future.

Mr. Allen thanked the members and stated that he was appreciative of all their support and assistance during that time.

**Date of Next Meeting**

The Panel agreed that its next meeting would take place at 1.00 p.m. on Tuesday, 10th March.

Chairman