



Subject:	Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel
Date:	24th September 2021
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources and Deputy Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
<i>After Committee Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>After Council Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Sometime in the future</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Never</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the key issues which were considered/discussed by the Audit and Risk Panel on 14th September and to present the minutes of that meeting for approval.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to note the key issues arising at the meeting on 14th September and approve the attached minutes of that meeting.
3.0	Main Report
	Key Issues
	<u>Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)</u>
3.1	The Panel considered the Statement of Accounts of the Council for the year-end 31st March, 2021. These accounts are a fundamental part of the councils overall corporate governance framework and provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position.

3.2	<p>The NIAO Director informed the Panel that their audit of the accounts is almost complete and on the basis of the work completed to date, the Local Government Auditor (LGA) will report on the 2020/21 financial statements with an unqualified audit opinion. The Panel expressed their thanks to the Finance team and the NIAO particularly as the previous audit was only completed in December 2020 due to the pandemic.</p>
3.3	<p>The Panel considered the draft Report to those Charged with Governance for 2020/21, which outlines the system / control issues arising from the NIAO audit. The draft report contained only 1 recommendation for management action, which is priority three (i.e. issue of a minor nature which represents best practice), relating to a cut off issue with invoices. The Panel considered the update provided by the Local Government Auditor, including the uncorrected misstatements identified by the NIAO. After considering materiality, impact on the net position and the amount of work required to update the accounts at this stage, the Panel decided not to correct these misstatements.</p> <p><u>Audit and Risk Panel</u></p>
3.4	<p>In line with recommended practice the work of the Audit & Risk Panel has been supported by the attendance and input of an external member, Geraldine Fahy. Ms Fahy is a source of expertise on audit and finance related matters, augmenting the skills / experience provided by Members. The Panel agreed to extend the contract with the external member for an additional two years, in line with the relevant legal agreement.</p> <p><u>Key reports</u></p>
3.5	<p>The Panel noted the progress being made against the annual audit plan, with four audits finalised in the period July - August 2021 and how there have been a number of requests to defer audits to later in the year. The Panel stressed the need for no further hold ups and asked the Head of AGRS to ensure that delivery of the audit plan stayed on track. Regarding a recent internal audit of compliance with policies on gifts and hospitality and conflict of interest, the Panel received an update from management on the progress being made to implement the recommendations arising. The Panel also received an update on the work being done to investigate matches arising from the National Fraud Initiative.</p>

3.6	<p>The Panel considered the corporate risk dashboard which provided an analysis and update on the progress being made to manage the 24 risks that are considered by management to present the greatest threat to the delivery corporate priorities and / or compliance with key statutory requirements. The Panel agreed the new focus and wording for the corporate risks on the Local Development Plan and Climate Change. The Panel noted the quarterly assurances provided by members of the corporate management team regarding compliance with risk management and internal control processes. The Panel was also provided with a progress update on the review of the business continuity plans for the critical services.</p>
3.7	<p>The Panel received an analysis of the high priority audit recommendations that had not been implemented within the dates initially agreed with management. This analysis examined the reasons for delay and the new timeframes for implementation. The Panel noted that AGRS would review all open audit actions again in January / February 2022.</p>
3.8	<p>In line with best practice, the Panel agreed for AGRS to take forward the development of an assurance map for the corporate risks and key financial systems.</p>
3.9	<p>The Panel was also provided with a progress update on the agreed actions to be taken in relation to the recommendations contained within the report from Peter Coll QC of his independent investigation relating to events at Roselawn Cemetery on 30th June 2020, and confirmed that regular updates on this report will be a standing agenda item for the Panel.</p>
3.10	<p>The Panel also received quarter 1 reports on corporate health and safety, absence management and performance improvement. The Head of Human Resources indicated that she would undertake a deeper examination of the reasons for the increase in our absence rate.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
3.12	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None known at this time.</p>
4.0	<p>Document Attached</p>
	<p>Minutes of Audit and Risk Panel meeting of 14th September</p>