

Title of Report:	Update on the Implementation of Recommendations contained within the Extraordinary Audit Report
Committee Report Submitted To:	Full Council
Date of Meeting:	30th October 2023
For Decision or For Information	For Decision – In Committee
To be discussed In Committee YES/NO	By virtue of paragraph(s) 1, 2 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Improvement and Innovation
Outcome	Delivery of Recommendations contained within the Extraordinary Audit Report
Lead Officer	Council is responsible for implementing the recommendations. Director of Environmental Services
	Various external consulting and training costs as noted in the report. In-house staff costs

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Total cost: £195,632.15
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	YES/NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	YES/NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

Assessment (DPIA)	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
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1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The report updates Council in relation to the progress made on the implementation of the recommendations contained within the Northern Ireland Audit Office ([NIAO Extraordinary Audit](#)) report, since the last Special Council Meeting on 27th March 2023. This report should be read in conjunction with the other reports listed on the agenda for the Special Council Meeting on 30th October 2023.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 On 30th November, the Minister for Communities directed the Local Government Auditor to hold an extraordinary audit of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council concentrating on land disposals and easements and related asset management policies and procedures.

- 2.2 On 7th July 2022 the Local Government Auditor published a report summarising the findings of an extraordinary audit of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, it details the findings and recommendations emanating from the audit of land disposals and easements since the Council was formed in April 2015.

- 2.3 At the Special Council Meeting held on 26th July 2022 the Council resolved:

“That this Council accepts the findings contained within the extraordinary audit. That this Council immediately moves to implement all eight recommendations contained within the Extraordinary Audit. That the Ministerial letter of the 7th July 2022 be responded to confirming all the above and an action plan be completed by the 8th August 2022 that shows how the Auditor’s recommendations will be fully implemented by 30 December 2022.

- 2.4 The previous Council meetings in relation to the Extraordinary Audit are listed in the table below. The minutes and reports can be viewed via the Members’ Portal at the links noted.

Council Meeting day/month/year	Link to Meeting Agenda, Reports and Minutes
Tuesday 26 July 2022	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/26-july-2022-special-council-meeting
Tuesday 2 August 2022	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/2nd-august-2022-council-meeting
Tuesday 6 September 2022	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/6th-september-2022-council-meeting

Council Meeting day/month/year	Link to Meeting Agenda, Reports and Minutes
Tuesday 4 October 2022	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/4th-october-2022-council-meeting
Monday 17 October 2022	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/monday-17-october-2022-council-meeting
Monday 14 November 2022	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/monday-14th-november-2022-special-council-meeting
Monday 12 December 2022	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/12-december-2022-special-council-meeting
Monday 16 January 2023	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/16-january-2023-special-council-meeting
Monday 20 February 2023	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/20-february-2023-special-council-meeting
Monday 27 March 2023	https://www.causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/council/minutes/special-council-meeting-27-march-2023

2.5 Annexe 1 to this report lists the eight recommendations contained in the NIAO Extraordinary Report which have now all been implemented by Council.

2.6 At the Special Council meeting held on 27th March 2023 Council received reports in relation to the completion of recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 5. Council resolved:

“That Council accept the Findings in these reports in full. Furthermore, that an implementation oversight panel is established (similar to what was taken forward with the Planning Review) to oversee the resolution of the issues outlined in these reports; to produce and progress an Action Plan and the implementation of these associated recommendations; the membership of 6 Elected Members by d’Hondt and a representative from the Department for Communities who have ultimate oversight authority to make sure there is change throughout this organisation and that it is overseen and engaged with.

Council agreed to send the reports to the Department for Communities and to note that progress continues to be made in respect of Recommendations 6 and 7 of the Extraordinary Audit.”

3.0 Progress update

3.1 For completeness Annexe 1 to this report provides a final status for each of the eight recommendations contained within the Extraordinary Audit report.

3.2 In respect of Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 separate reports listed on the agenda will provide the update on the implementation of these recommendations.

3.6 Council has received regular updates at previous meetings in relation to the costs of implementing the recommendations of the Extraordinary Audit. The table overleaf lists the final costs.

Recommendations	Item	Cost	Final Cost	Date approved by Council
1, 2 and 5	Appointment of individual to carry out the Independent governance review and independent review of land and property processes and procedures	£21,375	£21,375.00	14 th November 2022
3	Appointment of individual to carry out review of Records Management Policies and Procedures	£15,000	£10,020.00	16 th January 2023
3	Officer Training	£1,152	£1,152.00	10 th October 2022
4	Scrutiny & Challenge Training	£1,399	£1,399.00	10 th October 2022
6&7	HR Associate	£40,175	£134,086.15	17 th October 2022 30 th October 2023
8	Independent Adviser £9,000	£9,000	£18,000.00	14 th November 2022
	Additional 5 day	£4,500		20 th February 2023
	Additional 5 day	£4,500		30 th October 2023
Other	SOLACE NI membership	£1,100 per annum	£1,100.00	10 th October 2022

Recommendations	Item	Cost	Final Cost	Date approved by Council
	SOLACE NI membership	£5,000 per annum	£5,000.00	20 th February 2023
	Belfast City Council Legal Services - SLA in place to 31st March 2023 for provision of corporate legal advice in relation to extraordinary audit meetings/standing orders/procedural advice		£3,500.00	14 th November 2022 30 th October 2023

4.0 Recommendation(s)

The Council is committed to further improving the weaknesses identified in the Extraordinary Audit report and acknowledges the oversight of the Department during the process of implementing the recommendations. It is recommended:

- 4.1 That Council accepts that the actions associated with the eight recommendations in the Extraordinary Audit report have been completed and notes the final summary update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Action Plan.
- 4.2 That Council approves the updates to the costs required for the delivery and implementation of the recommendations as laid out in the table at paragraph 3.6.

List of attachments:

Annexe 1 – Final Summary Update on Action Plan to implement the NIAO Recommendations contained in the Extraordinary Audit Report

ANNEXE 1

Final Summary Update on Action Plan to implement the NIAO Recommendations contained in the Extraordinary Audit Report

NIAO Recommendation 1

An independent Council-wide review of governance arrangements should be carried out immediately to ensure that significant weaknesses highlighted in this report are addressed. This review should be overseen by the Department including monitoring the implementation of any recommendations from the review.

Actions

The Council-wide review of governance arrangements was undertaken by Steven Mungavin, Integritas Consultancy & Training Ltd.

The Council considered the report at its meeting on 27th March 2023 and accepted the report and the recommendations contained within.

NIAO Recommendation 2

The Council should arrange an independent detailed review of all of its land related policies and procedures to ensure that all policies comply with the legislation and guidance as noted in the background section of this report.

Actions

The Council-wide review of land related policies and procedures was undertaken by Steven Mungavin, Integritas Consultancy & Training Ltd.

The Council considered the report at its meeting on 27th March 2023 and accepted the report and the recommendations contained within.

NIAO Recommendation 3

The findings in this report have identified a number of failings in relation to record keeping, particularly around key matters demonstrating compliance with legal and accountability requirements. The Council should carry out a review of its procedures to ensure adequate records are used to support decision making.

Actions

The review of procedures to ensure adequate records are used to support decision making was undertaken by Professor Gordon Anthony.

The Council considered the report at its meeting on 27th March 2023 and accepted the report and the recommendations contained within.

NIAO Recommendation 4

The Council should provide comprehensive and regular training to its Members to facilitate their understanding of the level of challenge and scrutiny needed when holding Council Officers to account.

Actions

Training for Elected Members to facilitate their understanding of challenge and scrutiny needed when holding Council Officers to account was completed in November 2022.

The Council considered the update on completion of the recommendation at its meeting on 27th March 2023.

NIAO Recommendation 5

The Council should ensure that it demonstrates clearly that it is meeting the legislative requirements and best practice in land and property transactions and that this is clearly documented. The Council should follow LPS guidance and its own Land and Property policy in complying with the requirement to obtain best price as directed by legislation. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that valuations are up to date, valuations take into account all relevant information and are appropriately challenged, costs are recovered from the purchaser and consideration in all cases is given to open market sale. Where best price cannot reasonably be obtained, approval must be sought from the Department to proceed.

Actions

The Council-wide review of land related policies and procedures included the requirements of Recommendation 5 which was undertaken by Steven Mungavin, Integritas Consultancy & Training Ltd.

The Council considered the report at its meeting on 27th March 2023 and accepted the report and the recommendations contained within.

NIAO Recommendation 6

The Council should take appropriate action where it has been demonstrated from this report that the behaviour of Senior Council Officers has fallen short of the standards expected of an official in a public body.

Actions

A report providing outcomes and recommendations will be considered at the Special Council Meeting on 30th October 2023.

NIAO Recommendation 7

The Council should refer Senior Council Officers to the relevant professional bodies where it has been demonstrated from this report that the behaviour of those Officers has fallen short of the standards and behaviours expected by those bodies.

Actions

A report providing outcomes and recommendations will be considered at the Special Council Meeting on 30th October 2023.

NIAO Recommendation 8

The Department should carry out a detailed consideration of its responsibilities for this Council in light of the significant failings identified by this audit and take the required appropriate action and use its powers to intervene if necessary.

Actions

The Department's correspondence to the Mayor in relation to its responsibilities and appropriate action is for consideration is at Item 5 on the agenda.