

SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 7.00PM

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No.	Item	Decision
1.	Apologies	<i>Councillor McShane</i>
2.	Declaration of Members' Interests	<i>None</i>
3.	Annual Accounts 2023/24	<i>That the Council approves of the adoption of the annual statement of accounts as presented and where applicable any amendments notified during the meeting</i>

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPECIAL COUNCIL
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER ON
MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 7.00PM**

In the Chair : The Mayor, Councillor McQuillan

Present : Alderman Boyle, Callan, Coyle, Fielding, Hunter,
Knight-McQuillan, J McAuley, S McKillop, Stewart

Councillors Anderson, C Archibald, N Archibald, Callaghan,
Chivers, Holmes, Huggins, Kane, Kennedy, Kyle, Mairs,
McCully, McGlinchey, McGurk, MA McKillop, McMullan,
Nicholl, Peacock, Stirling, Storey, Wallace Watson, Watton,
Wilson

Officers Present : D Jackson, Chief Executive
D Wright, Chief Finance Officer
E Callaghan, Project Accountant (R)
L Clyde, Financial Accountant (R)
J Culkin, Management Accountant (R)
S Duggan, Civic Support & Committee & Member Services Officer
J Keen, Committee and Member Services Officer

In attendance : A Lennox, Mobile Operations Officer
M Kennedy, ICT Technical Support Officer

Press, 2 no. (R)

Key – (R) = Attended Remotely

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were recorded for Alderman Scott, Councillors Bateson, McShane, Schenning and Wisener.

2. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2023/24

Report, previously circulated presented by The Chief Finance Officer.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the annual accounts for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council for the financial year ended 31 March 2024 for approval.

Background

Councils and other public bodies are required to prepare and submit to the Department for Communities (DfC) by 30 June each year their annual accounts for the previous financial period, I can confirm Council complied with this requirement. Under current regulation the approval of the accounts now occurs after completion of the audit meaning Council are approving what will eventually be published. Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) are in the process of completing their work in this regard and the accounts are presented in conjunction with the reports from NIAO.

Detail

Attached as an appendix is a draft copy of the Annual Statement of Accounts for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. At the time of writing this report NIAO are still completing aspects of the audit therefore the accounts being approved may contain a few amendments when compared to the accounts appended, any such changes will be advised verbally at the Council meeting, these are not expected to be significant.

Income and Expenditure that was controlled by Budget Holders is £641k (page 82) surplus to budget. The surplus includes a negative rates finalisation of £27k. The Financial Recovery Reserve was increased by £5,741k leaving a balance at 31 March 2024 of £14,781k, the majority of this increase arising from a successful historic claim dating back to 2007.

The Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) recorded within the Annual Accounts includes expenses outside the control of Budget Holders. It includes property, provisions and pension revaluations and accumulated absences. Some of these adjustments are accounting entries or future long-term liabilities that are based on pension assumptions and will only materialize on retirements.

The main figure members will be interested in can be found in being the Movement in Reserves statement which details an in-year movement in the General Fund Summary of a increase of £573k giving a carrying total of £5,164k. Under regulation we are recommended to carry a minimum fund balance in the range of 5% to 7.5% of our Net Operating Expenditure (£61,946k) which translates into a recommended balance between £3,097k and £4,646k. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is compliant with these recommendations.

Whilst the result is favourable it should be noted that in addition Council has increased other useable reserves by £5,461 to a total of £24,234. Aside from the increases to the Financial Recovery Reserve mentioned in 3.4 above the other significant movement in usable reserves was the release from the Election Reserve (£450k) the purposes of which were to meet election costs incurred during the Local Government Elections in May 2023. The breakdown of these reserves was shown in the table circulated.

The Financial Performance Outturn is detailed in the table circulated.

Overall Council outperformed budget by £8.596m. This result was underpinned by significant improvements in income.

Exceptional income of £5.436m relates to VAT previously surrendered on income which HMRC has conceded were not in fact subject to VAT.

Other favourable variances against budgeted income were service income (£1.878m), service grants (£0.806m), Landfill Discounting factors (£0.353m) and Investment Income (£0.256m). Direct Government funding recorded a £0.266m adverse outcome against budget as a result of reduced Rates Support Grant.

Overall Council expenditure was in line with budget expectations recording a modest £0.133m positive variance.

The financial performance for 2023/24 should be viewed in the context that Council has budgeted for use of reserves to the value of £2.612m but has in fact increased the General Reserve balance by £573k.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council approves of the adoption of the annual statement of accounts as presented and where applicable any amendments notified during the meeting.

The Chief Finance Officer addressed Council:

The Annual Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 are presented this evening for Council approval.

Council is required annually to prepare and submit draft accounts to the Department for Communities by 30 June and I am pleased to be able to confirm Council's compliance with this requirement our accounts being delivered on 28 June.

There are no material amendments to the accounts as circulated with the agenda to report although there may have been some typo's corrected.

The audit of the accounts is nearing completion with just final certification by Northern Ireland Audit Office Certification to take place once Council have approved and the publication of the certified accounts by 30 September in accordance with regulations.

Initial audit findings were reported to the Audit committee last week in the verbal, since then a draft report to those charged with governance and the associated audit recommendations has been received by Council, this is an excellent report from Council's viewpoint with only 4 recommendations, one of which is fairly minor and in my humble opinion does not warrant inclusion.

Turning to the accounts themselves, Council set a budget for the 2023/24 year that included an applied balance of £2.612m, during the year close expenditure control together with enhanced income I am pleased to report

that Council has managed to overturn the budgeted deficit and generate a modest surplus for the year with the General Fund increasing by £573k to a carrying balance of £5,164k, which, as stated in the report, is well within guidelines.

In addition to this Council benefitted from a significant refund of VAT dating back to 2007, this has not been added to the General Fund but rather transferred into the Financial Recovery Reserve so that it can be considered by Council for future application.

The accounts as presented therefore show an increase in other usable reserves of £5.461m to £24,234m.

It should also be noted that the accounts contain several transfers to/from other usable reserves, the main one being the release of £450k from the election reserve in respect of the Local Government Elections taking place during that year, by approving the draft accounts in June Council has already approved these transfers to reserves.

The final point I would like to draw members attention to is the debt position, during the 2023/24 financial year this has improved from £56.476m to £49.972m, significantly down from the inherited position of £72m, indeed as we speak in the current financial year this has further improved to £47.918m. Such a reduction has been achieved as a result of close financial monitoring of the capital spend and expenditure limits imposed by this Council in an effort to keep these costs under control. Eagle eyed readers of the accounts may notice that these figures do not correspond to the debt figures in the balance sheet, the difference being due to a change in accounting treatment for leases which has added to the recorded debt figures in the accounts.

Councillor Holmes commented it was noteworthy regarding Council's debt position, that he had expressed frustration around reporting across newspapers and BBC about being the most indebted Council in Northern Ireland. Councillor Holmes commended Officers, staff and Councillors for the decisions they had taken over the years to bring the debt down.

Proposed by Councillor Holmes
Seconded by Councillor Mairs and

RESOLVED - that the Council approves of the adoption of the annual statement of accounts as presented and where applicable any amendments notified during the meeting.

This being all the business, The Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 7.08pm.

Mayor