

**REPORT TO:** CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS BOROUGH COUNCIL

**TITLE:** EXTRAORDINARY AUDIT PROGRESS AND CONSIDERATION OF FINAL REPORTS

**DATE:** 30 OCTOBER 2023

**BY:** ELMA MURRAY, INDEPENDENT ADVISER

**FOR DECISION/INFORMATION:** FOR DECISION

## **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report provides a final update on the work to progress the recommendations of the Extraordinary Audit of Causeway Coast and Glens published on 7 July 2022 and accepted in full by Council on 26 July 2022. The report makes final recommendations for Council to consider in relation to moving on to implement the various improvements proposed in each Review conducted in response to the Extraordinary Audit.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Council has received regular updates from the Council's Implementation Team in respect of the actions to address the recommendations of the Extraordinary Audit. One of the actions was to appoint an Independent Adviser to provide support and challenge to the Council and assurance to the Department for Communities about the progress of the Council's work.
- 2.2 I was appointed as the Independent Adviser on 20 October 2022 following recommendation from the Local Government Staff Commission and with the approval of the Department for Communities.
- 2.3 My work has involved the following:
- Regular meetings with the officers of the Implementation Team to provide support and challenge to the approach being taken to address the recommendations of the Extraordinary Audit. While the team was in place these took place at least every 2 weeks.
  - Individual meetings were held with officers to build good relationships with them and to provide ongoing support and challenge in the final stages of the work.
  - Since the Implementation Team stepped down, and following the Special Council Meeting on 27 March 2023, meetings have been light touch and infrequent focusing on providing support for queries and ensuring progress of the work to complete Recommendations 6 and 7.
  - Participation in joint progress meetings with those appointed to take forward the reviews required to address recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 5.
  - Liaison with the Local Government Staff Commission in relation to the Commission's progress to address recommendations 6 and 7, while ensuring complete confidentiality was maintained with the investigations.
  - Regular meetings with the Department for Communities to provide reassurance on the Council's progress and the independence of the work.

### 3. Progress Update

- 3.1 At the last Special Council Meeting to consider the Extraordinary Audit on the 27 March 2023, Council considered the reports of the Reviews in respect of recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 5. These reports and background papers are listed at paragraph 2.4 (with links) in the Officers report at Item 3 of this agenda. Council accepted all of the recommendations from each review and as noted in the Officers report at paragraph 2.6, agreed to put in place an Implementation Oversight Panel comprising up to 6 members of the Council and a representative of the Department for Communities.
- 3.2 The work to undertake recommendation 4 was completed at the start of 2023, and today's Special Council Meeting receives the report of the work undertaken by the Local Government Staff Commission in respect of recommendations 6 and 7. The Department for Communities has written directly to the Mayor in response to previous correspondence from the Council and specifically in respect of recommendation 8. A copy of this letter is included on today's agenda at Item 5.
- 3.3 The three reports from the Reviews considered by Council on 27 March 2023 contained 79 recommendations as follows:
- Extraordinary Audit Recommendation 3 - **Review of Record Keeping** conducted by Professor Gordon Anthony BL contained 7 recommendations.
  - Extraordinary Audit Recommendation 2 and 5 - **Review of Land and Property** conducted by Stephen Mungavin, Integritas contained 20 recommendations.
  - Extraordinary Audit Recommendation 1 - **Review of Governance** conducted by Stephen Mungavin, Integritas contained 52 recommendations.
- 3.4 The report from the Local Government Staff Commission was considered at Item 4 of today's agenda. It contains 23 recommendations, which Council have been recommended to accept and develop into an integrated and holistic implementation plan. Two of the key recommendations within this report include an **organisational health check** and **organisational structure review**. Both recommendations are fundamental to moving the Council's improvement forward. They therefore require immediate implementation and to be conducted in a robust and independent manner. The Local Government Staff Commission are well-placed to support the Council with these critical pieces of work, and as can be seen from their report this is within their duties and responsibilities.
- 3.5 The letter from the Department for Communities at Item 5 of today's agenda recognises that, if Council accept the recommendations from the Local Government Staff Commission, then it will have completed all actions in respect of the recommendations arising from the Extraordinary Audit. It further recognises that this first phase would therefore be complete.
- 3.6 The Department now expects that the Council will rapidly move onto the next phase to implement the range of recommended improvements and changes from all of the Reviews conducted. It is important to recognise that while the Reviews were conducted as independent pieces of work the emerging recommendations are interlinked and complementary. Collectively they provide the basis for a significant and comprehensive Transformation Programme.
- 3.7 While the Department is clear that it would not be appropriate for it sit on the Council's proposed Oversight Implementation Panel, it does expect the Council to set up such a vehicle to ensure full member engagement and responsibility in taking the work forward, in line with the recommendations agreed at the Special Council Meeting on 27 March 2023. Further, the Department expects the Council to identify a named lead Council officer to support the Panel and appoint an Independent Oversight Implementation Adviser. The Adviser would Chair an Officer

Implementation Steering Group and oversee the implementation of the Transformation Programme, providing quarterly reports on progress to the Department.

- 3.8 The 100+ recommendations from all Reviews will require the Council to take a ‘Whole Council’ approach to their implementation creating a portfolio of transformation workstreams that are interlinked and include all staff and Elected Members. The following themes have been identified across all reports:

<b><i>Theme</i></b>	<b><i>Areas for Improvement</i></b>
Leadership	Senior Officer Leadership – reviewing the senior officer structure, development and training, supported by a competency framework and associated behaviours . Member Leadership – reviewing committee structures, development and training, and the scrutiny role of Members. Implementing a clear Performance Management Framework which links to the Council’s Strategy, Vision and Values and embeds a clear appraisal system.
Governance	Transparent decision-making at Senior Leadership level that is clearly documented, communicated and feeds directly into Corporate Strategy. Committee Structure Review to ensure there is clear decision making and responsibility.
Culture and Relationships	Creating a clear Vision and Values and embedding these across the organisation for all Members and officers. Creation of regular communications across the Council from and to Members, Senior Leadership Team and staff.
Financial Governance – specifically identified in the Review of Governance	Review the responsibilities of the senior finance roles, including accountability, and increasing the authority of audit and risk functions to support Members and officers.
Land and Property – adoption of good practice	Implementation of the suite of recommendations from the Land and Property Review which will ensure the Council adopts Best Practice in its structures, procedures and operations and improves its relationship with the Department for Communities.
Record Keeping and Information Management procedures	Implementation of the recommendations from the Review of Record Keeping which will improve understanding of legal obligations, records and information management, and recording of decisions, as well as ensuring Council complies with legislation and Freedom of Information.

- 3.9 These themes are not intended to be exhaustive, but to indicate that it is possible to create a programme which takes all of the recommendations, from all of the Reviews, and implement them in a way that supports organisational change. This could also provide a clear opportunity for a range of staff to be part of the changes ensuring that an inclusive approach is adopted.

3.10 This programme, in line with the letter from the Department, should be clearly timetabled taking account of 'business as usual', but allowing rapid improvement to be made within the next year. This will demonstrate that the Council is visibly improving and provide confidence to Elected Members and the Department for Communities that the appropriate change is taking place.

#### **4. Recommendations**

4.1 The Council agree to implement all of the recommendations arising from the Reviews to address the recommendations from the Extraordinary Audit and to set these out as a comprehensive Transformation Programme to ensure that the matters that led to the Extraordinary Audit will not re-emerge.

Specifically, Council is requested to agree:

- i. to set up an Implementation Oversight Panel to oversee the Transformation Programme and its implementation.
- ii. as a priority, to engage the Local Government Staff Commission to undertake the review of the Senior Leadership structure and the Organisational 'Health Check';
- iii. to appoint an Independent Implementation Oversight Adviser to oversee the programme of work, Chairing an Implementation Steering Group and provide quarterly reports to the Department for Communities.