Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne
and Down
District Council

May 1st, 2026

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the Council meeting to be held on **Tuesday, 5th May 2026** at **6:00 pm** in **Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre.**

Agenda

1.0 Apologies and Chairperson's Remarks

2.0 Declarations of Interest

3.0 Action Sheet arising from Council Meeting held on 13 April 2026

For Information

Action Sheet 2026 04 13.pdf ***Page 1***

Council Minutes For Adoption and Signing

4.0 Minutes of Council Meeting held on 13 April 2026

For Approval

Council Minutes 2026-04-13.pdf ***Page 12***

Committee Minutes for Consideration and Adoption

5.0 Minutes of Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 20 April 2026

For Approval

Economy Regeneration and Tourism Minutes 2026-04-20.pdf ***Page 50***

6.0 Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 23 April 2026

For Approval

Strategy Policy & Resources Committee Meeting Minutes 2026-04-23.pdf ***Page 61***

7.0 Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 27 April 2026

For Approval

Active and Healthy Communities Minutes 2026 04 27 .pdf ***Page 73***

8.0 Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 29 April 2026

For Approval

Copy to follow.

9.0 Planning Section

For Information

Correspondence

10.0 Correspondence Report

Correspondence Report Council 2026-05-05.pdf ***Page 77***

10.1 Correspondence from DAERA Minister Muir re NOM Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill (C/054/2026)

Letter from Minister Muir MLA re NOM ANC (Payments) Bill (C-054-2026).pdf ***Page 79***

Invitees

Cllr Terry Andrews

Mr Alan Beggs

Cllr Callum Bowsie

Fionnuala Branagh

Cllr Jim Brennan

Lorraine/Emma Burns/McParland

Cllr Pete Byrne

Cllr Philip Campbell

Cllr William Clarke

Cllr Laura Devlin

Ms Louise Dillon

Cllr Cadogan Enright

Cllr Killian Feehan

Cllr Doire Finn

Ms Lynne Fitzsimons

Ms Joanne Fleming

Cllr Conor Galbraith

Cllr Mark Gibbons

Cllr Oonagh Hanlon

Cllr Glyn Hanna

Mrs Catherine Hanvey

Cllr Valerie Harte

Mr Conor Haughey

Cllr Martin Hearty

Cllr Roisin Howell

Cllr Tierna Howie

Ms Catherine Hughes

Cllr Jonathan Jackson

Joanne Johnston

Cllr Geraldine Kearns

Miss Veronica Keegan

Mrs Sheila Kieran

Cllr Cathal King

Cllr Aurla King

Ms Elaine Kirk

Cllr Mickey Larkin

Cllr Niall Lawlor

Cllr David Lee-Surginor

Cllr Alan Lewis

Cllr Oonagh Magennis

Mr Conor Mallon

Cllr Aidan Mathers

Cllr Declan McAteer

Mr Martin McKibbin

Ms Tracie McLoughlin

Cllr Declan Murphy

Cllr Selina Murphy

Cllr Kate Murphy

Sinead Murphy

Ms Aisling Murray

Cllr Siobhan O'Hare

Mr Andy Patterson

Cllr Áine Quinn

Cllr Henry Reilly

Cllr Michael Rice

Ms Alison Robb

Ms Maria Rogan

Ruth Rooney

Cllr Michael Ruane

Conor Smyth

Donna Starkey

Sarah Taggart

Cllr David Taylor

Cllr Jarlath Tinnelly

Cllr Jill Truesdale

Mrs Marie Ward

Cllr Helena Young

ACTION SHEET – COUNCIL MEETING – MONDAY 1 JULY 2024

Minute Ref	***Subject***	**Decision**	***Lead Officer***	***Actions taken/ Progress to date***	***Remove from Action Sheet Y/N***
C/128/2024	*Minutes of Council Meeting held on 01.07.2024*	It was agreed item C/058/2024: Twinning Newry with City of Ramallah should remain on the action sheet.	*Democratic Services*	*Noted*	*N*

ACTION SHEET – COUNCIL MEETING – MONDAY 1 DECEMBER 2025

Minute Ref	***Subject***	**Decision**	***Lead Officer***	***Actions taken/ Progress to date***	***Remove from Action Sheet Y/N***
C/189/2025	*Notice of Motion – Water Courses*	The Motion was referred to the Sustainability and Environment Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6	*S Murphy*	*Ongoing*	*N*

ACTION SHEET – COUNCIL MEETING – MONDAY 12 JANUARY 2026

Minute Ref	***Subject***	**Decision**	***Lead Officer***	***Actions taken/ Progress to date***	***Remove from Action Sheet Y/N***
C/010/2026	*Planning Section*	It was agreed that a report would be requested providing details on Judicial Reviews and presented at a future Planning Committee Meeting.	*C Mallon*	*Ongoing*	*N*

ACTION SHEET – COUNCIL MEETING – MONDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2026

Minute Ref	***Subject***	**Decision**	***Lead Officer***	***Actions taken/ Progress to date***	***Remove from Action Sheet Y/N***
C/023/2026	*Correspondence Report*	*Correspondence from Richard Pengelly, Chief Executive of Education Authority re NOM Voting at 18 C/184/2025* It was agreed that Council write to all schools within the District inviting them to permit elected representatives to attend and engage with pupils for discussion around policies, manifestos and to providing opportunities for pupils to question and scrutinise their local representatives.	*Democratic Services*	*In progress*	*N*

ACTION SHEET – COUNCIL MEETING – MONDAY 13 APRIL 2026

Minute Ref	***Subject***	**Decision**	***Lead Officer***	***Actions taken/ Progress to date***	***Remove from Action Sheet Y/N***
C/042/2026	*Action Sheet arising from Council Meeting held on 02/03/26*	It was agreed to note the action sheet.	*Democratic Services*	*Noted*	
C/043/2026	*Minutes of Council Meeting held on 02/03/2026*	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	*Democratic Services*	*Noted*	
C/044/2026	*Minutes of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held 09/03/2026*	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	*Democratic Services*	*Noted*	
C/045/2026	*Minutes of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held 12/03/2026*	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	*Democratic Services*	*Noted*	

C/046/2026	*Minutes of Active & Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held 16/03/2026*	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	*Democratic Services*	*Noted*	
C/047/2026	*Minutes of Sustainability & Environment Committee Meeting held 18/03/2026*	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, subject to the following amendment: *SE/033/2025: Environment Charges for Financial Year 2026/2027* It was agreed to reverse the Committee's previous decision and not apply the 5% uplift.	*Democratic Services* *S Murphy*	*Noted*	
C/048/2026	*Planning Section*	There were no issues arising.	*Democratic Services*	*Noted*	
C/049/2026	*Correspondence Report*	It was agreed to note the correspondence report. *Correspondence from Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA re NOM CAR-T Cell Therapy (C/123/2025)* It was agreed that Council write to the Department of Health requesting a meeting with senior departmental officials to examine the detail of the Health Minister's correspondence.	*Democratic Services* *Democratic Services*	*Noted* *Correspondence sent*	
C/050/2026	*Notice of Motion – Independent Environmental Protection Agency*	It was agreed that this Council strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) by the DUP in the Assembly and Executive; further condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the Lough Neagh crisis, the illegal dump at Mobuoy and wider environmental degradation, but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards; notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained within the New Decade, New Approach Deal; agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask him to urgently convene a process of institutional reform, in consultation with the Irish Government and local parties, to remove blockages and vetoes from Stormont's system	*Democratic Services*	*Correspondence sent*	

		of government; and to ask the Secretary of State to take meaningful steps to ensure that commitments in New Decade, New Approach are implemented.			
C/051/2026	*Notice of Motion – St Patrick Centre Review*	**The Motion was referred to the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6.** *"This Council recognises the significant contribution St Patrick Centre Downpatrick has made to Tourism and Heritage. As Ireland's only exhibition centre dedicated to the life & legacy of our patron Saint we must recognise the significant role it plays in promoting our patron Saint.* *This Council will pledge cross party support for the centre and a review is initiated based on the Tim Husband report presented to Council in Oct 2019. We will write to DFC and DFE seeking support for the centre."*	*M Ward* *Democratic Services*	*Correspondence Sent*	
C/052/2026	*Notice of Motion – Basic Income for Artists*	It was agreed that this Council notes that the arts, culture and creative sectors are central to our social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy. Many artists, performers and creative workers in the district and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis. The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice. The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries. This Council believes that Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity. Newry Mourne and Down's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, mental health, youth engagement and cultural life. A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would	*Democratic Services*	*Correspondence Sent*	

		help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the districts cultural ecosystem. This Council resolves to call on the Executive to introduce and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, modelled on the Irish Government's programme, providing regular, unconditional income support to eligible artists and creative workers to include a timeframe for the receipt of the benefit. Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance, engaging directly with the arts and creative sectors in its design. Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process.			
C/053/2026	*Notice of Motion – Portaferry Bridge*	It was agreed that Newry, Mourne & Down District Council recognises the importance of improving connectivity in East Down and the huge benefits this can bring to the wider district; in terms of boosting the local economy, enhancing tourism and tackling isolation. This council is also committed to supporting more reliable, affordable and sustainable forms of travel for residents and visitors within our district. Furthermore, this Council is concerned about the increase in traffic along roads on both sides of Strangford Lough which could be better served by a fixed crossing between Strangford village and Portaferry. This may also alleviate increasing congestion in parts of Rowallane and Downpatrick DEAs, as well as in the Ards district, thus shortening journey times and improving road safety. NMD Council, therefore, agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister to request that she secure funding for a feasibility study into a bridge across Strangford Lough from Strangford to Portaferry.	*Democratic Services*	*Correspondence sent*	

C/054/2026	*Notice of Motion - Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill*	It was agreed that this Council notes the introduction of the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill in the Assembly. This Council Recognises the importance of Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) payments in sustaining family farms, supporting rural communities, and maintaining agricultural activity in marginal and upland areas. This Council Welcomes the Bill's requirement that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs make regulations under the Agriculture Act 2020 to ensure continued and inflation-linked payments to eligible farmers in line with the Ulster Farmers' Union, provided it is funded through additional resources that are separate from existing direct agricultural support funding. This Council calls on all parties in the Assembly, and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to support and progress this legislation without delay.	*Democratic Services*	*Correspondence sent*	
C/055/2026	*Notice of Motion – Wastewater Infrastructure*	It was agreed that this Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; recognises that the Executive is chronically underfunded and is trying to deliver public services in the context of decades of British government austerity and underinvestment in critical infrastructure; recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting", Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are delaying 1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices.	*Democratic Services* *C Mallon*		

		Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area: • 3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North. • 1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments. • Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North. • The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%. Council therefore agrees to take the following actions: Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she: • Details her plans for the funding of required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided • request that the department regularly reviews NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office Request that Newry Next provide a copy of their report ''Newry Next building regional powerhouse by 2035 and this is tabled on the ERT agenda to ensure it is available.			
C/056/2026	*Notice of Motion – Cold Water Swimming Facilities at Tyrella Beach*	The Motion was referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6. *"This Council notes the growing popularity of cold water swimming across the district, including at Tyrella Beach, which provides a picturesque and accessible natural setting for such activity.*	*Democratic Services* *A Patterson*		

		Council further notes the recognised physical and mental health benefits associated with cold water swimming, including improved circulation, reduced stress levels, enhanced mood, and its increasing use as a complementary activity promoted through health initiatives. *This Council acknowledges that a number of organised groups and individuals make regular use of Tyrella Beach throughout the year, including during the winter months, often without access to appropriate facilities.* *Accordingly, this Council agrees to:* *- Engage with local cold water swimming groups to assess current usage and demand* *- Engage with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to explore any existing or potential health-led initiatives involving cold water swimming* *- Assess the feasibility of opening existing shower and changing facilities at Tyrella Beach during the winter period* *- Consider the introduction of a pilot scheme to provide such facilities, with a view to gauging demand, usage, and overall benefit* *This Council further agrees that any such pilot should be reviewed following its implementation to inform future provision."*			
C/057/2026	*Notice of Motion - Inadequacy of £17m Fund for NI Households*	It was agreed that this Council recognises the immense pressure being placed on workers, families and businesses as a result of huge price hikes on energy costs, especially home heating oil as a result of the US-Israeli war on Iran; notes that homes across Newry, Mourne and Down, like the rest of the North, are predominantly heated by home heating oil, making us much more vulnerable to price shocks; acknowledges that we are already in the midst of a cost of living crisis and workers, families and businesses here need real support; calls on the Communities Minister who has the responsibility for tackling fuel poverty to set up a scheme	*Democratic Services*	*Correspondence sent*	

		to get this money into the pockets of those who are struggling with heating costs. This council further calls on the British government to end its inadequate and delayed response to the fuel crisis, and to act with the urgency that it demands to protect households, sustain local businesses, and safeguard our rural economy. And to write to the British Secretary of State for the North and the Minister of State for Energy to clearly convey this Council's deep frustration at their failure to act, and to demand the immediate delivery of real, effective support for those struggling with rising energy crisis.			
C/058/2026	*Notice of Motion – Lislea Men's Shed proposed Wildfowl ad Wildfire Preserve at Camlough*	**The Motion was referred to the Sustainability and Environment Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6.** *"That this Council; Recognises the huge environmental, educational, and recreational potential of the Camlough Lake Wildfowl and Wetland Centre, as promoted by Lislea Men's Shed; Commends the Lislea Men's Shed group for their efforts so far, including the excellent Wildfowl and Wetlands Family Festival; acknowledges the Council's commitment to, "embedding sustainability across all its operations and providing leadership for the wider community"; recognises that Council's support for the project is both welcome and necessary, and innkeeping with its own sustainability goals; commits to working with Lislea Men's Shed and their partners, to deliver this project as a key environmental initiative, with educational, recreational and tourist potential and further commits to engaging with relevant funders, both internal and external, to see this project through to completion."*	*Democratic Services* *S Murphy*		
C/060/2026	*Notice of Motion – Tollymore Mountain Centre*	It was agreed that this Council notes the ongoing review and current status of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre in Bryansford and recognises the significant concern within the local community and the wider outdoor recreation sector regarding its future. This Council recognises that Tollymore National Outdoor Centre is a world class facility in the heart of the Mournes, providing	*Democratic Services*	*Correspondence sent*	

		an essential public service in safety training and the development of mountain leadership. This service must be protected in the context of increasing visitor numbers to the Mournes, ensuring the safety of those using our natural environment. This Council resolves to write to the Chief Executive of Sport NI to reiterate its support for the reopening of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre at the earliest possible opportunity, alongside the development of a long-term, financially sustainable operating model which protects core education and training services while improving access for the local community. The Council will also request that the findings of the ongoing review, and any proposed operating models, are shared with the Council to ensure alignment with local development and tourism strategies.			
C/061/2026	*Notice of Motion – St Patricks Day*	The Motion was deferred.	*Democratic Services*		
C/062/2026	Notice of Motion – Unauthorised Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Council Owned Land	**The Motion was referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6** *"That this Council notes the ongoing and widespread community concern regarding the dangerous and unauthorised use of scramblers, quad bikes and other off road vehicles on Council owned land, open spaces, parks and public pathways; that our parks and public spaces are vital resources for the people of Newry, Mourne and Down, and should be protected, enhanced and kept safe for people; the increased risk these vehicles pose to members of the public, including children, older people, dog walkers and other users of shared public spaces; the sometimes considerable damage caused to green spaces and sports pitches by repeated off road vehicle activity and the negative effect this has on biodiversity and our local environment; that existing legislation which restricts the use of mechanically propelled vehicles on land without the landowner's permission.*	*Democratic Services* *A Patterson*		

		This Council will proactively engage with police and the community to enforce this policy; audit all parks that are currently being used by these vehicles to ensure that entrance and exit points are properly secured and access to these sites are safe and pedestrian friendly. *Calls on the Council to develop and enforce an implementation plan in collaboration with the PSNI and local stakeholders, including:* • *Regular joint operations and patrols in hotspot areas.* • *Clear reporting pathways for the public.* • *Use of signage and all other appropriate deterrent measures."*			

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 13 April 2026 at 6.30pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor P Campbell

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor T Andrews
Councillor P Byrne
Councillor L Devlin
Councillor D Finn
Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor V Harte
Councillor T Howie
Councillor G Kearns
Councillor C King
Councillor A Lewis
Councillor A Mathers
Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor H Reilly
Councillor D Taylor
Councillor J Truesdale
Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor W Clarke
Councillor K Feehan
Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor G Hanna
Councillor M Hearty
Councillor J Jackson
Councillor A King
Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor O Magennis
Councillor D Murphy
Councillor S Murphy
Councillor A Quinn
Councillor M Rice
Councillor J Tinnelly
Councillor H Young

In attendance via Teams:

Councillor J Brennan
Councillor R Howell
Councillor M Ruane
Councillor C Enright
Councillor M Larkin

Officials in attendance: Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active and Health Communities
Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of People & Legal
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

C/040/2026 APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors McAteer and Lee-Surginor.

The Chairperson thanked Councillor Kearns for stepping in for his absence for the the last Council meeting.

The Saint Patrick Centre was congratulated on 25 years of operation and its contribution to tourism. The Chairperson highlighted the significant role played by the Centre in promoting tourism not only in Downpatrick but across the wider Newry, Mourne and Down District.

The Chairperson referred to the honour of leading the St Patrick's Day Parade in Downpatrick and thanked all organisations involved in its delivery, particularly the grassroots community sector across the District. Appreciation was also expressed to the Events Team for hosting successful events in both Newry and Downpatrick.

Mrs Martina Flynn and the Active and Healthy Communities Team were commended for organising impactful events as part of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls campaign. The Chairperson stated that the work strongly demonstrated the Council's commitment to addressing the issue.

The Chairperson thanked the volunteers at Castlewellan Forest Park and noted that the park had largely reopened. Reference was made to a recent visit by elected representatives to volunteer, during which Members gained insight into horticultural work.

Condolences were extended to the family of Seamus Lonergan, a Newry, Mourne and Down District Council employee who had died suddenly. At the request of Councillor Feehan, condolences were also extended to the family of former Newry and Mourne Council employee Hillary Halliday.

Members joined the Chairperson in wishing Councillor Taylor a happy birthday.

The Chairperson advised that an emergency notice of motion had been received and would be dealt with at the appropriate time during the meeting.

C/041/2026 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

C/042/2026 **ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2026**

Read: Action sheet from Council Meeting held on 2 March 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Finn, the Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 2 March 2026 was agreed.**

COUNCIL MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/043/2026 **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2026**

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 2 March 2026 **(copy circulated).**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by**

Councillor Hanlon, the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 2 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/044/2026 **MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 MARCH 2026**

Read: Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 March 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Young, seconded by Councillor Clarke, the Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/045/2026 **MINUTES OF STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2026**

Read: Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 12 March 2026 **(copy circulated).**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 12 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/046/2026 **MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 MARCH 2026**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 16 March 2026 **(copy circulated).**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, the Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 16 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/047/2026 **MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 MARCH 2026**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 March 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

SE/033/2025: Environment Charges for Financial Year 2026/2027
Councillor Byrne expressed concern that a decision had been taken to increase commercial

waste charges at Household Recycling Centres by 5% for the forthcoming year and questioned why the matter had not been considered by the Strategic Finance Working Group prior to the rates being set.

Councillor Byrne proposed that the Committee decision be reversed and that the 5% uplift not be applied. This was seconded by Councillor Hanna.

Mrs Murphy clarified that Household Recycling Centre commercial charges and trade waste charges were set on a cost-recovery basis, reflecting increases in disposal costs paid by the Council. In response to a query from Councillor Hearty regarding service impact, she advised that service provision would not be affected, but that failure to recover costs would place additional pressure on the ratepayer unless otherwise funded.

Mrs Murphy further advised that trade waste had not been accepted at Household Recycling Centres until the introduction of a new payment arrangement. She also clarified, in response to Councillor Reilly, that charges for additional bins or increased bin capacity were payable by residents, with collection provided without any additional charge.

Councillor Hanlon expressed concern that the issue had been brought forward after the setting of the rates and had not been previously considered by the Strategic Finance Working Group.

Mrs Murphy advised that the matter related to cost recovery and would not directly affect the rate. She explained that the timing aligned with disposal cost increases brought through the committee process in March and April and advised that the issue could be reviewed for the following year.

Councillor Byrne stated that his comments were not directed at officers but reflected concern about public perception given that rates had already been set. He suggested that the Council absorb the cost for the current year and review the matter again to avoid placing further pressure on ratepayers and commercial businesses.

In response, Councillor Hanlon queried how the cost could be absorbed given that budgets across directorates had already been agreed. Mrs Murphy reiterated that if costs were not recovered through charges, they would have to be absorbed within existing revenue budgets.

Agreed:	**It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Hanna, to reverse the Committee's previous decision and not apply the 5% uplift.**
Agreed:	**On the proposal of Councillor Magennis, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, the Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, subject to the above amendment.**

C/048/2026 PLANNING SECTION

There were no issues arising.

C/049/2026 CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

Read: Report from Mrs Ward, Chief Executive, regarding an update on correspondence received for the attention of Council **(copy circulated)**.

Correspondence from Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA re NOM Physician Associates (C/186/2025)

Councillor Rice thanked the Minister for his response but stated that it offered limited reassurance. He advised that reference to budget pressures and engagement with Trusts highlighted the underlying issue, namely that training places had been funded without securing corresponding employment. He noted that the suspension of intake until September 2027, while future placements continued to be planned, demonstrated deficiencies in workforce planning.

Councillor Rice noted that the Minister had described the situation as "unsatisfactory" but stated that it was, in fact, unsustainable. He advised that the motion sought to align investment with service delivery and that, until this occurred, the concerns remained valid.

Correspondence regarding Isle of Man Legislation C/037/2026

Councillor Rice welcomed the response from Minister Muir. He stated that both the Minister and the Secretary of State, Hilary Benn, had heard directly from fishermen and processors in Kilkeel during the previous week regarding the impact of recent Isle of Man fisheries legislation on crews and processors in Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie.

He noted that this issue formed part of a wider range of challenges facing the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. He highlighted that only 2.8% of the Coastal Growth Fund had been allocated to the local fleet, that fuel costs continued to rise across agri-food sectors, and that seasonal visa arrangements had become increasingly bureaucratic. He stated that further engagement from the Minister of Agriculture and the Secretary of State was required, and that meaningful support for fishing communities was needed immediately.

Councillor Hanna stated that fishermen around Kilkeel Harbour had lost confidence in Minister Muir, advising that this view was consistently expressed by those he had engaged with locally. He criticised the Minister's handling of the Isle of Man legislation, questioning the level of departmental engagement given the length of time required for such legislation to progress..He referred to the loss of access to Isle of Man waters and other fishing grounds, advising that crews were now restricted to a narrow operating area in the Irish Sea, which he noted was also being considered for closure. He warned that, if these measures proceeded alongside forthcoming legislation affecting foreign crews, the fishing industry in Northern Ireland—particularly along the County Down coastline—would be left with minimal viable operating capacity.

Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM CAR T Cell Therapy (C/034/2026)

Councillor Feehan thanked the Health Minister for his response but said it was regrettable he had been unable to meet Members. He noted the Minister's explanation that CAR-T delivery required further accreditation, regulatory approvals and staff training, and that the Department was exploring a phased approach. He said that, based on meetings with charities, clinicians and affected families, senior specialists in Northern Ireland were already qualified to provide this care.

Accepting the Minister's diary constraints, he proposed that Council request a meeting with senior departmental officials to examine the detail of the correspondence and understand why families were being told they must wait for essential treatment.

This was seconded by Councillor Finn.

Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) (C/035/2026)

Councillor Young welcomed the Health Minister's response stating that the community in the Meadow and Armagh Road in Newry had been devastated by the recent loss of 12-year-old Shay Haughey, whose death had cast deep sadness across Newry and beyond. She said Shay had embraced life, loved sport, and was always smiling, and she held his family and friends in her thoughts.

She noted that awareness and research into SUDC were limited, that these deaths could not yet be predicted or prevented, and that they continued to devastate families. She stated that greater collaboration, investment in medical research, improved understanding of SUDC, and better support for affected families were essential.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Feehan seconded by Councillor Finn, that Council write to the Department of Health requesting a meeting with senior departmental officials to examine the detail of the Health Minister's correspondence.**

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Young, seconded by Councillor Rice, to note the correspondence report and the following correspondence:**

- **Correspondence from Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA re NOM Physician Associates (C/186/2025)**
- **Correspondence regarding Isle of Man Legislation**
- **Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM CAR T Cell Therapy C/034/2026**
- **Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) C/035/2026**

C/050/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - INDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Truesdale:

"That this Council strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) by the DUP in the Assembly and Executive; further condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the Lough Neagh crisis, the illegal dump at Mobuoy and wider environmental degradation, but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards; notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained within the New Decade, New Approach Deal; agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask him to urgently convene a process of institutional reform, in consultation with the Irish Government and local parties, to remove blockages and vetoes from Stormont's system of government; and to ask the Secretary of State to take meaningful steps to ensure that commitments in New Decade, New Approach are implemented."

This was seconded by Councillor Howie.

Councillor Truesdale stated that Northern Ireland had been ranked among the most nature-depleted regions globally, with approximately 12% of species threatened with extinction. She advised that decades of intensive agriculture, pollution and climate change had driven significant biodiversity loss, citing the decline of farmland birds, algal blooms in Lough Neagh, poor river health, the Mobuoy landfill site and Northern Ireland's low Biodiversity Intactness Index ranking.

She stated that her Party supported the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), arguing that current structures were ineffective and that progress had stalled despite previous commitments and post-Brexit regulatory changes. She advised that Northern Ireland required a non-departmental public body with robust monitoring and enforcement powers and noted polling evidence indicating public support for such an agency. Councillor Truesdale concluded that reform of power-sharing structures was necessary, stating that the ability of a single party to block environmental action was untenable.

Councillor Hearty confirmed full support for the establishment of an IEPA, stating that existing bodies lacked adequate powers and that the Office for Environmental Protection was not fit for purpose in the North. He advised that a locally based regulator was required to address the island's unique environmental context and to work with counterparts in Ireland, particularly in border regions. He stated that Assembly mechanisms had at times been used to block legislation or avoid scrutiny and that broader institutional reform was required. He added that, while some viewed constitutional change as necessary for full reform, the existing structures still needed to function effectively and, on that basis, confirmed his support for the motion.

Councillor Finn welcomed the motion and thanked Councillor Truesdale, expressing frustration at the lack of progress at Stormont. She stated that the North remained the only jurisdiction in the UK or Ireland without an environmental protection agency, despite severe pollution in Lough Neagh, river failures, biodiversity decline, poor air quality and a slow response to the climate emergency. She noted that, while the DAERA Minister supported the principle, Executive agreement had not been secured, prompting her Party to table an amendment to the Financial Provisions Bill to force Assembly consideration.

Councillor Bowsie stated that his Party would not support what he described as an attempt by the Alliance Party to avoid responsibility. He advised that responsibility for environmental protection lay with the Agriculture Minister through the NIEA and argued that transferring these functions to an unelected body would divert funding from existing agencies. He stated that his Party's agriculture spokesperson had emphasised the need for the Department to demonstrate effective delivery of its current responsibilities. Councillor Bowsie added that the focus should be on accountability and performance rather than additional bureaucracy, and that matters relating to the Executive and Assembly were for Northern Ireland's political parties.

Councillor Taylor stated that his Party supported genuine independence for any environmental regulator, but only where a clear mandate, adequate resourcing and financial transparency was in place. He advised that restructuring should not blur responsibilities or weaken delivery and that any regulator must be trusted, effective and collaborative. He stated that the section of the motion relating to institutional reform was a separate issue and that governance arrangements were a Strand One matter for local political parties without involvement from the Irish Government. On that basis, he advised that he would not support the motion.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	**32**
AGAINST:	**6**
ABSTENTIONS:	**0**

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillor Truesdale stated in summing up that an Independent Environmental Protection Agency would consolidate, rather than duplicate, existing responsibilities, with regulatory and monitoring functions transferring from the Department and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to the new body. She clarified that its establishment would not add an additional layer of governance but would replace current arrangements with a more effective and accountable framework.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Truesdale, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed that this Council strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) by the DUP in the Assembly and Executive; further condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the Lough Neagh crisis, the illegal dump at Mobuoy and wider environmental degradation, but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards; notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained within the New Decade, New Approach Deal; agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask him to urgently convene a process of institutional reform, in consultation with the Irish Government and local parties, to remove blockages and vetoes from Stormont's system of government; and to ask the Secretary of State to take meaningful steps to**

ensure that commitments in New Decade, New Approach are implemented.

C/051/2026 NOTICE OF MOTION - ST. PATRICK CENTRE REVIEW

The following Motion was received from Councillor Hanlon:

"This Council recognises the significant contribution St Patrick Centre Downpatrick has made to Tourism and Heritage. As Ireland's only exhibition centre dedicated to the life & legacy of our patron Saint we must recognise the significant role it plays in promoting our patron Saint.

This Council will pledge cross party support for the centre and a review is initiated based on the Tim Husband report presented to Council in Oct 2019. We will write to DFC and DFE seeking support for the centre"

This was seconded by Councillor Campbell.

Agreed: **The Motion was referred to the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6**

C/052/2026 NOTICE OF MOTION - BASIC INCOME FOR ARTISTS

The following Motion was received from Councillor Finn:

"This Council notes that the arts, culture and creative sectors are central to our social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy. Many artists, performers and creative workers in the district and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis.
The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice. The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries.
This Council believes that Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity. Newry Mourne and Down's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, mental health, youth engagement and cultural life. A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the districts cultural ecosystem.

This Council resolves to call on the Executive to introduce and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, modelled on the Irish Government's programme, providing regular, unconditional income support to eligible artists and creative workers.
Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance, engaging directly with the arts and creative sectors in its design.
Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process."

This was seconded by Councillor A King.

Councillor Finn offered her condolences to the family of Michael Patrick (Michael Campbell), whom she described as a highly talented actor. She stated that she had consistently raised in the Chamber the need for better support for artists and noted that while the North celebrated international success in film, television and theatre, many artists felt that achievement occurred despite, rather than because of, public support. She highlighted that per-capita cultural spending in the North was £5.07, compared with £22.50 in the Republic of Ireland, and that culture accounted for approximately 1% of the Department for Communities budget. She further noted that artists were not referenced in the Programme for Government.

Councillor Finn warned that without appropriate investment in grassroots creative workers, the wider cultural ecosystem would be lost. She noted the absence of a multi-year budget and emphasised the role of the Council in advocating for artists who contributed significantly to community wellbeing.

She concluded by expressing the hope that the motion would receive support in order to promote a scheme that properly valued artists.

Councillor C. King thanked Councillor Finn for bringing the motion forward and stated that his Party recognised the contribution of artists to communities and the economy. He referred to major cultural events such as the Fleadh in Belfast and local festivals including Wake the Giant, Eats & Beats and Footsteps in the Forest, and highlighted the positive impact of arts engagement locally in Newry, including through organisations such as Sticky Fingers Arts.

He advised that his Party supported the principle of a basic income scheme for artists and had advocated for the continuation of the scheme in the Republic of Ireland. He stated that the Communities Minister should consider proposals to support artists, including potential income support measures. However, he noted that the scheme in the Republic had cost over €18 million and questioned how a similar programme could be funded in the North given budgetary constraints and limited fiscal autonomy.

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Finn for bringing forward the motion, which she stated her Party supported. She emphasised the importance of adequate support for the arts and referred to the basic income scheme operating in the Republic of Ireland. She advised that artists had raised concerns regarding any local implementation, particularly around reduced duration and potential dilution of support.

She noted that the original scheme in the Republic had not included a time limit and had provided longer-term stability, whereas the revised scheme operated over three years. She stated that, while this could leave some artists worse off in the longer term, she considered it preferable to some level of support being available to a wider group. She requested that the motion be amended to include reference to a defined timeframe for receipt of the benefit.

Councillor Finn accepted the amendment.

Councillor Taylor acknowledged that the motion had been brought forward with genuine concern and highlighted the economic, tourism and personal development benefits of the arts. He stated that his Party would not block the motion from progressing for Executive

consideration but raised concerns regarding affordability and precedent, noting that other sectors could also argue for similar support. He further stated that the proposal would require qualifying criteria rather than unconditional support and that significant further work would be needed before full support could be given. He confirmed, however, that his Party would not oppose the motion at this stage.

Councillor Hanna stated that the DUP had significant concerns regarding the motion, several of which had already been raised during the debate.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	**32**
AGAINST:	**0**
ABSTENTIONS:	**6**

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillor Finn thanked Members for their support and acknowledged that the scheme would require detailed design and implementation and expressed hope that the relevant departments referenced in her motion would assist in taking this forward.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Finn, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed that This Council notes that the arts, culture and creative sectors are central to our social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy. Many artists, performers and creative workers in the district and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis. The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice. The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries. This Council believes that Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity. Newry Mourne and Down's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, mental health, youth engagement and cultural life. A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the districts cultural ecosystem.**
This Council resolves to call on the Executive to introduce and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, modelled on the Irish Government's programme, providing regular, unconditional income support to

eligible artists and creative workers to include a timeframe for the receipt of the benefit.
Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance, engaging directly with the arts and creative sectors in its design. Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process.

C/053/2026 NOTICE OF MOTION – PORTAFERRY BRIDGE

The following Motion was received from Councillor Bowsie:

"Newry, Mourne & Down District Council recognises the importance of improving connectivity in East Down and the huge benefits this can bring to the wider district; in terms of boosting the local economy, enhancing tourism and tackling isolation. This council is also committed to supporting more reliable, affordable and sustainable forms of travel for residents and visitors within our district.
Furthermore, this Council is concerned about the increase in traffic along roads on both sides of Strangford Lough which could be better served by a fixed crossing between Strangford village and Portaferry. This may also alleviate increasing congestion in parts of Rowallane and Downpatrick DEAs, as well as in the Ards district, thus shortening journey times and improving road safety.
NMD Council, therefore, agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister to request that she secure funding for a feasibility study into a bridge across Strangford Lough from Strangford to Portaferry."

This was seconded by Councillor Lewis.

Councillor Andrews welcomed the motion and noted that the vision for the proposed bridge had existed for many years referencing the SDLP's emphasis on building bridges within communities.

Councillor Andrews further noted that a similar motion had been considered by Ards and North Down Borough Council, where a colleague had written to the Minister for Infrastructure seeking a feasibility study. He advised that the Minister had responded that, within the existing planning framework, there was no immediate requirement for a fixed crossing. Despite previous challenges, Councillor Andrews stated that experience from the Narrow Water Bridge demonstrated that, with appropriate funding, a bridge between Strangford and Portaferry was achievable.

Councillor Campbell advised that Sinn Féin supported the motion in principle, while emphasising that the financial constraints facing the Department for Infrastructure required careful consideration.

Councillor Young confirmed Alliance Party support for the motion and stated that any feasibility study should consider road upgrades on both sides of the lough, the viability of a more sustainable ferry service, and environmental designations. She noted that increased traffic would require significant road improvements and referred to sustainable ferry

developments in Belfast, including hybrid vessels and electric hydrofoils. Reference was made to the Belfast–Bangor pilot service and sustainability investments by Stena Line. Councillor Young further highlighted that Strangford Lough was the largest sea inlet in the British Isles and Northern Ireland's first Marine Conservation Zone, with both Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area designations.

Councillor Taylor confirmed support for the motion, acknowledged the challenges associated with funding such a project, and stated that a feasibility study would assist in identifying potential issues. He suggested that the Minister give favourable consideration to the proposal.

The Chairperson declared the motion passed unanimously.

In summing up, Councillor Bowsie thanked Members for their support and acknowledged the DUP Deputy Leader, Michelle McIlveen MLA, who had launched the campaign three months earlier alongside councillors from Ards and North Down Borough Council. He added that it was positive to have joint political support from Councils on both sides of Strangford Lough.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed that "Newry, Mourne & Down District Council recognises the importance of improving connectivity in East Down and the huge benefits this can bring to the wider district; in terms of boosting the local economy, enhancing tourism and tackling isolation. This council is also committed to supporting more reliable, affordable and sustainable forms of travel for residents and visitors within our district. Furthermore, this Council is concerned about the increase in traffic along roads on both sides of Strangford Lough which could be better served by a fixed crossing between Strangford village and Portaferry. This may also alleviate increasing congestion in parts of Rowallane and Downpatrick DEAs, as well as in the Ards district, thus shortening journey times and improving road safety. NMD Council, therefore, agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister to request that she secure funding for a feasibility study into a bridge across Strangford Lough from Strangford to Portaferry.**

C/054/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - AREAS WITH NATURAL CONSTRAINTS (PAYMENTS) BILL**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Rice:

"This Council notes the introduction of the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill in the Assembly.

This Council Recognises the importance of Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) payments in sustaining family farms, supporting rural communities, and maintaining agricultural activity in marginal and upland areas.

This Council Welcomes the Bill's requirement that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs make regulations under the Agriculture Act 2020 to ensure continued and inflation-linked payments to eligible farmers.

This Council calls on all parties in the Assembly, and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to support and progress this legislation without delay."

This was seconded by Councillor Ruane.

Councillor Rice stated that the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Payments Bill was necessary and long overdue for farmers in South Down and across the North. He highlighted the challenges faced by upland and small family-run farms in Severely Disadvantaged Areas, particularly within the Mournes, and emphasised their importance to the rural economy and the wider agricultural supply chain.

He advised that the removal of the former ANC scheme had placed additional financial pressure on farms operating on marginal land with limited diversification opportunities and referred to declining cattle and sheep numbers as evidence of increasing strain within the sector. Councillor Rice outlined that the Bill established a legal framework for an ANC scheme, with funding to be considered through established budgetary processes, and stressed that ANC payments should complement existing farm support schemes and address structural disadvantage.

Councillor Reilly advised that, as of June 2025, Northern Ireland had 25,834 active farmers, the majority operating small family farms, and noted that the farm sustainability payment had a budget of £336 million.

He stated that a mandatory ANC scheme would have required funding from within the existing agriculture budget, potentially displacing support for other farm businesses, and expressed concern that linking ANC payments to inflation could create inequities. He emphasised that future support should focus on efficiency, resilience and productivity rather than further area-based payments. Councillor Reilly highlighted support for a designated sheep scheme and referenced the work of the Northern Ireland Sheep Industry Task Force, while expressing concern about the slow implementation of its recommendations.

Councillor Reilly further challenged the assertion that farms in disadvantaged areas were worse off following the cessation of the ANC scheme, citing adjustments to land-based payments, eligibility changes under the 2026 scheme, current application timelines and the introduction of the suckler cow scheme on 1 April. He concluded that the DUP's position was to maximise direct farmer support, reduce bureaucracy and ensure effective delivery, and confirmed that the Party could not support the motion.

Councillor Taylor noted that the Bill had recently completed Second Stage in the Assembly and advised that his party had offered conditional support based on its stated intent. While acknowledging positive elements, he identified a number of unresolved issues requiring clarification before full support could be confirmed.

He questioned whether the Bill formed part of a coherent long-term agricultural strategy or was a response to short-term pressures, emphasising the need for funding arrangements to be credible, sustainable and fairly targeted. On that basis, Councillor Taylor advised that his party would abstain pending further consideration as the Bill progressed through the Assembly.

Councillor Howie stated that, while the Alliance Party supported fair assistance for farm businesses in disadvantaged areas, it considered that alternative approaches offered better long-term value for public money. She advised that the Bill's progression to Second Stage required robust scrutiny and confirmed that Alliance intended to seek amendments, including environmental conditionality and closer examination of the Bill's financial implications, particularly the proposed inflation-linked uplift. She noted there was no clear evidence of significant land abandonment in ANC areas and highlighted existing and developing supports under the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, including the farm sustainability payment and revised land eligibility rules.

Councillor Howie proposed the following amendment:
Remove all text after 'upland areas' and insert:
This Council supports effective scrutiny of the bill as it progresses through the Assembly, recognising the need to address issues raised during Second Stage debate, including the case for adding nature and biodiversity conditionality to the bill, its affordability if not funded from the earmarked Sustainable Agriculture Programme budget, and the inherent unfairness of linking payments to inflations when no other farm support measures have the same protections in law.

Councillor Rice advised that he did not accept the amendment. Councillor Howie confirmed that, on that basis, the Alliance Party would not support the motion.

Mrs Ward advised that, under Standing Orders 17.1.1, Councillor Howie's amendment could not be accepted as it constituted a direct negative.

Councillor Byrne stated that he did not wish to create unrealistic expectations regarding what the Council could deliver. He noted that the FCLP had supported the Bill at Second Stage but advised that significant questions remained regarding funding, including whether resources would be additional or reallocated within departmental budgets. He stated that these matters required detailed scrutiny at Committee Stage.

Councillor Byrne highlighted that a significant proportion of agricultural land in the North was classified as disadvantaged and advised that, since the cessation of ANC payments in 2018, many farms had experienced herd reductions and financial pressure. While acknowledging differing views on land abandonment, he emphasised the sustained challenges faced by farmers operating on less productive land. He expressed concern about linking payments to inflation where no comparable schemes operated on that basis and cautioned against redistributing funding in a way that disadvantaged other farm sectors.

Councillor Byrne confirmed his support for the motion as drafted and proposed the addition of wording after the reference to eligible farmers: "in line with the Ulster Farmers' Union, provided it is funded through additional resources that are separate from existing direct agricultural support funding."

Following further protracted discussion, Councillor Rice accepted the amendment.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	**28**
AGAINST:	**8**
ABSTENTIONS:	**1**

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

In summing up, Councillor Rice stated that not all land was equal and highlighted that farmers in upland areas faced higher costs, lower productivity, and fewer opportunities for diversification. He noted that farmers in these areas experienced particular challenges in meeting the requirements of the suckler cow scheme. In relation to the amendment, Councillor Rice advised that it had been incorporated within the Bill and added that this provision had been instrumental in securing the Ulster Farmers' Union's support during the consultation process prior to the Bill's introduction in the Assembly.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor Ruane, it was agreed that this Council notes the introduction of the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill in the Assembly. This Council Recognises the importance of Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) payments in sustaining family farms, supporting rural communities, and maintaining agricultural activity in marginal and upland areas. This Council Welcomes the Bill's requirement that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs make regulations under the Agriculture Act 2020 to ensure continued and inflation-linked payments to eligible farmers in line with the Ulster Farmers' Union, provided it is funded through additional resources that are separate from existing direct agricultural support funding. This Council calls on all parties in the Assembly, and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to support and progress this legislation without delay.**

C/055/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Feehan:

"This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting". Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are blocking 1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices.

Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:

- *3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.*
- *1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.*
- *Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.*
- *The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.*

Council therefore agrees to take the following actions:
Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:

- *confirms that the long-term funding required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided*
- *commission an independent review of NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office*
- *Invite the authors of the Newry Next report to attend a Special Council Meeting to Interrogate the recommendations of the report and ascertain the necessary action required to realise its ambition."*

This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Councillor Feehan stated that the Motion had been brought forward to address the clear evidence that inadequate water and wastewater infrastructure was the principal constraint on long-term development in the area. He emphasised that the motion was not intended to allocate blame, but to acknowledge an established capacity crisis which was already restricting housing delivery, delaying commercial development, and constraining investment and employment growth. It was noted that several local wastewater treatment works had no remaining capacity and others were operating under significant pressure.

Councillor Feehan highlighted that house prices and rents in Newry, Mourne and Down had risen faster than elsewhere in the North in the previous year, reinforcing the need to unblock development and increase housing supply.

Councillor Feehan concluded that the issue required a collaborative, evidence-based approach and that water infrastructure needed to be treated as a priority at Executive level in order to support housing delivery and sustainable economic development.

Councillor Andrews concurred with the sentiments expressed in the motion.

Councillor Hanna advised that the DUP fully recognised wastewater infrastructure constraints as a critical barrier to housing development, economic growth and investment. The Councillor stated that a wider infrastructure review across Northern Ireland would be supported in order to assess whether current funding levels met identified need, noting that without functioning infrastructure development could not proceed and communities were bearing the consequences.

Councillor Hanna confirmed willingness to explore options to grant NI Water borrowing powers, provided appropriate protections for vulnerable households were in place, and stressed that wastewater investment must be fairly distributed and not exacerbate regional imbalances.

In conclusion, Councillor Hanna stated that the issue was not solely about increased spending but about ensuring that the system was structurally capable of delivering the infrastructure Northern Ireland required. It was also noted that Gordon Lyons had taken steps to increase housing supply through existing mechanisms, including the introduction of an intermediate rent scheme and increasing property value thresholds to support prospective homeowners.

Councillor D Murphy stated that most, if not all, Executive parties had acknowledged that insufficient funding had been provided from Westminster and expressed concern that this issue had not been addressed within the motion. He indicated that failing to recognise this risked deflecting responsibility from those accountable for departmental underfunding, which was a matter of significance for Sinn Féin. He noted that the current funding model had been introduced in 2021 and brought to the Executive by a former Infrastructure Minister and expressed concern that such a review could lead to proposals for water charges or privatisation, reiterating Sinn Féin's clear opposition to water charges.
He emphasised that wastewater capacity constraints were not a new issue and had affected communities, developers and investors for many decades and acknowledged that the Department for Infrastructure faced significant pressures due to an inadequate budget, but stressed the importance of focusing on feasible, solution-based approaches and recognising progress already made, which was not reflected in the motion.

Councillor D Murphy stated that additional investment in wastewater infrastructure required adequate funding from the British Government and support across the Executive. He emphasised the need to lobby Westminster directly to address the core funding issue and expressed concern that the motion risked being perceived as political point-scoring rather than solution-focused.

Councillor D Murphy suggested the following amendments to the motion;

"This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; ***recognises that the north's Executive is chronically underfunded and is trying to deliver public services in the context of decades of British government austerity and underinvestment in critical infrastructure;*** *recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting",* ***welcomes the Minister for Infrastructure's innovate approach to these issues, particularly the announced increased capacity at Newry and Annsborough (Castlewellan) treatment facilities, and also welcomes her commitment to pursuing resolution to these issues.***

Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are blocking ***delaying*** *1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices.*

Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:

• 3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.

• 1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.

• Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.

• The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.

Council therefore agrees to take the following actions:

Write to the Communities Minister requesting that he outlines his plans for investment in housing across Newry, Mourne and Down

Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:

· confirms that the long term ***Outlines her plans for the*** *funding* ***of*** *required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided*

· *commission an independent review of NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office*

Invite the authors of the Newry Next report to attend a Special Council Meeting to interrogate the recommendations of the report and ascertain the necessary action required to realise this ambition.

Councillor Devlin proposed a recess. This was seconded Councillor Byrne.

The meeting did then recess – 8.20pm

The meeting did then resume – 8.48pm.

The following amendments to the motion were agreed, proposed by Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor D Murphy.

"This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; ***recognises that the Executive is chronically underfunded and is trying to deliver public services in the context of decades of British government austerity and underinvestment in critical infrastructure;*** *recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting",*
Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are ***delaying*** *1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices. Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:*
• 3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.

• 1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.
• Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.
• The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.
Council therefore agrees to take the following actions:
Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:
• ***Details her plans for the*** *funding* ***of*** *required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided*
• Request that the department regularly reviews NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office
Request that Newry Next provide a copy of their report "Newry Next building regional powerhouse by 2035 and this is tabled on the ERT agenda to ensure it is available."

Councillor Feehan accepted the amendments.

Councillor Taylor acknowledged that wastewater infrastructure was a significant issue in Northern Ireland and stated that it had developed into a crisis requiring strategic action. He highlighted that the impacts of underfunding were extensive, with construction delays constraining economic growth.

Councillor Reilly stated that he was broadly supportive of the motion but emphasised the importance of prioritising ordinary working-class residents within the district and referred to the number of properties being purchased by residents from the Republic of Ireland in the Newry area.

Councillor Feehan responded that focusing on the eventual occupancy of new-build properties was not relevant to the issue under discussion. He thanked Councillors D Murphy, Harte and Hanlon for their contributions and Members for their support for the motion.

The Chairperson declared the motion passed.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor D Murphy, it was agreed that "This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; recognises that the Executive is chronically underfunded and is trying to deliver public services in the context of decades of British government austerity and underinvestment in critical infrastructure; recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting", Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are delaying 1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been**

delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices.
Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:

- **3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.**
- **1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.**
- **Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.**
- **The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.**

Council therefore agrees to take the following actions:
Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:

- **Details her plans for the funding of required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided**
- **request that the department regularly reviews NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office**

Request that Newry Next provide a copy of their report ''Newry Next building regional powerhouse by 2035 and this is tabled on the ERT agenda to ensure it is available.

C/056/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - COLD WATER SWIMMING FACILITIES AT TYRELLA BEACH**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Lewis:

"This Council notes the growing popularity of cold water swimming across the district, including at Tyrella Beach, which provides a picturesque and accessible natural setting for such activity.

Council further notes the recognised physical and mental health benefits associated with cold water swimming, including improved circulation, reduced stress levels, enhanced mood, and its increasing use as a complementary activity promoted through health initiatives.

This Council acknowledges that a number of organised groups and individuals make regular use of Tyrella Beach throughout the year, including during the winter months, often without access to appropriate facilities.

Accordingly, this Council agrees to:
- Engage with local cold water swimming groups to assess current usage and demand
- Engage with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to explore any existing or potential health-led initiatives involving cold water swimming
- Assess the feasibility of opening existing shower and changing facilities at Tyrella Beach during the winter period
- Consider the introduction of a pilot scheme to provide such facilities, with a view to gauging demand, usage, and overall benefit
This Council further agrees that any such pilot should be reviewed following its implementation to inform future provision."

This was seconded by Councillor Bowsie.

Agreed: **The Motion was referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6**

C/057/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - INADEQUACY OF £17M FUND FOR NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSEHOLDS**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Kearns:

"This Council recognises the immense pressure being placed on workers, families and businesses as a result of huge price hikes on energy costs, especially home heating oil as a result of the US-Israeli war on Iran; notes that homes across Newry, Mourne and Down, like the rest of the North, are predominantly heated by home heating oil, making us much more vulnerable to price shocks; acknowledges that we are already in the midst of a cost of living crisis and workers, families and businesses here need real support; calls on the Communities Minister who has the responsibility for tackling fuel poverty to set up a scheme to get this money into the pockets of those who are struggling with heating costs."

This was seconded by Councillor Quinn.

Councillor Kearns stated that illegal US-Israel war on Iran had contributed to sharp increases in energy costs, placing additional pressure on workers, families and businesses during an ongoing cost-of-living crisis. She advised that fuel cost pressures had intensified across Ireland and that timely and meaningful intervention from both the British and Irish Governments was required, rather than delayed or partial measures.

She stated that responsibility for delivering substantial financial support in the North rested with the British Government, including the ability to reduce fuel taxation. She expressed concern that existing measures, including £17 million allocated for home-heating oil support, were insufficient to address the scale of need and would not materially reduce cost pressures on households and businesses.

Councillor Kearns highlighted that petrol, diesel and home-heating oil prices remained exceptionally high and were expected to increase further, stating that many households were struggling to cope with unaffordable energy costs. She concluded that decisive action was overdue and called for immediate support to protect communities from further financial hardship.

Councillor Quinn seconded the proposal and proposed the following amendment to the motion:

"That this Council further calls on the British government to end its inadequate and delayed response to the fuel crisis, and to act with the urgency that it demands to protect households, sustain local businesses, and safeguard our rural economy.
And to write to the British Secretary of State for the North and the Minister of State for Energy to clearly convey this Council's deep frustration at their failure to act, and to demand the immediate delivery of real, effective support for those struggling with rising energy crisis."

The amendment was accepted by Councillor Kearns

Councillor Quinn stated that rising energy, fuel and fertiliser costs had placed severe pressure on farmers, farming families and rural communities. She advised that these cost increases were compounding existing difficulties within the agricultural sector and were contributing to growing financial uncertainty for family farms, particularly in border areas such as South Armagh.

She highlighted significant increases in agricultural diesel and fertiliser costs and stated that farmers across the island were experiencing sustained pressures from multiple directions, noting that border communities were disproportionately affected by rising costs, which were impacting households, farms and small businesses, and referred to the challenges arising from decisions taken by both the British and Irish governments.

She called for urgent and meaningful intervention from the British Government to support local food production and sustain the agri-food sector, stating that existing responses were insufficient. She attributed the crisis to global instability and wider energy market disruption, noting that communities distant from those decisions were bearing the consequences.

In conclusion, Councillor Quinn stated that the ongoing pressures highlighted structural challenges, particularly for border communities, and called for a coordinated and unified response stating that the case for Irish unity had never been more relevant as a practical, common-sense solution. She stressed that Council should send a clear message of support for workers, families, farmers and small businesses and oppose any approach that left rural communities without adequate assistance.

Councillor Hanna stated that the DUP recognised the growing pressure on households, particularly within Newry, Mourne and Down, where high reliance on home-heating oil left families more exposed than elsewhere. He noted that approximately 82% of the district's population lived in rural areas and depended heavily on oil for domestic heating.

He advised that the £17 million allocated for home-heating oil support, equating to approximately £30 per household, did not represent meaningful assistance given the scale of the challenge. Councillor Hanna emphasised the need for clarity regarding responsibility, stating that energy policy and support schemes primarily lay with the Department for the Economy and that future measures required collective agreement and action across the Executive.

He emphasised that responsibility for energy policy primarily rested with the Department for the Economy and required coordinated action across the Executive. Reference was made to the role of the Department for Communities, with Councillor Hanna stating that Minister Gordon Lyons had previously delivered support within his remit and remained prepared to do so again. Concern was also expressed regarding the failure to distribute £81 million in energy support previously allocated by the UK Government.

Councillor Hanna stated that any support should reflect the pressures on working families as well as those in receipt of welfare and highlighted that key levers such as fuel duty and VAT rested with the UK Government. He concluded that meaningful increases in funding, urgent delivery mechanisms and coordinated action by both the Executive and the UK Government were required to provide effective relief.

Councillor Galbraith advised that households across Newry, Mourne and Down were experiencing significant pressure due to sharp increases in home-heating oil prices. He noted that price rises of up to 80% had been observed over a short period and highlighted that the impact was particularly acute in the North, where a majority of households relied on oil for heating, especially within a largely rural district.

Councillor Galbraith confirmed SDLP support for the motion but identified limitations in its current scope. He stated that an energy crisis of this scale required a coordinated Executive-wide response rather than action by a single department. While supporting the proposal to provide urgent financial assistance, he advised that the £17 million allocated for home-heating oil support was insufficient given the number of households affected and stressed the importance of targeting support at the most vulnerable and delivering it quickly. In conclusion, Councillor Galbraith stated that the Executive had tools at its disposal to act collectively and that stronger intervention was required to protect households.

Councillor Galbraith proposed that the following amendment be added to the motion:
"We propose that this Council writes to the First and Deputy First Ministers, the NI Executive and the UK Government to urgently establish a joint energy taskforce to address the following measures:

- *The urgent rollout of the £17 million home heating oil support scheme, including capacity for increased funding as autumn approaches;*
- *Emergency legislation to provide an increased range of energy support mechanisms for households most in need;*
- *Extension of UK rural fuel duty relief to rural parts of Northern Ireland;*
- *Fast-tracking the Warm Healthy Homes Fund;*
- *Exploring reduced public transport fares where appropriate;*
- *And targeted support for those workers who are particularly exposed to fuel costs."*

This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Councillor Kearns did not accept the amendment, stating that it let the British Government 'off the hook' and enabled them to shirk responsibility for people in the North.

Councillor Byrne disagreed and stated that issues such as rural fuel duty, additional support for workers most exposed to fuel costs and reducing transport costs required additional funding and were not being addressed at Assembly level. He advised that the amendment proposed by Councillor Galbraith sought to engage the British Government directly and hold it accountable in relation to these matters.

Councillor Byrne proposed a recess, seconded by Councillor Feehan.

The meeting did then recess – 9.19pm

The meeting did then resume – 9.24pm.

Councillor Kearns noted that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister had written to the British Prime Minister in the previous week, urging the introduction of a package of measures to address fuel costs in the region. She stated that this correspondence addressed the issues raised in the amendment proposed by Councillor Galbraith and, on that basis, confirmed that the amendment was not accepted.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	**11**
AGAINST:	**20**
ABSTENTIONS:	**6**

The Chairperson declared the proposal lost.

Councillor Taylor advised that the £17 million financial package represented limited recognition of the fuel cost crisis and was insufficient when set against the scale of fuel duty and VAT revenues collected by the UK Government. He stated that substantially more intervention was required.

He indicated that a targeted support scheme developed in partnership with the Executive would be appropriate for those most affected, but argued that, given the urgency, a universal approach would deliver faster and more effective support for working families.

He referred to the impact of rising transport costs on workers and businesses, noting that increased fuel prices would inevitably be passed on to consumers through higher costs for goods and services. Councillor Taylor highlighted that a significant proportion of fuel prices comprised taxation and stated that government intervention was required beyond existing duty freezes.

In conclusion, Councillor Taylor stated that fuel costs affected all communities regardless of political background and expressed disappointment that broader cross-community consensus had been undermined by constitutional commentary during the debate. He advised that a unified message would have strengthened advocacy on an issue impacting all residents and warned that cost pressures could worsen further in light of ongoing international developments.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	**31**
AGAINST:	**6**
ABSTENTIONS:	**0**

The Chairperson declared the amended motion passed.

Councillor Kearns thanked Members for their support.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Kearns, seconded by Councillor Quinn, it was agreed that "This Council recognises the immense pressure being placed on workers, families and businesses as a result of huge**

price hikes on energy costs, especially home heating oil as a result of the US-Israeli war on Iran; notes that homes across Newry, Mourne and Down, like the rest of the North, are predominantly heated by home heating oil, making us much more vulnerable to price shocks; acknowledges that we are already in the midst of a cost of living crisis and workers, families and businesses here need real support; calls on the Communities Minister who has the responsibility for tackling fuel poverty to set up a scheme to get this money into the pockets of those who are struggling with heating costs.
This council further calls on the British government to end its inadequate and delayed response to the fuel crisis, and to act with the urgency that it demands to protect households, sustain local businesses, and safeguard our rural economy.
And to write to the British Secretary of State for the North and the Minister of State for Energy to clearly convey this Council's deep frustration at their failure to act, and to demand the immediate delivery of real, effective support for those struggling with rising energy crisis."

C/058/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - LISLEA MEN'S SHED PROPOSED WILDFOWL & WILDLIFE PRESERVE AT CAMLOUGH LAKE**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Magennis:

"That this Council; Recognises the huge environmental, educational, and recreational potential of the Camlough Lake Wildfowl and Wetland Centre, as promoted by Lislea Men's Shed; Commends the Lislea Men's Shed group for their efforts so far, including the excellent Wildfowl and Wetlands Family Festival; acknowledges the Council's commitment to, "embedding sustainability across all its operations and providing leadership for the wider community"; recognises that Council's support for the project is both welcome and necessary, and innkeeping with its own sustainability goals; commits to working with Lislea Men's Shed and their partners, to deliver this project as a key environmental initiative, with educational, recreational and tourist potential and further commits to engaging with relevant funders, both internal and external, to see this project through to completion."

This was seconded by Councillor D Murphy.

Agreed: **The Motion was referred to the Sustainability and Environment Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6**

C/059/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - OPPOSING ASPIRATIONAL CLIMATE TARGETS**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Jackson:

"That this Council expresses deep concern that aspirational climate targets are impeding the delivery of high-quality public services and infrastructure that ratepayers deserve; notes that the provisions of the Climate Change Act 2022 have been found by the courts to obstruct the progression of A5 Road Upgrade, with far-reaching consequences for other major projects such as the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass; is alarmed, furthermore, that the current legal requirement for minimum spend on active travel perversely acts as a barrier to vital investment in roads maintenance and repairs; believes Council should conduct a cost-benefit analysis of all climate-related policies and funding streams; calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to withdraw the current draft Climate Action Plan, which contains a range of proposals that are not quantified and would place additional burdens on farmers and households during a cost-of-living crisis; and further calls on the Minister to urgently bring proposals to the Executive to amend the net zero by 2050 emissions target in Northern Ireland."
This was seconded by Councillor Hanna.

Councillor Taylor referred to a recent Audit Office report which highlighted concerns that targets contained within the Climate Change Bill set a very high bar. He stated that his Party recognised these targets were ambitious but believed they were becoming increasingly unrealistic. He referred to perceived failures in achieving energy targets and delivering major road infrastructure projects, which he stated were linked to climate targets, and argued that a review of those targets should be considered. Councillor Taylor stated that while Northern Ireland had a role to play in meeting wider UK climate ambitions, it should not be placed in a position where industries or communities were expected to pursue unachievable goals.

Speaking in opposition to the motion on behalf of his Party, Councillor Hearty stated that the motion did not relate to the A5, the A4, agriculture, ratepayers or the cost-of-living crisis, but represented what he described as a continuation of the DUP's opposition to climate action. He emphasised the importance of agriculture to Ireland's economy, culture and heritage and stated that climate action was essential to safeguarding farming for future generations.

Councillor Hearty referred to the Climate Change Risk Assessment, noting that it identified direct local risks arising from climate change, including increased wildfires, flooding, drought, coastal erosion, soil and water salinisation, threats to carbon sinks, and increased pests, diseases and invasive species. He stated that these impacts posed a greater risk to farming than environmental legislation.

He further stated that references to the A5 were misplaced, noting that the High Court ruling related to the absence of an operational carbon budget against which emissions could be assessed. He advised that this situation arose because the Assembly had collapsed shortly after the Climate Change Act was passed, preventing the implementation of key provisions such as carbon budgets and action plans.

Councillor Hearty stated that refusal to transition away from fossil fuels would exacerbate cost-of-living pressures due to exposure to volatile energy markets. While acknowledging that achieving net zero would be challenging, he argued that it would bring long-term benefits including energy security and greater price stability. He stated that while aspects of climate policy could be improved, abandoning net-zero ambitions would be environmentally damaging and short-sighted.

Councillor A King advised that the SDLP could not support the motion, stating that climate targets were not the issue, but rather the failure to deliver them. She argued that major infrastructure projects were not being delayed by climate legislation itself, including the Climate Change Act (2022), but by deficiencies in planning, compliance and delivery. She stated that the long-term economic, environmental and societal benefits of achieving net zero outweighed the costs and emphasised the need for a just transition supporting workers, farmers and households. She further stated that political instability and Executive collapse had done more to undermine progress than the existence of climate targets.

Councillor Truesdale stated that it was inappropriate to bring forward a politically charged motion relating to an active court case. She advised that DAERA had intervened to support DfI in its appeal of the A5 decision, specifically to clarify interpretation of the Climate Change Act. She stated that efforts should focus on accelerating delivery rather than reducing ambition and emphasised the importance of transitioning to locally produced clean energy to reduce household bills. She referred to recent international developments exposing households to rising energy costs and stated that climate action formed part of the response to the cost-of-living crisis. She also highlighted long-standing underinvestment in infrastructure and failure to implement the Barton Report as key barriers.

Councillor Reilly responded to Councillor Hearty, stating that he rejected the view that imposing additional costs on households and businesses in Northern Ireland would have any meaningful impact on global emissions. He expressed concern that climate measures risked inflicting disproportionate economic harm on local communities.

As there was dissent in the chamber the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	**6**
AGAINST:	**31**
ABSTENTIONS:	**0**

The Chairperson declared the proposal lost.

Agreed: **The Motion was lost.**

C/060/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - TOLLYMORE MOUNTAIN CENTRE**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Lawlor:

"This Council notes the ongoing review and current status of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre in Bryansford and recognises the significant concern within the local community and the wider outdoor recreation sector regarding its future. This Council recognises that Tollymore National Outdoor Centre is a world class facility in the heart of the Mournes, providing an essential public service in safety training and the development of mountain leadership. This service must be protected in the context of increasing visitor numbers to the Mournes, ensuring the safety of those using our natural environment. This Council resolves to write to the Chief Executive of Sport NI to reiterate its support for the reopening of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre at the earliest possible opportunity, alongside the development of a long-term, financially sustainable operating model which protects core education and training services while improving access for the local community. The Council will also request that the findings of the ongoing review, and any proposed operating

models, are shared with the Council to ensure alignment with local development and tourism strategies."

This was seconded by Councillor Clarke.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Lawlor stated that it was regrettable that the centre had remained closed for an extended period, particularly given the significant increase in visitor numbers to the Mourne Mountains. He highlighted the role of the centre in safety training and the development of mountain leadership, stating that its value should not be assessed solely on financial performance. He further advised that the centre had the potential to operate as a hub supporting the local community, the outdoor recreation sector and the wider regional economy, and could play a greater role within the Mournes in the future.

Councillor Clarke thanked Councillor Lawlor for bringing the motion forward and stated that the Tollymore Outdoor Centre was a strategically important regional asset, recognised across the island of Ireland as a centre of excellence for outdoor education, mountain leadership and safety training. He outlined the centre's role in developing instructors, teachers, youth leaders and mountain professionals, equipping them with the skills and confidence to manage and enjoy the natural environment safely.

He emphasised the significant growth in visitor numbers to the Mournes in recent years and stated that increased use of the area by walkers, climbers and cyclists reinforced the need for professional training and public safety education. Councillor Clarke advised that a financially sustainable operating model was required which protected core education and training services while improving access for local sports groups, community organisations and families. He confirmed that Sinn Féin supported the reopening of the centre at the earliest possible opportunity under a sustainable future model.

Councillor Devlin confirmed SDLP support for the motion and stated that the Tollymore Outdoor Centre was a vital asset both locally and nationally for those reliant on high-quality outdoor safety training. She advised that greater clarity and commitment regarding the centre's future were required and called on Sport NI to move beyond delay and reopen the facility as soon as possible with a long-term, sustainable operating model that protected its core function and enhanced community access.

Councillor Hanna advised that the DUP recognised the centre as a unique and strategically important facility supporting outdoor education, safety training and tourism. He stated that the Party understood the level of local concern regarding its closure and future direction and supported reopening the centre at the earliest opportunity. He emphasised that any future operating model must be financially sustainable and welcomed the ongoing review and proposed public consultation, stressing the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement. He further stated that Council should play a more proactive role in supporting the future of the centre.

Councillor Truesdale welcomed references within the motion to a long-term, financially sustainable operating model and the findings of the ongoing review. She referred to job losses arising from the centre's closure and to the loss of facilities previously available. Drawing on personal experience, she highlighted the value of the centre in promoting physical and mental wellbeing. Councillor Truesdale stated her Party's full support for the motion, emphasising that the centre should provide broad community access, support the local economy and continue to deliver high-quality training and qualifications.

Councillor Taylor confirmed support for the motion and highlighted the multiple benefits provided by the centre, including its contribution to tourism. He emphasised the importance of clearly demonstrating Council support and urged that certainty be provided urgently by Sport NI on a sustainable future operating model that protected the services previously offered.

With agreement from all the Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillors Ruane and Brennan left the meeting during the above discussion – 9.58pm and 22.03pm respectively.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Lawlor, seconded by Councillor Clarke, it was agreed that this Council notes the ongoing review and current status of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre in Bryansford and recognises the significant concern within the local community and the wider outdoor recreation sector regarding its future. This Council recognises that Tollymore National Outdoor Centre is a world class facility in the heart of the Mournes, providing an essential public service in safety training and the development of mountain leadership. This service must be protected in the context of increasing visitor numbers to the Mournes, ensuring the safety of those using our natural environment. This Council resolves to write to the Chief Executive of Sport NI to reiterate its support for the reopening of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre at the earliest possible opportunity, alongside the development of a long-term, financially sustainable operating model which protects core education and training services while improving access for the local community. The Council will also request that the findings of the ongoing review, and any proposed operating models, are shared with the Council to ensure alignment with local development and tourism strategies.**

C/061/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - ST PATRICKS DAY**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Campbell:

"This Council recognises the local, national and international significance of St Patrick's Day, and commits to establishing a dedicated working group comprising representatives from the community, voluntary and business sectors. The purpose of this group will be to enhance and develop existing St Patrick's Day events in Downpatrick and Newry, with a view to increasing economic opportunities and strengthening the district's tourism offering".

The Chairperson advised the Motion had been deferred.

Agreed: **The Motion was deferred.**

C/062/2026 **NOTICE OF MOTION - UNAUTHORISED USE OF OFF-ROAD VEHICLES ON COUNCIL-OWNED LAND**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Mathers:

"That this Council notes the ongoing and widespread community concern regarding the dangerous and unauthorised use of scramblers, quad bikes and other off road vehicles on Council owned land, open spaces, parks and public pathways; that our parks and public spaces are vital resources for the people of Newry, Mourne and Down, and should be protected, enhanced and kept safe for people; the increased risk these vehicles pose to members of the public, including children, older people, dog walkers and other users of shared public spaces; the sometimes considerable damage caused to green spaces and sports pitches by repeated off road vehicle activity and the negative effect this has on biodiversity and our local environment; that existing legislation which restricts the use of mechanically propelled vehicles on land without the landowner's permission.
This Council will proactively engage with police and the community to enforce this policy; audit all parks that are currently being used by these vehicles to ensure that entrance and exit points are properly secured and access to these sites are safe and pedestrian friendly.
Calls on the Council to develop and enforce an implementation plan in collaboration with the PSNI and local stakeholders, including:

- *Regular joint operations and patrols in hotspot areas.*
- *Clear reporting pathways for the public.*
- *Use of signage and all other appropriate deterrent measures."*

This was seconded by Councillor K Murphy.

Agreed: **The Motion was referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6**

C/063/2025 **EMERGENCY NOTICE OF MOTION – ESCALATING FUEL CRISIS**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Quinn:

"This Council calls on both the British and Irish governments to take urgent, coordinated action to protect workers, families and rural communities from the escalating fuel crisis."

Councillor Quinn withdrew the Motion on the basis of the Motion passed earlier on the agenda (C/057/2026).

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 10.06pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 5 May 2026.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026 **VENUE:** Downshire Civic Centre **MEETING:** Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received from Councillor Truesdale

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan	2			
P Byrne	3			
P Campbell	4			
W Clarke	5			
L Devlin	6			
C Enright	7			
K Feehan	8			
D Finn	9			
C Galbraith	10			
M Gibbons				1
O Hanlon	11			
G Hanna		2		
V Harte	12			
M Hearty	13			
R Howell	14			
T Howie	15			
J Jackson		3		
G Kearns	16			
A King	17			
C King	18			
M Larkin	19			
N Lawlor	20			
D Lee-Surginor				2
A Lewis		4		
O Magennis	21			
A Mathers	22			
D McAteer				3
D Murphy	23			
K Murphy	24			
S Murphy	25			
S O'Hare	26			
A Quinn	27			
H Reilly		5		
M Rice	28			
M Ruane	29			
D Taylor		6		
J Tinnelly	30			
J Truesdale	31			
H Young	32			
TOTALS	32	6		3

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026 **VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre** **MEETING: Council**

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received from Councillor Finn

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie			1	
J Brennan	2			
P Byrne	3			
P Campbell	4			
W Clarke	5			
L Devlin	6			
C Enright	7			
K Feehan	8			
D Finn	9			
C Galbraith	10			
M Gibbons				1
O Hanlon	11			
G Hanna			2	
V Harte	12			
M Hearty	13			
R Howell	14			
T Howie	15			
J Jackson			3	
G Kearns	16			
A King	17			
C King	18			
M Larkin	19			
N Lawlor	20			
D Lee-Surginor				2
A Lewis			4	
O Magennis	21			
A Mathers	22			
D McAteer				3
D Murphy	23			
K Murphy	24			
S Murphy	25			
S O'Hare	26			
A Quinn	27			
H Reilly			5	
M Rice	28			
M Ruane	29			
D Taylor			6	
J Tinnelly	30			
J Truesdale	31			
H Young	32			
TOTALS	32		6	3

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026 **VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre** **MEETING: Council**

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received from Councillor Rice

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan	2			
P Byrne	3			
P Campbell	4			
W Clarke	5			
L Devlin	6			
C Enright				1
K Feehan	7			
D Finn	8			
C Galbraith	9			
M Gibbons				2
O Hanlon	10			
G Hanna		2		
V Harte	11			
M Hearty	12			
R Howell	13			
T Howie		3		
J Jackson		4		
G Kearns	14			
A King	15			
C King	16			
M Larkin	17			
N Lawlor	18			
D Lee-Surginor				3
A Lewis		5		
O Magennis	19			
A Mathers	20			
D McAteer				4
D Murphy	21			
K Murphy	22			
S Murphy	23			
S O'Hare	24			
A Quinn	25			
H Reilly		6		
M Rice	26			
M Ruane	27			
D Taylor			1	
J Tinnelly	28			
J Truesdale		7		
H Young		8		
TOTALS	28	8	1	4

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026 **VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre** **MEETING: Council**

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Amendment to Councillor Kearn's motion by Councillor Galbraith

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie			1	
J Brennan		1		
P Byrne	2			
P Campbell		2		
W Clarke		3		
L Devlin	3			
C Enright				1
K Feehan	4			
D Finn	5			
C Galbraith	6			
M Gibbons				2
O Hanlon		4		
G Hanna			2	
V Harte		5		
M Hearty		6		
R Howell		7		
T Howie	7			
J Jackson			3	
G Kearns		8		
A King	8			
C King		9		
M Larkin		10		
N Lawlor		11		
D Lee-Surginor				3
A Lewis			4	
O Magennis		12		
A Mathers		13		
D McAteer				4
D Murphy		14		
K Murphy		15		
S Murphy		16		
S O'Hare		17		
A Quinn		18		
H Reilly			5	
M Rice		19		
M Ruane		20		
D Taylor			6	
J Tinnelly	9			
J Truesdale	10			
H Young	11			
TOTALS	11	20	6	4

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026 **VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre** **MEETING: Council**

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Councillor Kearn's motion

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan	2			
P Byrne	3			
P Campbell	4			
W Clarke	5			
L Devlin	6			
C Enright				1
K Feehan	7			
D Finn	8			
C Galbraith	9			
M Gibbons				2
O Hanlon	10			
G Hanna		2		
V Harte	11			
M Hearty	12			
R Howell	13			
T Howie	14			
J Jackson		3		
G Kearns	15			
A King	16			
C King	17			
M Larkin	18			
N Lawlor	19			
D Lee-Surginor				3
A Lewis		4		
O Magennis	20			
A Mathers	21			
D McAteer				4
D Murphy	22			
K Murphy	23			
S Murphy	24			
S O'Hare	25			
A Quinn	26			
H Reilly		5		
M Rice	27			
M Ruane	28			
D Taylor		6		
J Tinnelly	29			
J Truesdale	30			
H Young	31			
TOTALS	31	6	0	4

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026 **VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre** **MEETING: Council**

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received Councillor Jackson

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews		1		
C Bowsie	1			
J Brennan		2		
P Byrne		3		
P Campbell		4		
W Clarke		5		
L Devlin		6		
C Enright				1
K Feehan		7		
D Finn		8		
C Galbraith		9		
M Gibbons				2
O Hanlon		10		
G Hanna	2			
V Harte		11		
M Hearty		12		
R Howell		13		
T Howie		14		
J Jackson	3			
G Kearns		15		
A King		16		
C King		17		
M Larkin		18		
N Lawlor		19		
D Lee-Surginor				3
A Lewis	4			
O Magennis		20		
A Mathers		21		
D McAteer				4
D Murphy		22		
K Murphy		23		
S Murphy		24		
S O'Hare		25		
A Quinn		26		
H Reilly	5			
M Rice		27		
M Ruane		28		
D Taylor	6			
J Tinnelly		29		
J Truesdale		30		
H Young		31		
TOTALS	**6**	**31**	**0**	**4**

NEWRY MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on Monday 20 April 2026 at 6.00pm in Boardroom, Warrenpoint Town Hall

Chairperson: Councillor D Lee-Surginor

Committee Members
Councillor T Andrews
Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor G Hanna
Councillor G Kearns
Councillor S Murphy
Councillor M Ruane
Councillor K Feehan
Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor V Harte
Councillor A Lewis
Councillor A Quinn

Committee Members in attendance via Teams: Councillor W Clarke, Councillor H Young

Non-Committee Members In attendance: Councillor C Bowsie

Officials in attendance:
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth and Tourism
Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Regeneration
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

Officials in attendance via Teams: Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

ERT/032/2026 APOLOGIES / CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

There were no apologies.

The Chairperson advised that in an effort to be more transparent, many of the reports were tabled in open session while the appendices were in closed session. He asked that should Members have any questions regarding an appendix that they wait until the meeting was in closed session to raise any queries.

ERT/033/2026 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

ERT/034/2026 ACTION SHEET ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 9 MARCH 2026

Read: Action Sheet arising out of the Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 March 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

ERT/028/2026 – Tourism Events Programme 2026/27
Councillor Hanlon highlighted the local, national and international significance of St Patrick's Day and proposed the establishment of a dedicated Events Working Group, comprising representatives from the community, voluntary and business sectors to enhance and develop existing events, including St Patrick's Day celebrations across Newry, Mourne and Down District, with a view to increasing economic opportunities and strengthening the District's tourism offering.

Councillor Hanlon further proposed that Council write to the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA, seeking support for St Patrick's Day events across the District in 2027. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Harte.

The Chairperson confirmed that all Members were in agreement with the proposal.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet arising from the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 March 2026.**

It was also agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Harte to establish a dedicated Events Working Group, comprising representatives from the community, voluntary and business sectors to enhance and develop existing events, including St Patrick's Day celebrations across the Newry, Mourne and Down district, with a view to increasing economic opportunities and strengthening the district's tourism offering.

It was further agreed that Council write to Communities Minister Gordon Lyons MLA, seeking support for St Patrick's Day events across the district in 2027.

FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION

ERT/035/2026 **OFFICER REPORT ON NOTICE OF MOTION - NIGHT TIME ECONOMY IN DOWNPATRICK**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism regarding Night Time Economy in Downpatrick – C/039/2026. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Galbraith thanked officers for the work undertaken in preparing the report and acknowledged the significant consideration given to the issues and opportunities associated with Downpatrick's night-time economy. He stated that the motion sought to progress this work through the proposed appointment of a Night-Time Economy Champion to provide leadership, coordination and representation for the sector. He highlighted the importance of meaningful engagement with local businesses, including pubs, restaurants, cafés and venues, whose experience and insight were essential to future success.

Councillor Galbraith further indicated that Council should seek to meet with a delegation from Belfast City Council to learn from its experience in developing its night-time economy. He stated

that the overall aim was to develop a clear, realistic and deliverable action plan for Downpatrick. While acknowledging that regeneration of the night-time economy would present challenges and require sustained commitment, he stated that inaction was not an option. He welcomed the ongoing work towards Purple Flag accreditation and noted that the appointment of a Night-Time Economy Champion could play a key role in maintaining momentum and bringing stakeholders together.

Mrs Smyth outlined the report and advised that Section 3 set out the recommendations, namely to engage with the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group to host an engagement event with local businesses and relevant agencies, and to scope an action plan for the development of Downpatrick's night-time economy. She further advised that a second recommendation was for officers to engage with Belfast City Council to develop a proposal for a Purple Flag accreditation application.

Councillor Hanlon welcomed the sentiments of the motion but stated that her party believed it fell short of the vision and plans required for Downpatrick. She acknowledged the importance of the night-time economy but stated that a more holistic approach was required, including consideration of daytime footfall and overnight stays. She outlined the need to maximise opportunities to encourage visitors to visit Downpatrick, spend money locally and avail of the town's cultural, leisure and retail offer. She noted that while relevant frameworks were already in place, these initiatives required greater coordination rather than being addressed in isolation.

Councillor Hanlon proposed an amendment to include "consideration of all aspects of economic growth in Downpatrick, with a view to enhancing footfall and visitor experience and promoting Downpatrick as a positive place to visit, shop, dine and stay". This was seconded by Councillor Harte.

Councillor Galbraith did not accept the amendment, stating that while he supported the sentiments expressed, he believed that Downpatrick had been missing opportunities associated with the night-time economy for many years. Councillor Hanlon responded that her proposed amendment had enhanced the motion rather than detracted from it.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a show of hands vote, the results of which were as follows:

FOR:	**7**
AGAINST:	**3**
ABSTENTIONS:	**2**

The Chairperson declared the proposed amendment carried.

Councillor Feehan welcomed the motion and proposed an amendment "that Council host an engagement event with local businesses and relevant agencies in Newry to scope an action plan and pursue an application for Purple Flag accreditation for Newry".

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Andrews and was accepted by Councillor Galbraith.

Councillor Hanna proposed a further amendment that Council host an engagement event with local businesses and relevant agencies in Newcastle to scope an action plan and pursue an application for Purple Flag accreditation for Newcastle. This amendment was seconded by Councillor Lewis.

Councillor Galbraith did not accept the amendment.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a show of hands vote, the results of which were as follows:

FOR:	**11**
AGAINST:	**2**
ABSTENTIONS:	**1**

The Chairperson declared the proposed amendment carried.

Councillor Bowsie requested that Members respect motions when they were brought before Council. He stated that the motion related specifically to the night-time economy rather than the daytime economy, and that its original focus was Downpatrick rather than the wider district. He encouraged Members who wished to advocate for their own areas to bring forward motions accordingly.

Councillor Hanlon responded that any Councillor was entitled to propose an amendment to a motion.

In summing up, Councillor Galbraith stated that, notwithstanding the amendments and additions made to the motion, he was not opposed to daytime activity in Downpatrick but believed that the town had been underserved during the night-time for a considerable period. He expressed support for the motion proceeding and stated that he looked forward to the next steps.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Galbraith, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the following was agreed;**

- **To engage with Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group to host an engagement event with local businesses and relevant agencies to scope an action plan for the development of Downpatrick's nighttime economy, looking at all aspects of economic growth in Downpatrick to enhance foot flow and visitor experience and promote Downpatrick as a positive place to visit, shop, dine, and stay.**
- **Officers to engage with Belfast City Council to develop proposals for a Purple Flag accreditation application for Downpatrick, Newry and Newcastle.**
- **It was also agreed that the Council hosts an engagement event with local businesses and relevant agencies in Newry and Newcastle to scope an action plan for the development of their nighttime economy.**

ERT/036/2026 **LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism regarding PEACEPLUS Theme 1.1. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Smyth outlined the two recommendations contained within the report and confirmed that the business case had been approved through the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) Business Plan and by the Department for the Economy (DfE), which had provided 100% funding.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Ruane, it was agreed to note the action reports as outlined in Appendix 1 and approve the business case outlined in Appendix 2 contained within the officer's report.**

ERT/037/2026 **PAVEMENT CAFÉ POLICIES**

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism regarding Pavement Café Designation and Enforcement Policies. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr McGilly advised that the report reviewed the details of the policy and noted the inclusion of guidance received from the Department, as set out in paragraph 6.9 of the draft. He confirmed that the officer recommendation was to approve the draft policy.

In response to a question from Councillor Andrews regarding complaints about the regulations and their application, Mr McGilly confirmed that complaints received related to cafés that had not been licensed. He advised that no issues had been raised by businesses where the policy had been applied and that no enforcement cases had been brought forward.

Councillor Ruane expressed concern that the policy could give rise to conflict between Council and local businesses, emphasising the importance of engagement with businesses and a common-sense approach.

In response to a question regarding enforcement, Mr McGilly stated that guidelines were in place to ensure a balanced consideration of the needs of all users and to provide a mechanism for reaching agreement.

Councillor Hanna concurred with the concerns raised by Councillor Ruane, questioned the level of flexibility officers would apply, and highlighted the potential for varying interpretations of the policy by different officers.

Councillor Feehan also concurred with Councillor Ruane and stated that he would not wish to see conflict between Council and local businesses. He commented that the policy was comprehensive and queried whether it could be condensed into a factsheet for circulation to businesses, outlining what was permitted, encouraged and required to remain compliant.

Councillor Feehan added that outdoor eating and drinking enhanced the town centre experience and expressed hope that Council and local businesses could work in partnership.

Councillor Young concurred with Members' comments and highlighted the potential impact of pavement furniture on individuals with sight or mobility issues where recommended guidance was not followed. She asked whether Council could confirm that, in light of Equality Act requirements, it had a comprehensive understanding of how its grant and pavement licensing policies did not detrimentally affect blind and partially sighted people. She further queried the processes for measuring the impact of pavement café clutter on disabled people and whether compliance visits would be unannounced or subject to prior notice.

Mr McGilly responded that the policy review had taken account of lessons learned from experience to date. He confirmed that the policy had been equality screened and provided the guidance used by officers when assessing applications and monitoring compliance through site visits and ongoing engagement with applicants.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to consider and approve the Pavement Café Policies and the additional item '6.9 (b)The minimum footway width may need to be greater than 2 m in areas with medium/high pedestrian footfall. The Pedestrian Comfort Guide for London can be used as guidance to determine the clear footway width for recorded high pedestrian flows.**

ERT/038/2026 **PEACEPLUS THEME 1.1**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism regarding PEACEPLUS Theme 1.1. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Smyth noted that the report sought approval of a business case under the approved PEACEPLUS Action Plan and to note the minutes of the PEACEPLUS Partnership Board.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Ruane, it was agreed to note the minutes of PEACEPLUS Partnership on 26th March 2026 and approve the business case for procurement and delivery of the Social and Emotional Support Programme –intergenerational Music and Dance under Strand 2 of the Co-designed Local Action Plan.**

ERT/039/2026 **NI REGIONAL PLANNING IT SYSTEM**

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism regarding NI Regional Planning It System. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr McGilly outlined the report which recommends approval for the associated cost of the SLA Shared Service for the Planning System.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Kearns, it was agreed to approve the associated costs of the Shared Service for the Planning system.**

ERT/040/2026 **TEMPORARY ROAD CLOSURE POLICY**

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Economy,

Regeneration & Tourism regarding Temporary Road Closures on a Public Road for the Purposes of Holding a Special Event Policy. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr McGilly outlined the report and advised that the policy had been reviewed, with no changes recommended.

Councillor Andrews queried whether responsibility for placing advertisements in the local press could transfer from Council to applicants and whether an appeal process existed to overturn road closure decisions. Mr McGilly confirmed that the policy specified that Council was responsible for advertising road closure applications, that an appeal process was in place and that road closure decisions could be overturned.

In response to a query from Councillor Lewis regarding whether applicants for road closures could be advised to consider the potential impact on places of worship, noting that road closures had resulted in delays to services, Mr McGilly confirmed that this feedback would be shared with the relevant officers.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to consider and approve the Temporary Road Closures on a Public Road for the Purposes of Holding a Special Event Policy.**

In response to a suggestion from Councillor Hanna that Item ERT/042/2026 – Tha Hairtlan Festival 2026 be considered in open session, Mr Mallon advised that the item had previously been considered in closed session and that should remain the case as it contained information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person, including the Council.

Councillor Bowsie suggested that financial matters could be considered in closed session, with general discussion held in open session, as had occurred for other items. Mr Mallon responded that his advice remained unchanged that the item should be considered in closed session.

In response to a question from Councillor Bowsie regarding whether a vote could be taken to determine whether the item should be considered in open or closed session, Mr Mallon advised that Members of the Committee could make proposals in relation to this and highlighted that the agenda had been issued several days in advance and that no queries or concerns regarding the status of the item had been raised prior to the meeting.

ITEMS RESTRICTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on the following matters which related to exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Harte, it was agreed to come out of Closed Session.**

The Chairperson advised that the following had been agreed while in closed session.

ERT/041/2026 **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE CALL 1 TRANCHE 2 2026/27**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding Financial Assistance Call 1 – Tranche 2 – Revenue Themes. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Ruane, to issue Letters of Offer to projects as per Council Policy to the groups recommended for the award of funding within the budget allocation for each theme. Letters of Offer to successful applicants and notification to unsuccessful applicants will be issued in mid May 2026.**

It was also agreed that Pre-Letter of Offer conditions are to be met prior to issue of full Letter of Offer and where conditions are not satisfied, the budget will be re-allocated to score and rank list, if applicable.

It was further agreed to open a Financial Assistance Revenue Call (Call 2) mid-May 2026 for 4 weeks for the following themes: Good Relations, PCSP and Community Events & Festivals.

It was agreed to move two applications for assessment from summer scheme theme into Sports programme theme.

ERT/042/2026 **THA HAIRTLAN FESTIVAL 2026**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding Tha Hairtlan Festival 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanna, seconded by Councillor Lewis, to support the new outreach and programmes proposed for Tha Hairtlan Festival in 2026 as set out in Section 2.1 of the officer's report.**

It was also agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanna, seconded by Councillor Lewis, to allocate 20% of the total event cost towards delivery of the

event to include all the activities set out in appendix 2 of the officers' report.

ERT/043/2026 **RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2026-27**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding Rural Business Development Scheme 2026-27. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, to approve the delivery of the Rural Business Development Scheme for the 2026/2027 year, subject to DAERA Business Case approval.**

FOR NOTING

ERT/044/2026 **BT STREETS HUB PROPOSAL**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding Proposal for Replacement of Legacy BT Telephone Box with BT Street Hubs in NMDDC. **(Copy circulated)**

In response to a query from Councillor Andrews regarding timescales for rollout and whether there were plans to extend the hubs to other areas within the District, Mr Mallon confirmed that the hubs were being delivered by the private sector. He added that Council was supportive of the initiative and would encourage the private sector to engage with Council on rolling out the hubs in other areas.

Councillor Lewis commented that the hubs appeared to be quite large and queried whether there were plans for BT to consult on their design. Mr Mallon advised that this would be managed through the planning process, with public consultation providing opportunities for representations to be made in respect of submitted applications.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to note the proposal and current planning applications submitted by Global and BT and that all installations are subject to the appropriate planning approvals. It was also agreed to note the strategic benefits of the proposal, including enhancing digital infrastructure, promoting digital inclusion, and town centre regeneration across the district. It was further agreed to support continued engagement with Global and BT to explore opportunities for Council use, particularly in relation to civic messaging and data sharing insights.**

ERT/045/2026 **CASTLEWELLAN SMART FOREST**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding SMART Forest Castlewellan. **(Copy circulated)**

In response to a query from Councillor Lewis, Mr Mallon advised that a Smart Forest referred to the use of technology to remotely record and monitor data, including air quality, water quality, visitor numbers and trends.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to note the update provided on the Castlewellan Smart Forest Project.**

ERT/046/2026 **ERT SCHEME OF DELEGATION APR 25-MAR 26**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding ERT Scheme Of Delegation Apr 25-Mar 26. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to note the document.**

ERT/047/2026 **INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS NI (IOD NI) INFRASTRUCTURE REPORT LAUNCH**

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding Institute Of Directors NI (IOD NI) Infrastructure Report Launch **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to note the recent launch of a report and its recommendations, "Getting Infrastructure and Investment Back on Track".**

ERT/048/2026 **BUILDING CONTROL 6 X MONTHLY REPORT**

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism regarding 6 Monthly Building Control Report. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to note the report.**

ERT/049/2026 **LICENSING 6 X MONTHLY REPORT**

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism regarding Licensing 6 Monthly Report. . **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to note the report.**

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 7.23pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 5 May 2026

Signed: **Councillor D Lee-Surginor**
Chairperson
Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee

_____

Signed: **Conor Mallon**
Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism

_____

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 23 April 2026 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre

In the Chair: Councillor O Hanlon

In Attendance in Chamber:

Councillor P Byrne
Councillor T Howie
Councillor A Lewis
Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor M Rice
Councillor M Hearty
Councillor A King
Councillor A Mathers
Councillor H Reilly

Committee Members in Attendance via Teams: Councillor D Taylor

Officials in Attendance in Chamber:

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism
Ms S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities
Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director of Capital Projects & Procurement
Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director Healthy Living
Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of People & Legal
Mr C Sage, Assistant Director Sustainability
Ms M Hughes, HR & OD Manager
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

SPR/045/2026: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSONS REMARKS

An apology was received from Councillor McAteer

The Chairperson advised that in an effort to be more transparent, many of the reports were tabled in open session while the appendices were in closed session. She asked that should Members have any questions regarding an appendix that they wait until the meeting was in closed session to raise any queries.

Councillor Hanlon extended condolences on behalf of Council to Councillor Tinnelly on the very sad and untimely passing of his daughter, Aoife. She stated that the thoughts and prayers of the Council community were with him and his family at that difficult time.

She also extended sincere sympathies to Councillor McAteer on the recent loss of his father.

SPR/046/2026: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rice declared an interest in Item 10 – Kilkeel Town Hall.

SPR/047/2026: **ACTION SHEET OF STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2026**

Read: Action Sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting held 12 March 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the action sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 12 March 2026.**

FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION

SPR/048/2026: **ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER**

Read: Report from Mrs M ward, Chief Executive, regarding Elected Member Development Charter. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Taggart noted that the report was taken as read and outlined that Council had originally committed to the charter in 2016 with cross-party support, led by the Elected Member Development Steering Group. She explained that the accreditation had since lapsed and efforts to re-establish the steering group had been unsuccessful. She confirmed that party leaders had considered the matter and agreed that it was not the appropriate time to pursue reattainment, highlighting that the framework was structured, resource-intensive, and not best suited to members' immediate needs.

Ms Taggart advised that the focus would instead focus on developing a flexible and responsive Elected Member Training Plan tailored to current and future challenges, while not ruling out potential reattainment of the charter in the future.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne seconded by Councillor C King, the following was agreed:**

- **That Council does not proceed with reattainment of the Member Development Charter at this time.**
- **That officers develop and bring forward an Elected Member Training and Development Plan, tailored to the current and future needs of Councillors, with the plan being presented to a future SP&R Committee for consideration and approval.**

SPR/049/2026: **EXPRESSION OF INTEREST – WARRENPOINT SQUARE RETAIL UNIT 2**

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Expression of Interest – Warrenpoint Square Retail Unit 2. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Sage outlined the report which sought approval to proceed to undertake an expression of interest for the lease of the retail unit situated at unit 2 of Warrenpoint Square.

In proposing the report, Councillor Mathers noted his delight at seeing this movement as the unit had been lying vacant for some time.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to proceed with an expression of interest for the lease of retail unit 2 at Warrenpoint Square public toilet block.**

SPR/050/2026: **EMERGENCY WORKS – CANAL BANK CAR PARKS, NEWRY**

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Emergency Works – canal Bank Car Parks, Newry. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Sage outlined the report, which aimed to update and inform Members of the emergency appointment of a contractor to carry out repair works at Canal Bank 2 and 3 car parks in Newry. He explained that a section of the retaining wall, along with part of the car park at Canal Bank 3, had subsided into the Newry River on Easter Sunday, 5 April 2026, and that due to the associated safety risks, the Chief Executive, in consultation with party leaders, had determined that it was necessary undertake emergency measures to immediately appoint a contractor to make the area safe.

In proposing the report, Councillor Mathers queried whether any consideration had been given to the volume of traffic on the stretch of road and any potential further damage that could arise in another adjacent section of the wall.

Mr Sage advised that as part of the repair works, traffic management would be required given the high volume of traffic in the area. He confirmed that there was currently no evidence of further damage as advised by the current contractor who had assessed the area and was completing a design package for repair.

Councillor Mathers noted that the original damage was not obvious until it was too late and queried how safe the wall was along the full stretch of the river.

Mr Mallon advised that when the damage had been noted, the car park had been immediately closed with safety fencing being set well back from the damage and would be in place until the design solution had been completed. Regarding any repair work, he advised that a design team had been engaged to consider short-, medium- and long-term solutions for repair and had hopes these would be completed in the coming days to have a finalised cost estimate. He also confirmed that Council had reached out to both DFI Rivers and Translink to discuss how risks and structural integrity could be assessed collaboratively, alongside the sharing of any information regarding surveys and inspections on the relevant sections of wall under each Department's ownership.

Councillor Taylor noted his concern regarding further potential damage, and asked Council to impress on the relevant authorities to work collaboratively to establish and confirm difficulties as a matter of urgency.

Councillor Reilly stated that he was impressed at the speed at which Council could work in Newry but expressed his disappointment that he believed no action had been taken regarding Annalong Harbour or Cranfield Beach, which he stated he had raised on numerous occasions.

Councillor Hanlon advised Councillor Reilly that his issue was potentially something that he could address with the relevant officers following the meeting.

Councillor Byrne thanked and congratulated officers for the speed at which they actioned the emergency, and commended Council for their response when any emergency situation arose.

Mrs Ward stated that the reason for the quick movement was the issue had arisen on a busy thoroughfare, adjacent to the main transport hub for Newry and quick action was needed given the potential health and safety risks. She confirmed that Council had discussed Cranfield and Annalong Harbour and appreciated that any response may seem slow but confirmed that they had been discussed on a number of occasions and would be considered again as Council looked to budget setting for the new financial year.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Reilly, it was agreed to approve the appointment of a contractor to carry out emergency repair works at Canal Bank 2 and 3 car parks in Newry.**

SPR/051/2026: **DOWNPATRICK REGENERATION**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding Downpatrick Regeneration. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Mallon outlined the report, which detailed projects put forward for consideration by the Downpatrick Regeneration Working Group (DRWG), which had arisen from the living high streets that had been piloted several years ago. He confirmed the report detailed designs for Dunleath and The Grove regeneration projects, alongside a proposal to allocate funding to the regeneration of Irish Street in partnership with the Department for Communities (DfC).

Councillor Hanlon welcomed the report and the proposals as outlined by Councillor Campbell initially at DRWG. She proposed that Council sought assurance from the Department that they were as committed to the Irish Street proposal as Council were, should the Committee approve the proposed funding. This was seconded by Councillor Mathers.

Councillor A King welcomed the proposals, especially the Irish Street Project which would reconnect Irish Street with the wider town and would enhance both daytime and evening economic activity within the town.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed to approve the following:**

- **The allocation of funding and the appointment of the technical support to assist with the delivery of the Grove Peace Plus Project in Downpatrick as set out in Appendix 1.**
- **The allocation of funding and appointment of the technical support to assist with the delivery of the project to link the skate park and Dunleath Park in Downpatrick as set out in Appendix 1.**

- **The allocation of funding to the Irish Street project in Downpatrick as set out in Appendix 1, and the procurement for the Irish Street development, subject to approval from Dept for Communities.**

It was also agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Mathers, that Council seek assurance from the Department for Communities that they are committed to the Irish Street project given the level of funding that Council has agreed to spend.

SPR/052/2026: **BRCD TOURISM PROJECT – OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding BRCD Tourism Project – Outline Business Case. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Mallon outlined that the report provided background on the BRCD journey undertaken since August, during which Members had been engaged in developing concepts to deliver against the BRCD objectives. He noted that three elected member workshops had been held in September, November, and January, facilitated by a tourism consultant, with concept proposals presented in March 2025 and confirmed that officials had also engaged with BRCD partners and the Tourism NI Board, with proposals receiving a positive response. He confirmed that approval had been secured from the BRCD Executive Board to progress to Outline Business Case (OBC) stage, alongside confirmation of support from Tourism NI.

Mr Mallon advised that officials had since engaged a multidisciplinary team of specialists, including various technical and professional disciplines, to help develop robust conceptual design proposals informed by masterplan information, project objectives, and budget constraints and confirmed that the report sought Committee approval for the appointment of a multidisciplinary team to deliver the OBC for the BRCD tourism project.

In proposing the report, Councillor Rice stated that the appointment of a multidisciplinary team represented a positive step forward for the district, signalling momentum in delivering high-quality tourism with long-term economic and social benefits. He highlighted the redevelopment potential of areas such as Kilbroney Forest Park and agreed that specialist expertise was needed to shape a sustainable vision that enhanced natural assets while creating opportunities for visitors, local businesses, and the wider community.

Councillor Rice noted that the proposed investment in the district had the potential to boost tourism, support job creation, and improve long-underfunded areas. He also referenced the opportunity to link the BRCD project with the Narrow Water Bridge to enhance north–south tourism and unlock wider economic benefits and further stressed the importance of retaining BRCD funding within the district and stated that he looked forward to monitoring the development of the proposals through the next stages.

Councillor Reilly noted his concern regarding the cost of the OBC and queried whether Council knew for certain that the scheme would be accepted by both BRCD and Tourism NI.

Mrs Ward advised that all propositions had to progress through phases of development, from concept proposal and OBC stage, and stressed that as noted in the report, all partners were content with the strategy as presented and were content to proceed straight to OBC.

Councillor Reilly stated that if the relevant partners were content then he was content to second the proposal but expressed his hope that he did not regret his support.

Councillor Byrne stated that Council needed to take every possible action to retain the BRCD funding within the District and stated that the proposal was a good project following Council having launched its tourism brand. He acknowledged Councillor Reilly's point and stated that in order to secure the funding that the OBC needed to be as strong a submission as possible and therefore needed full support across the Council Chamber. He queried whether the BRCD funding was still time bound, whether Council would have the latest project start date and whether this would have any implications for the funding.

Mrs Ward advised that timeframes had been discussed with all partners, and while Council's submission could potentially be behind on the OBC stage, it was hoped that the OBC would be complete by the end of the calendar year and then enter the approval process. She highlighted that BRCD partners had given approval to bypass the strategic outline case and proceed straight to OBC stage.

Councillor Byrne queried the process regarding the OBC, and how Members could have an input on this.

Mrs Ward advised that should approval be granted for the OBC that Council's intention was to establish a new programme board of Councillors to ensure that Members were on the journey to complete the OBC, alongside relevant stakeholders.

Councillor Howie noted her Party's support of the project, in principle, but stressed her concern about costs given Council had previously cost public money not knowing all the facts.

Mrs Ward confirmed that Council did not lose public money due to not knowing all the facts and stressed rather that Council had worked through the appropriate governance process with all facts fully declared and agreed by Members at every stage. She stated that if Council wanted to deliver on this plan, then the Council chamber had to get behind it and reiterated that full engagement at programme board level would be constructive.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor Reilly, it was agreed to approve the appointment of a multidisciplinary team to deliver the Outline Business Case for the BRCD Tourism project at the fee estimate as set out in Appendix 1. It was also agreed to note the draft press release at Appendix 2.**

ITEMS RESTRICTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor A King, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on the following matters which related**

to exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.**

The Chairperson advised the following had been agreed whilst in closed session:

SPR/053/2026: **DUNDRUM PITCHES**

Read: Report from Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities, regarding Dundrum Pitches. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Lewis, the following was agreed:**

- **To utilise the required capital budget for essential works to Dundrum football pitches.**
- **To approve the business case for the works and appointment of a contractor following a competitive tendering process in line with Council's Procurement Policy.**

Having previously declared an interest, Cllr Rice left the meeting for discussion on the following item – 6.34pm

SPR/054/2026: **KILKEEL TOWN HALL**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding Kilkeel Town Hall. **(Copy circulated)**

As there was dissent in the Chamber, the item was put to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows:

FOR	**9**
AGAINST	**3**
ABSTENTION	**0**

Cllr Rice was not present for the vote, having previously declared an interest.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to continue the open market process to achieve the best price.**

Cllr Rice rejoined the meeting at this stage – 7.06pm
Cllr Reilly left the meeting at this stage – 7.06pm

SPR/055/2026: **REQUEST FOR EASEMENT AT THE BANKS RECREATION AREA, DUNDRUM**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of Legal and People, regarding Request for Easement at the Banks Recreation Area, Dundrum. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to grant an Easement for a foul sewer pipe under that portion of Council facility known as The Banks Recreation Area, Dundrum as show by a red dashed line on the map attached to the report, to the party named in this report for nil consideration, subject to Departmental Consent.**

SPR/056/2026: **DEED OF DEDICATION FOR NEWRY CITY PARK**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of Legal and People, regarding Deed for Dedication for Newry City Park. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to the signing and sealing of the Deed of Dedication as a necessary requirement of the Contract for Funding for Newry City Park with the Department for Communities.**

SPR/057/2026: **NCCR THEATRE CONFERENCE REVIEW**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding NCCR Theatre Conference Review. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to approve the procurement of a specialist advisor to support Council in the development of the preferred operating model**

SPR/058/2026: **CASTLEWELLAN FOREST PARK NLHF PROJECT**

Read: Report from Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director of Capital Projects & Procurement. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to approve the allocation of additional capital funding as detailed in sections 1.1, 2.2 and 4.1 of the officer's report. It was also agreed that a paper**

be brought to the next Committee Meeting outlining the compensation events and the reporting structures for the project. It was further agreed that minutes and action sheets of the project are tabled going forward at Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meetings.

SPR/059/2026: **STRATEGIC CAPITAL PROJECTS DIRECTOR**

Read: Report from Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive, regarding Strategic Capital Projects Manager. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve the appointment of a Strategic Capital Projects Director as detailed within the officer's report.**

SPR/060/2026: **WASTE MANAGEMENT RESOURCES**

Read: Report from Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment, regarding Waste Management Resources. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor A King, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to approve the recommendations outlined in sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 of the officer's report to engage in waste, infrastructure and data specialists to assess current Waste Collection and Recycling Services and make recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency as required by the Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (pEPR) regulations with resource requirement outlined at section 4.1 of the report.**

SPR/061/2026: **SOLACE POLICY OFFICER POST**

Read: Report from Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive, regarding SOLACE Policy Officer Post. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to approve, under the Chief Executive Structure, the creation of an additional post and associated recruitment for one full time equivalent staff resource, funded through SOLACE NI contributions by all 11 Councils.**

FOR NOTING - ITEMS RESTRICTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

SPR/062/2026: **HILLTOWN HRC LEASE**

Read: Report from Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment, regarding Hilltown HRC Lease. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Rice, it was agreed to note the contents of the report.**

SPR/063/2026: **MINUTES OF THE NEWRY CITY CENTRE REGENERATION PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING HELD FRIDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2026**

Read: Minutes of the Newry City Centre Regeneration Programme Board Meeting held Friday 6 February 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Rice, it was agreed to note the minutes.**

SPR/064/2026: **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding Financial Assistance Funding. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Rice, it was agreed to note the shortfall in the funding available for successful applications under Financial Assistance Call 1 – Revenue.**

It was also agreed that officers look at measures to address the shortfall to ensure all successful applicants are awarded funding with a paper for noting being tabled at the next Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting.

FOR NOTING

SPR/065/2026: **MINUTES OF MOURNE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY PROJECT MEETING HELD 2 APRIL 2026**

Read: Minutes of Mourne Mountain Gateway Project Meeting held 2 April 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to note the minutes.**

SPR/066/2026: **STATUTORY REPORTING – SECTION 75 POLICY SCREENING REPORT – QUARTERLY REPORT FOR PERIOD JANUARY 2026 – MARCH 2026.**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Statutory Reporting – Section 75 Policy Screening Report – Quarterly Report for Period January – March 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to note the Section 75 Policy Screening Report – Quarterly Report for period January – March 2026.**

SPR/067/2026: **CORRESPONDENCE FROM MINISTER KIMMINS MLA REGARDING WATER CONNECTIONS**

Read: Correspondence from Minister Kimmins MLA regarding Water Connections. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to note the correspondence.**

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 7.54pm

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 5 May 2026.

Signed: _____
Councillor Oonagh Hanlon
Chairperson

Signed: _____
Marie Ward
Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 23/04/2026 VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre MEETING: SPR Committee

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Proposal from Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor Byrne to continue the open market process to achieve the best price.

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
P Byrne	1			
C Enright				1
O Hanlon	2			
M Hearty	3			
R Howell	4			
T Howie	5			
A King	6			
C King	7			
A Lewis		1		
A Mathers	8			
D McAteer				2
S O'Hare	9			
H Reilly		2		
M Rice				3
D Taylor		3		
TOTALS	**9**	**3**		**3**

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ref: AHC/2026

Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on Monday 27 April 2026 at 6.00pm in the Council Chambers, Downshire Civic Centre

Chairperson: Councillor C Bowsie

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor C Galbraith	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor A King	Councillor Lee-Surginor
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor K Murphy

Committee Members in attendance via Teams:

Councillor J Brennan	Councillor D Finn
Councillor M Gibbons	Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor J Truesdale

Officials in Chamber:
Mr A Patterson, Director, Active and Healthy Communities
Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director, Healthy Living
Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director, Community Development
Ms D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

Non-Committee Members in Chamber: Councillor T Andrews

AHC/025/2026: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Howell and D Murphy.

On behalf of himself and Councillor Galbraith, the Chairperson extended congratulations to Leo Laverty from Star of the Sea Boxing Club, Killough on becoming a two-time All-Ireland Champion and commended him on an incredible achievement.

AHC/026/2026: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

AHC/027/2026: ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM ACTIVE & HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 MARCH 2026

Read: Action sheet of the Active & Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on Monday 16 March 2026. **(Copy circulated)**.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on Monday 16 March 2026.**

AHC/028/2026: DISTRICT ELECTORAL AREA (DEA) FORUM UPDATE

Read: Report from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director: Community Development, regarding District Electoral Area (DEA) Forums Update. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Truesdale requested an update on works for Donard Park. She also enquired that given a recent incident if additional security was to be examined for the gates in and out of Donard Park and asked for an update on opening hours.

Mr Haughey advised that regarding works to bollards in Donard Park, as agreed with local residents and the commercial businesses, this was currently progressing through the procurement process and it was hoped that this would be concluded in the coming weeks.

In referring to the recent incident Mr Haughey confirmed officers were examining the vandalism that took place and what repairs were required. He added there would be no change to the opening and closing times as per the consultation with the public.

Councillor Truesdale thanked the officer for the update.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed to note the report and approve the actions in the action sheets attached for:**

- **Slieve Gullion Forum Meeting held on 3 March 2026**
- **Newry DEA Forum Meeting held on 19 March 2026**
- **Mournes DEA Forum Meeting held on 24 March 2026**

ITEMS RESTRICTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on the following items, which related to exempt information by virtue of para. 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 - information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding**

that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.**

The Chairperson advised the following had been agreed whilst in closed session:

AHC/029/2026: **2026/27 COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAMME**

Read: Report from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director of Community Development, regarding the Community Support Programme for 2026/27. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to proceed with the Community Support Programme as set out within the officer's report.**

FOR NOTING

AHC/030/2026: **POLICING & COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (PCSP) & NEWRY NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL PARTNERSHIP (NRP) UPDATES**

Read: Report from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director Community Development, regarding Policing and Community Safety Partnership and Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to note the contents of the report and to note the following:**

- **Minutes of the Newry Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership (NRP) Meeting held on 18 February 2026 and approved at the NRP Meeting on 25 March 2026.**
- **Minutes of the Policing Committee & PCSP Meeting held on 3 February 2026, approved at the Policing Committee & PCSP Meeting on 31 March 2026.**

AHC/031/2026: **SOCIAL INCLUSION UPDATE**

Read: Report from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director Community Development, regarding an update on Social Inclusion. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to note the officer's report.**

Mrs Robb took the opportunity to advise Members the Financial Assistance Call 2 was currently open for Sports Facility and Community Capital (Major and Minor).

Members were asked to encourage groups to apply and attend the relevant workshops and if there were any issues to directly contact Mrs Robb and Mr Haughey's teams.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 6.13pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 5 May 2026.

Signed: _____
Councillor C Bowsie
Chairperson

Signed: _____
Andrew Patterson
Director Active and Healthy Communities

Report to:	Council
Date of Meeting:	5 May 2026
Subject:	Correspondence to Council
Reporting Officer (Including Job Title):	Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Contact Officer (Including Job Title):	Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager

Confirm how this Report should be treated by placing an x in either:-

For decision	**x**	**For noting only**	

1.0	**Purpose and Background**
1.1	To provide an update on correspondence received for attention of Council.
2.0	**Key issues**
2.1	This paper refers to correspondence to be brought to the attention of Council. Items are referred to in 3.0 below.
3.0	**Recommendations**
	That Council considers and notes the following correspondence:
3.1	**Correspondence from DAERA Minister Muir MLA** Council received correspondence from DAERA Minister Muir MLA re NOM Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill (C/054/2026).
4.0	**Resource implications**
4.1	Not applicable.
5.0	**Due regard to equality of opportunity and regard to good relations (complete the relevant sections)**
5.1	***General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes*** It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations ☒
5.2	***Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision*** Yes ☐ No ☒ If yes, please complete the following:

	The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) has been equality screened	☐
	The policy (strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or decision) will be subject to equality screening prior to implementation	☐
5.3	***Proposal initiating consultation***	
	Consultation will seek the views of those directly affected by the proposal, address barriers for particular Section 75 equality categories to participate and allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves	☐
	Consultation period will be 12 weeks	☐
	Consultation period will be less than 12 weeks (rationale to be provided)	☐
	Rationale:	
6.0	**Due regard to Rural Needs (please tick all that apply)**	
6.1	Proposal relates to developing, adopting, implementing or revising a policy / strategy / plan / designing and/or delivering a public service Yes ☐ No ☒	
	If yes, please complete the following:	
	Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed	☐
	If no, please complete the following:	
	The policy / strategy / plan / public service is not influenced by rural needs	☐
7.0	**Appendices**	
8.0	**Background Documents**	
	None	

From the Office of the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe
Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

DAERA Private Office
First Floor, Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Sydenham Intake
Belfast, BT3 9ED
Telephone: 028 9052 4140
Email: private.office@daera-ni.gov.uk

Marie Ward
democratic.services@nmandd.org

Our Ref: COR-0276-2026
Date: 30 April 2026

Dear Marie,

NOTICE OF MOTION – AREAS WITH NATURAL CONSTRAINTS (PAYMENTS) BILL

I am writing in response to your correspondence of 21 April 2026, on behalf of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, in relation to your call for all parties, and myself, to support and progress the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill without delay. We are aware that your correspondence was additionally sent to TEO, and I am also replying on their behalf.

As you are aware, Declan McAleer MLA brought forward the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill to the Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly which completed its second stage reading on 23 March 2026. This Private Members Bill (PMB) is calling for the restoration of Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) payments based at the minimum of the previous ANC Scheme in 2018.

Should this PMB receive royal assent, it will create a legal requirement on my Department to establish a new ANC Scheme. Based on 2018 rates and the 2025 Retail Price Index, this represents an additional budgetary pressure of approximately £11.4m for the first year of a new Scheme.

This PMB is now at the Committee consideration stage, where it will undergo scrutiny by the Northern Ireland Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs committee. The Committee will take evidence from stakeholders and undertake a detailed examination of the Bill's provisions and consider proposed changes before it moves to the next stages of the legislative process.

My Department has considered the previous ANC scheme and the level of value for money it offered. A Ministerial Direction was required to provide this scheme as it did not

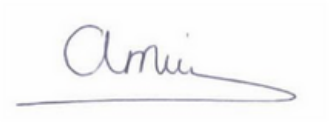
meet the Value for Money requirements of Managing Public Money. In light of this evidence, my Department has focused on other ways to support farm businesses in ANCs through its Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP), which includes the Farm Sustainability Payment (FSP), the Beef Sustainability Package, the Suckler Cow Scheme, and the Farming with Nature Package. Work has also commenced in conjunction with stakeholders to explore the need for sheep sector support as part of the SAP.

Whilst I welcome the opportunity to engage in the next stage of the PMB, I am concerned that there is no provision for this additional expenditure in the Finance Minister's Draft Budget 2026/27-2029/30 for a new ANC Scheme. We currently face grave public expenditure challenges with the Executive budget for 2025/26 also substantially overspent.

As it stands, the consequence of introducing an ANC scheme would be additional demand on the Executive Earmarked budget for agriculture, agri-environment and rural affairs and will likely result in a scaleback in the value of the Farm Sustainability Payment (FSP) for all claimants, including farmers in the ANCs.

I would encourage all farm businesses, including those in the ANC to fully engage in the schemes within the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, availing of their productivity and environmental benefits and delivering better outcomes for society in Northern Ireland from public expenditure.

Yours sincerely



ANDREW MUIR MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs