



October 6th, 2025

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the Council meeting to be held on **Monday, 6th October 2025** at **6:00 pm** in **Council Chamber, 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 1 September 2025

 [Action Sheet 2025 09 01.pdf](#)

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Council Minutes For Adoption and Signing

4.0 Minutes of Council Meeting held on 1 September 2025

 [Council Minutes 2025 09 01.pdf](#)

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5.0 Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 26 August 2025

 [Special Council Minutes - 2025-08-26.pdf](#)

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6.0 Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 22 September 2025

 [Special Council Minutes - 2025-09-22.pdf](#)

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Committee Minutes for Consideration and Adoption

7.0 Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 8 September 2025

 [Economy Regeneration and Tourism Minutes 2025-09-08.pdf](#)

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8.0 Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 September 2025

 [Strategy Policy & Resources Committee Meeting Minutes 2025-09-11.pdf](#)

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9.0 Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 15 September 2025

 [Active and Healthy Communities Minutes 2025 09 15.pdf](#)

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10.0 Minutes of Sustainability & Environment Committee Meeting held on 16 September 2025

 Sustainability_and_Environment_Committee_Minutes_2025_09_16.pdf

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11.0 Planning Section

Correspondence

12.0 Correspondence Report

 Correspondence_Report_Council_2025_10_06.pdf

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12.1 Response from SEHCST re NOM - Enhancement of Services at Downe C/058/2025

 Response_from_SEHCST_re_NOM_-_Enhancement_of_Services_at_Downe_C.058.2025.pdf

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12.2 Response from Health Minister re NOM CAR T Cell Therapy C/123/2025

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12.3 Response from Home Office re NOM - Fishing Industry & Enhancement Support C/044/2025

 Response_from_Home_Office_re_NOM_-_Fishing_Industry_and_Enhancement_Support_C.044.2025.pdf

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12.4 Response from NI Fish producers Organisation to arrange visit C.128.2025

We would be very happy to host a visit of NM&D Councillors to our training facility in Portavogie and to discuss the crewing issues we are facing with them.

Best wishes,

Dr Lynn Gilmore

CEO | Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation

Notices of Motion

13.0 Notice of Motion - Dunleath Park Safe Space for Dog Owners

Notice of motion received from Councillor Galbraith:

"This Council acknowledges growing concerns from members of the public regarding dog fouling and incidents involving off-lead dogs at Dunleath Playing Fields. In response, this Council agrees to explore the feasibility of creating a secure, fenced area within Dunleath Playing Fields where dog owners can safely exercise their dogs off-lead. Such a facility would help promote responsible dog ownership, reduce the risk of dog-related incidents in shared public areas, and provide a dedicated, safe space for dogs and their owners."

14.0 Notice of Motion - Ladies with Letters Campaign

The following Notice of Motion was received from Councillor Finn (deferred from September 2025):

"Newry, Mourne and Down recognises the courage and bravery of the 'ladies with letters' campaign group who are representing 17,500 women, will amplify their frustration with the Department of Health and will write to the Minister of Health to show our support for their continued calls for an independent inquiry."

15.0 Notice of Motion - All-Island Citizens' Assembly

The following Notice of Motion was received from Councillor Quinn:

"This Council notes the growing public discussion on the constitutional future of this island and recognises the provision within the Good Friday Agreement for the people of Ireland to decide that future through referendums. Accordingly, this Council agrees to write to the Office of An Taoiseach, urging the Irish Government to plan and prepare for Irish unity through the following actions:

- Establish an all-island Citizens' Assembly and a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Irish Unity;
- Produce and publish a plan towards Irish unity in conjunction with civic society and key stakeholders, including local government;
- Work to secure a date for a referendum on unity, as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.

This Council further commits to ensuring that the voices of people across Newry, Mourne and Down are heard as part of this important conversation about the future of our island."

16.0 Notice of Motion - Murder of Charlie Kirk

The following Notice of Motion was received from Councillor Lewis:

"That this Council notes with deep concern the murder of Charlie Kirk, a prominent American political commentator, who was shot and killed while exercising his right to speak at a public event; believes that freedom of speech and expression are hard-won cornerstones of democracy; remembers those who have been targeted by terrorists in Northern Ireland due to their political and religious beliefs; resolves to condemn the murder of Charlie Kirk and reaffirm our commitment to the principle of free speech; and further, that Newry, Mourne and Down District Council sends our condolences to his wife Erika and their two young children."

17.0 Notice of Motion - Climate Change Act 2022

The following Notice of Motion was received from Councillor Reilly:

"That this Council requests the Northern Ireland Assembly to repeal the Northern Ireland Climate Change Act (2022) and replaces it with workable legislation"

Invitees

Cllr Terry Andrews

Mr Alan Beggs

Cllr Callum Bowsie

Fionnuala Branagh

Cllr Jim Brennan

Mr Gerard Byrne

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/Noelle Johnston

Cllr Geraldine Kearns

Miss Veronica Keegan

Mrs Josephine Kelly

Mrs Sheila Kieran

Cllr Cathal King

Cllr Aurla King

Cllr Mickey Larkin

Cllr David Lee-Surginor

Cllr Alan Lewis

Cllr Oonagh Magennis

Mr Conor Mallon

Cllr Aidan Mathers

Cllr Declan McAteer

Cllr Leeanne McEvoy
.....
Sinead Murphy
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Cllr Selina Murphy
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Cllr Kate Murphy
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Cllr Declan Murphy
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Cllr Siobhan O'Hare
.....
Mr Andy Patterson
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Cllr Áine Quinn
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Cllr Henry Reilly
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Cllr Michael Rice
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Ruth Rooney
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Cllr Michael Ruane
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Donna Starkey
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Sarah Taggart
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Cllr David Taylor
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Cllr Jarlath Tinnelly
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Cllr Jill Truesdale
.....
Mrs Marie Ward
.....
Cllr Helena Young
.....

ACTION SHEET – COUNCIL MEETING – MONDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2025

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
<i>C/128/2024</i>	<i>Minutes of Council Meeting held on 01.07.2024</i>	It was agreed item C/058/2024: Twinning Newry with City of Ramallah should remain on the action sheet.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Ongoing	<i>N</i>
<i>C/127/2025</i>	<i>Action Sheet arising from Council Meeting held on 04.08.2025</i>	It was agreed to note the action sheet. It was agreed Council write to the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation to arrange a visit for all interested Councillors.	<i>Democratic Services</i> <i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted Response on Council agenda – 06/10/25	<i>Y</i> <i>Y</i>
<i>C/128/2025</i>	<i>Minutes of Council Meeting held on 04.08.2025</i>	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted	<i>Y</i>
<i>C/129/2025</i>	<i>Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on 31.07.2025</i>	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted	<i>Y</i>
<i>C/130/2025</i>	<i>Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 11.08.2025</i>	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted	<i>Y</i>
<i>C/131/2025</i>	<i>Minutes of Strategic, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 14.08.2025</i>	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted	<i>Y</i>

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
<i>C/132/2025</i>	<i>Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 18.08.2025</i>	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted	Y
<i>C/133/2025</i>	<i>Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 19.08.2025</i>	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted	Y
<i>C/135/2025</i>	<i>Correspondence Report</i>	It was agreed to note the Correspondence report. <i>Correspondence from Minister for Infrastructure, NIEA and Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to Motion, ReGen Waste Warrenpoint (C/110/2025):</i> It was that Council write back to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to request he meet with Council and also provide the minutes of the meetings he held with ReGen and the Harbour Authority so the people could actually see transparently what was discussed.	<i>Democratic Services</i> <i>Democratic Services</i>	Noted Correspondence Sent	Y Y
<i>C/136/2025</i>	<i>Notice of Motion – President of Ireland</i>	It was agreed that this Council fully acknowledges the outstanding 14 years President Michael D Higgins has served to his country and the people of this island. Championing equality, inclusion, human rights, and civic ethics — often speaking out on social justice and global solidarity. He notably undertook the first-ever state visit by an Irish President to the UK in April 2014, marking a	<i>Democratic Services</i>	Correspondence Sent	Y

Minute Ref	Subject	Decision	Lead Officer	Actions taken/ Progress to date	Remove from Action Sheet Y/N
		significant step in post Troubles reconciliation and international diplomacy. This Council will write to President Higgins to thank him for his commitment, passion, and duty of service to the people across this island.			
<i>C/137/2025</i>	<i>Notice Of Motion – Resurfacing and Long Term Repair of Main A route between Kilkeel and Newcastle</i>	It was agreed that this Council noted with concern the ongoing deterioration of the main A route between Newcastle, Kilkeel and onto Rostrevor recognising its strategic importance for local residents, businesses and the tourism economy, and expressing frustration at the continued lack of proper resurfacing full inspection and the need for repairs and updates especially widening at the Ballagh this Council agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins MLA to request that this road be prioritised for full resurfacing and long-term repair.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	<i>Correspondence Sent</i>	<i>Y</i>
<i>C/138/2025</i>	<i>Notice of Motion – Real Living Wage Accreditation</i>	This Council supports the Real Living Wage and believes that all workers including casual staff and agency workers deserve fair pay that reflects the cost of living. We note that Belfast City Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council are accredited Real Living Wage employers. The Executive has also formally become an accredited Real Living Wage Employer. This means all staff including agency and contract workers receive at least the Real Living Wage, above the British government's statutory minimum wage, bringing real benefits: improved staff morale, better retention, stronger recruitment, and a clear statement of commitment to fairness and workers' rights.	<i>J Kelly</i>		

<i>Minute Ref</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Lead Officer</i>	<i>Actions taken/ Progress to date</i>	<i>Remove from Action Sheet Y/N</i>
		Becoming a Real Living Wage employer also strengthens our leadership role in promoting social value through procurement and sets a positive example for businesses and organisations across our District. therefore, this Council agrees to: 1. Bring forward a plan in consultation with Advice NI and other key stakeholders to implement the Real Living Wage across all staff categories, including casual workers and agency staff. 2. Work toward accreditation with the Living Wage Foundation and aim to become a fully accredited Real Living Wage employer. 3. Bring a report to Council outlining options, costs, and a proposed timeline to deliver these changes. We believe fair pay is a foundation of dignity in work and essential to building a stronger, fairer local economy."			
<i>C/139/2025</i>	<i>Notice of Motion – 'Ladies with Letters' Campaign</i>	The motion was deferred to October's Council Meeting.	<i>Democratic Services</i>	<i>Noted Included on October Council Agenda</i>	<i>Y</i>

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 1 September 2025 at 6.00pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor P Campbell

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor P Byrne	Councillor W Clarke
Councillor L Devlin	Councillor C Enright
Councillor K Feehan	Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor O Hanlon	Councillor G Hanna
Councillor M Hearty	Councillor T Howie
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor C King
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor G Sharvin
Councillor H Young	

In attendance via Teams:

Councillor J Brennan	Councillor M Gibbons
Councillor R Howell	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S Murphy	Councillor D Taylor
Councillor J Tinnelly	

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
 Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
 Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer

C/125/2025 APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Finn, Harte, Jackson, McAteer, McEvoy and Truesdale and Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services.

The Chairperson praised Council staff and community volunteers who had worked tirelessly delivering a diverse range of family and tourist events across the District over the summer months. These events not only contributed to the local economy, but helped bring people together, strengthen connections and make Newry, Mourne and Down a vibrant and welcoming place to live.

The Chairperson extended his congratulations to the organisers of Newry Pride for another successful celebration of inclusion and diversity.

A special mention was given to Council's Veronica McVeigh and her family, who had opened their beautiful sunflower field on the Strangford Road and behalf of everyone in the chamber the Chairperson wished the McVeigh family every success in their efforts to raise funds for their chosen charities.

The Chairperson welcomed Council's continued investment in play parks across the district and referred to recent upgrades in Saval, Mullaghbawn, Belleek and Ardglass which were a wonderful addition to these villages and provided countless hours of fun and play for local children.

The Chairperson highlighted the upgrading of facilities at Tyrella Beach, which offered improved disability access and was a meaningful step in removing barriers, enabling people of all abilities to enjoy the stunning Lecale coastline.

C/126/2025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tinnelly declared an interest in item C/135/2025 as he was a member of Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.

C/127/2025 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 4 AUGUST 2025

Read: Action sheet from Council Meeting held on 4 August 2025.

Agreed: **The Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 4 August 2025 was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor Feehan.**

C/128/2025 COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 4 AUGUST 2025

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 4 August 2025 (copy circulated).

C/120/2025 – Notice of Motion, Voting Age to be reduced to 16

In response for an update from Councillor Andrews, the Chief Executive advised no reply had been received to date.

C/044,056,093/2025 – Notice of Motion, Fishing Industry Visa and Enhancement Support
Councillor Reilly referred to his previous suggestion that Council liaise with the Southern College and spoke of how the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation had done a lot of work regarding this matter and had indicated they would accommodate a visit from Council. He proposed Council write to the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation to arrange a visit for all interested Councillors. Councillor Hanna seconded the proposal.

Agreed: **It was agreed Council write to the Northern Ireland Fish Producers Organisation to arrange a visit for all**

interested Councillors.

Agreed: **The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 4 August 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Reilly.**

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/129/2025 MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 31 JULY 2025

Read: Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on 31 July 2025 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held on 31 July 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor O'Hare.**

C/130/2025 MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11 AUGUST 2025

Read: Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 11 August 2025 (copy circulated).

ERT/056/2025 – Outdoor Revamp of Delamont Country Park

In response for an update from Councillor Andrews, Mr Mallon advised the Delamont project had been assigned within the Capital Projects team and would progress to the appointment of a consultant team.

ERT/076/2025 – Eats and Beats Grant Application

Councillor Hanna referred to the upcoming event and concerns raised regarding whether Council was prepared in case any group or participant engaged in any type of political statement or activity.

Mr Mallon confirmed Council monitored any event to ensure there were measures in place to react to any material that would be deemed to be unsuitable or inappropriate.

Councillor Reilly raised concerns regarding a number of Palestinian flags in Newcastle. The Chairperson advised the matter was not on the agenda and therefore not for discussion.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 11 August 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted on the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanna.**

C/131/2025

**MINUTES OF STRATEGY POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 14 AUGUST 2025**

Read: Minutes of Strategy Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 14 August 2025 (copy circulated).

SPR/129/2025 – Replacement of Play Park Surfaces

In welcoming the replacement of Play Park surfaces Councillor Devlin enquired about a timeline for when works would be completed.

The Chief Executive advised there was a programme of work to be completed and officers would revert to Councillor Devlin directly.

Councillor Lewis requested an update regarding the rubber matting at the Maghera Play Park Mr Patterson advised he would revert to Councillor Lewis directly with an update.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 14 August 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Sharvin.**

C/132/2025

**MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 AUGUST 2025**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 18 August 2025 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 18 August 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor.**

C/133/2025

**MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 19 AUGUST 2025**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 19 August 2025 (copy circulated).

SE/091/2024 – Dog Fouling

In referring to the reporting tool for dog fouling, Councillor Devlin requested that she be copied into any updates on anticipated timeframes. She added like many Councillors she was inundated with problems associated with dog fouling particularly in the Marguerite area in Newcastle. Mrs Murphy noted Councillor Devlin's request for an update.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 19 August 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor**

Young.

C/134/2025 PLANNING SECTION

There were no issues arising.

C/135/2025 CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

Read: Report dated 1 September 2025 from Mrs Ward, Chief Executive, regarding an update on correspondence received for the attention of Council (copy circulated).

Correspondence from Minister for Infrastructure, NIEA and Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to Motion, ReGen Waste Warrenpoint (C/110/2025)

Councillor Ruane stated the reply from the Minister for Infrastructure had been what he had expected in that she had no responsibility in the relation to Ports other than the appointment of the Board and good governance. He spoke of how when the Motion had been presented to Council the Alliance Party had tried to shift the blame from their own Minister and take Minister Kimmins into the equation.

He advised the Minister that did have responsibility was the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and it was clear from the response from Minister Muir that it was the same response the people of Warrenpoint had been getting for the last 3 years with nothing being offered to resolve the issue. He added it was being said that surveys were being carried out and they were finding nothing wrong on the days they were at the Harbour however there were days when the smell was so obvious and yet no one was willing to take responsibility for it.

Councillor Ruane stated the response received from Minister Muir was really disappointing and disheartening. He added the Minister without any information or knowledge had recently taken a decision when Council were looking at the potential for the Gondola at Rostrevor jeopardising the potential £30million for the District and yet in Warrenpoint where he did have remit he was not willing to do anything to solve the issue.

He proposed that Council write back to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to request he meet with Council and provide the minutes of meetings held with ReGen and the Harbour Authority so people could see transparently what was discussed.

Councillor Clarke seconded the proposal.

Councillor Gibbons voiced his support for Councillor Ruane's proposal stating that a meeting with Minister Muir should happen immediately. He said he had no confidence in the responses received and that the smell was not going away and in fact was getting worse. He spoke of the need to have the ReGen licence revoked as the deal should not have been given the close proximity from Warrenpoint Harbour to residences.

Councillor Tinnelly took the opportunity as a Member of the Board to provide reassurance that there had been major developments over the past number of weeks and that he thought there was a resolution to be found for everyone.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Clarke that Council write back to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to request he meet with Council and also provide the minutes of the meetings he held with ReGen and the Harbour Authority so the people could actually see transparently what was discussed.

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

- Correspondence from Minister for Infrastructure, NIEA and Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to Motion, ReGen Waste Warrenpoint (C/110/2025).
- Correspondence from Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in relation to Motion, Nutrient Action Plan (C/109/2025).
- Correspondence from the Arts Council and the Department for Communities in relation to Motion, NOM Funding Cuts by Arts Council to National Youth Choir (C/122/2025).
- NILGA Executive Summary August 2025.

Councillor Taylor left the meeting at this point – 6.25pm.

C/136/2025 NOTICE OF MOTION – PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

The following Motion was received from Councillor Sharvin (deferred from August 2025):

"This Council fully acknowledges the outstanding 14 years President Michael D Higgins has served to his country and the people of this island. Championing equality, inclusion, human rights, and civic ethics — often speaking out on social justice and global solidarity. He notably undertook the first-ever state visit by an Irish President to the UK in April 2014, marking a significant step in post Troubles reconciliation and international diplomacy.

This Council will write to President Higgins to thank him for his commitment, passion, and duty of service to the people across this island".

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Sharvin spoke at length about President Higgins term in office offering commitment to peace, reconciliation and diversity and the importance of highlighting the strong relationship with the UK. Members were reminded that President Higgins had welcomed the late Queen, who visited Ireland in 2011 and further extended the arm of diplomacy when he attended King Charles Coronation.

Councillor Sharvin spoke of how President Higgins was a champion of culture and the arts and actively supportive of Irish language communities and cultural festivals, as well as an advocate for social justice and equality. Members were reminded of how he spoke

passionately against the social injustice and inequality that people faced across the world, particularly in Palestine and Gaza.

Other facts highlighted by Councillor Sharvin were that President Higgins was one of the most environmentally conscious Irish presidents, not only through his presidency but throughout his career and if you reached 100 years of age the President, just like the King of England sent a letter but also €2000 and that was for every one of every background, both North and South, East and West of the island.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Andrews agreed with the sentiments of Councillor Sharvin extolling the virtues of President Higgins who for 14 years had served with distinction in his role. He said he had proved himself a servant of all and reached out to everyone. Councillor Andrews spoke of President Higgins recognition for special milestones in people's lives including when he had paid tribute to Councillor Dermot Curran on reaching 50 years as a Councillor. He added he would be sorely missed and left behind a legacy and wished President Higgins and his wife Sabrina a long and happy retirement.

Councillor King spoke on behalf of his Party and stated Michael D Higgins had been an exceptional President of Ireland and throughout his presidency had demonstrated a supreme ability to represent the views of the Irish people and the nation, at home and overseas and had been a champion of Irish culture. Members were reminded he had been a champion of workers' rights and economic equality, with one of his standout events being the opening of Connolly Visitor Centre on the Falls Road. He was the first Irish president to pay a state visit to Britain, aiding in reconciliation on the island and improving relations.

Councillor King on behalf of his Party said it was hoped that the next presidential election would be the last that excluded and disenfranchised citizens here in the north. He added the President was a representative of all citizens on the island and should rightfully be elected by them all and that Irish citizens in the north were Irish where they reside and should be able to exercise all rights that come with that citizenship. He added it was long past time for presidential voting rights to be extended to the people of the north and wished President Higgins and his wife, Sabina, all the very best for the future.

Councillor Hanna stated the Motion referenced the President of Ireland and said the President of Ireland was not his President and was the President of the Republic of Ireland. Councillor Hanna although acknowledging the work done by Michael D Higgins, he was not his President and the Motion referenced equality, inclusion and human rights however the President had lost the respect within the unionist community when he failed to attend the service for the 100th anniversary to Northern Ireland at the Cathedral in Armagh. Councillor Hanna advised the DUP would not be supporting the Motion and requested a recorded vote.

On behalf of the Alliance Party, Councillor Lee-Surginor voiced support for the Motion and spoke of the contribution President Higgins had made over his Presidency that embodied the values of equality, diversity and inclusion which underpinned a shared and welcoming Ireland for all.

Councillor Bowsie took the opportunity to echo what Councillor Hanna had said, stating he would not be supporting the Motion as when President of the Republic of Ireland was invited to the NI Centenary event his response had effectively been he was not coming to Northern Ireland unless the Unionist referred to him as the President of Ireland. He added this had been an opportunity where Unionists reached out the hand of friendship to the epitome of

everything they opposed constitutionally and were met with arrogance.

In reply Councillor Andrews pointed out he disagreed with Councillor Bowsie's comments and that the President acted on the advice of his Government and just like the King was bound by the same convention to act on the advice of Ministers.

Councillor Lewis said the SDLP liked to regard themselves as the protectors of the Good Friday agreement and this was a prime example of how certain parties believed that the agreement could be changed or interpreted in a different way to set the agenda for what was currently being pushed.

Councillor Lewis questioned the laws and legalities behind putting this in place and if there had been any work done on that e.g. if taking part in an election to appoint the head of state of a different legally separate jurisdiction how did electoral fundraising work? How did electoral law work in terms of postal voting? And if there were two separate laws and how was that vote conducted.

Councillor Reilly spoke in opposition to the Motion stating he had no respect for the President stating he felt he was a 'nasty, condescending little man who was smug towards the Unionist community in Northern Ireland.

Councillor Devlin voiced her opposition to some of the commentary made by Councillor Reilly stating it was disrespectful. Councillor Sharvin concurred with Councillor Devlin stating that Members could have a different of opinion but should be respectful.

Referring to Councillor Lewis comments about legislation Councillor Sharvin pointed out that it was not within the body of the Motion and that the Motion was recognising a milestone, as had been done with other Motions brought before Council such as the Coronation of King Charles III.

The Chairperson put Councillor Sharvin's Motion to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows:

FOR:	30
AGAINST:	4
ABSTENTIONS:	0

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillor Sharvin thanked Members for their support for the Motion.

Agreed:	It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Andrews that this Council fully acknowledges the outstanding 14 years President Michael D Higgins has served to his country and the people of this island. Championing equality, inclusion, human rights, and civic ethics — often speaking out on social justice and global solidarity. He notably undertook the first-ever state visit by an Irish President to the UK in April 2014, marking a significant step in post Troubles reconciliation and international diplomacy.
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This Council will write to President Higgins to thank him for his commitment, passion, and duty of service to the people across this island.

C/137/2025

NOTICE OF MOTION – RESURFACING AND LONG TERM REPAIR OF MAIN A ROUTE BETWEEN KILKEEL AND NEWCASTLE

The following Motion was received from Councillor Devlin:

"Noting with concern the ongoing deterioration of the main A route between Newcastle, Kilkeel and onto Rostrevor recognising its strategic importance for local residents, businesses and the tourism economy, and expressing frustration at the continued lack of proper resurfacing, this Council agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins MLA to request that this road be prioritised for full resurfacing and long-term repair."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Hanna.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Devlin highlighted the route between Newcastle and Kilkeel was one of the main arterial routes within the district, linking two of the most important towns and connecting many thousands of residents, commuters, visitors and locals alike. It was also utilised by heavy vehicles from numerous agricultural and industrial businesses and the route must be maintained to the highest standards.

She spoke of the resurfacing scheme that had taken place at the beginning of the year on 2km of road between Kilkeel and Ballymartin which was a significant investment but only covered a small portion of the overall route, and not some of the worst parts of the A2, with Glasdrumman suffering particularly badly at present. She stated the Department for Infrastructure had paid out £32million in claims for compensation and associated costs resulting from the poor state of the road network with almost £4million, one eighth, spent on claims from Newry Mourne and Down, which was funding that could have been used for road improvements.

She went on to speak about how the SDLP had warned the Department in December 2024 that Cassy Water Bridge was at major risk and was ignored and for major structural damage to happen recently. She highlighted that after the 2023 flood, the Killowen Road was closed for many months and similar was happening just outside Hilltown, where a temporary traffic light system had been in place for almost two years.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Hanna spoke at length of his work in the motor trade over the years and the many tragic cases following accidents and fatalities on what he described a deadly road. He stated the road was so dangerous and the need for an upgrade was needed not only for the safety of users and the prevention of further accidents and fatalities but also for the economy.

Councillor Hanna proposed the following amendment for Councillor Devlin's Motion, seconded by Councillor Reilly:

*"Noting with concern the ongoing deterioration of the main A route between Newcastle, Kilkeel and onto Rostrevor recognising its strategic importance for local residents, businesses and the tourism economy, and expressing frustration at the continued lack of proper resurfacing **full inspection and the need for repairs and updates especially***

widening at the Ballagh this Council agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins MLA to request that this road be prioritised for full resurfacing and long-term repair."

Councillor Devlin accepted Councillor Hanna's amendment.

Councillor Rice stated the main A2 route from Newcastle to Kilkeel and onto Rostrevor was essential for the economic life of rural towns and villages, with the recent road closure following the near subsidence of the Cassey Water Bridge causing huge chaos for drivers traveling to and from work. He acknowledged there had been significant resurfacing works carried out in recent times along the Coastal Route including in April 2025 the Department completing the asphalt resurfacing along the stretch of the main A2 from Kilkeel into Ballymartin which had been a welcomed development for local residents and commuters.

Councillor Rice said there was however work still to be carried out and referring to the construction of the Narrow Water Bridge, funded by the Irish Government's Shared Island Unit, it was hard not to look on in envy. He added the reality was that when the Southern Government were fighting over how to spend their surplus budgets, Stormont Departments continued to be underfunded below need.

Councillor Reilly referred to a Motion brought forward by himself and Councillor Hanna that the Mourne DEA be moved into the Eastern Division because the Southern Division basically ignored the road between Rostrevor and Newcastle. He spoke of meetings with Roads Service where the number of fatalities on an essential route had been pointed out and was told it would not be worth it and spoke of his frustration at not being taken seriously.

Councillor Clarke concurred with the comments already made and the real need for the upgrade of the A2. He spoke of how all parties in the Mourne area had lobbied for the upgrade to be met with the standard of response of if resources were made available different schemes on the A2 would be carried out. He stated the onus was on all the Executive parties to ensure if the Department for Infrastructure Minister made requests for roads maintenance budgets that was supported at an Executive level. He spoke of extreme cuts to the budget over decades coming from the British Executive and the differences in quality of road servicing in the South compared to the North and not only roads but hospitals, education etc.

Councillor Clarke stated more resources needed to come from the British Government to provide good public services for the electorate, or a need look at the South in regard to the model for reunification as there was clearly a major issue in relation to the financial model that was operated.

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

In summing up, Councillor Devlin thanked Members for their support and said the lives that had been lost were tragic and the combination of speed and a deteriorating road network was a recipe for disaster and the importance of working together on prioritising the road network in Mourne. Councillor Devlin acknowledged underfunding by the UK Government and stated the SDLP would continue the fight for a fair funding model however levers within DFI should be utilised now.

AGREED: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanna that noting with concern the ongoing deterioration of the main A route between Newcastle, Kilkeel and onto Rostrevor recognising its strategic importance for local residents, businesses and the tourism economy, and expressing frustration at the continued lack of proper resurfacing full inspection and the need for repairs and updates especially widening at the Ballagh this Council agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins MLA to request that this road be prioritised for full resurfacing and long-term repair.

C/138/2025 NOTICE OF MOTION – REAL LIVING WAGE ACCREDITATION

The following Motion was received from Councillor Hanlon:

"This Council supports the Real Living Wage and believes that all workers including casual staff and agency workers deserve fair pay that reflects the cost of living. We note that Belfast City Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council are accredited Real Living Wage employers. The Executive has also formally become an accredited Real Living Wage Employer. This means all staff including agency and contract workers receive at least the Real Living Wage, above the British government's statutory minimum wage, bringing real benefits: improved staff morale, better retention, stronger recruitment, and a clear statement of commitment to fairness and workers' rights. Becoming a Real Living Wage employer also strengthens our leadership role in promoting social value through procurement and sets a positive example for businesses and organisations across our District. therefore, this Council agrees to:

- 1. Bring forward a plan in consultation with Advice NI and other key stakeholders to implement the Real Living Wage across all staff categories, including casual workers and agency staff.*
- 2. Work toward accreditation with the Living Wage Foundation and aim to become a fully accredited Real Living Wage employer.*
- 3. Bring a report to Council outlining options, costs, and a proposed timeline to deliver these changes.*

We believe fair pay is a foundation of dignity in work and essential to building a stronger, fairer local economy."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor D Murphy.

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

C/139/2025 NOTICE OF MOTION – 'LADIES WITH LETTERS' CAMPAIGN

The following Motion was received from Councillor Finn:

"Newry, Mourne and Down recognises the courage and bravery of the 'ladies with letters' campaign group who are representing 17,500 women, will amplify their frustration with the

Department of Health and will write to the Minister of Health to show our support for their continued calls for an independent inquiry."

AGREED: **The Motion was deferred to October Council.**

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.15pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 6 October 2025.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 01/09/25

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council Meeting

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Notice of Motion – President of Ireland

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				1
C Galbraith	9			
M Gibbons	10			
O Hanlon	11			
G Hanna		2		
V Harte				2
M Hearty	12			
R Howell	13			
T Howie	14			
J Jackson				3
G Kearns	15			
C King	16			
M Larkin	17			
D Lee-Surginor	18			
A Lewis		3		
O Magennis	19			
A Mathers	20			
D McAteer				4
L McEvoy				5
D Murphy	21			
K Murphy	22			
S Murphy	23			
S O'Hare	24			
A Quinn	25			
H Reilly		4		
M Rice	26			
M Ruane	27			
G Sharvin	28			
D Taylor				6
J Tinnelly	29			
J Truesdale				7
H Young	30			
TOTALS	30	4	0	7

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 26 August 2025 at 6.00pm in Downshire Chamber

In the Chair:	Councillor P Campbell	
In attendance in Chamber:	Councillor T Andrews Councillor O Hanlon Councillor G Sharvin	Councillor C Galbraith Councillor A Lewis
In attendance via Teams:	Councillor C Bowsie Councillor C Enright Councillor V Harte Councillor G Kearns Councillor D Lee-Surginor Councillor D McAteer Councillor A Quinn Councillor M Ruane Councillor H Young	Councillor P Byrne Councillor K Feehan Councillor M Hearty Councillor M Larkin Councillor O Magennis Councillor S Murphy Councillor H Reilly Councillor J Truesdale
In attendance in Chamber: (Officials)	Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive Mr A Patterson, Director Active & Healthy Communities Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting) Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer	
Also in attendance in Chamber:	NI Housing Executive Ms Grainia Long – Chief Executive Mr John McCartan – South Regional Manager Ms Claire Creaney – South Down Area Manager Ms Sinead Collins – Head of Place Shaping South	
Also in attendance via Teams:	NI Housing Executive Mr Andy Kennedy – Assistant Director Asset Strategy Mr David Palmer – Regional Programme Delivery Manager Mr Patrick Feeney – Head of Private Grants (South) Mr Kevin Logan – Assistant Director Corporate Procurement	

SC/011/2025 APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSON’S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Brennan, Mathers, McEvoy and K Murphy.

SC/012/2025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

SC/013/2025 NI HOUSING EXECUTIVE

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation. (Copy attached to these minutes)

The delegation provided details regarding the Housing Action Plan that focused on increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural settlements across the district. They presented an overview of the Housing Market Assessment, the supply of affordable housing, a breakdown of total homes within the district, expenditure during the 2024/25 period, waiting list trends over recent years, and the projected spend for 2025/26.

Following this, the delegation highlighted key housing challenges and opportunities and expressed concern about the level of funding received from the Department (which department) for grant programmes supporting schemes such as Disabled Facilities Grants, the Affordable Warmth Scheme, and other private sector initiatives.

Following the presentation the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

- What were the current plans for delivering new housing in Downpatrick, Newcastle, and Castlewellan?
- Regarding disability grants, what steps were being taken to address the gap between the grant amount offered and the actual cost of required renovations?
- Was anything being done to tackle the challenges around emergency accommodation, particularly where local residents were being placed far from their communities?
- Members noted that response times to maintenance issues reported by residents had become less reliable in recent months.
- Concerns had been raised about grounds maintenance, especially in areas with overgrown hedges and verges.
- Did NIHE or Housing Associations actively seek development sites in Ardglass and Killough to meet local housing demand?
- Despite the 2018 announcement of 13 new general needs homes in Ballyhornan, no construction had taken place to date.
- There was currently a 5% gap between the rent NIHE collects and the level of investment required. Was this decision made with cost-of-living pressures in mind, and would a 7.7% rent increase place additional strain on tenants?
- What percentage increase in rent would NIHE consider acceptable to meet its investment needs?
- The projected spend did not include a figure for new build investment. What level of investment was expected this year?
- Did NIHE experience a high rate of tenant turnover, and what were the financial implications in terms of renovation and refurbishment costs?
- Had contractor standards improved recently, and what measures were in place to ensure consistently high-quality work?
- If a particular area did not show an established housing need, did that prevent NIHE from purchasing properties there?
- Was the target of 2,500 affordable and 1,500 social housing units over 10 years sufficient, considering it only reflected current housing stress and did not account for future demand—especially in rural areas?
- What could councillors do to help NIHE overcome the current barriers to borrowing?

- What approaches could be used to encourage Housing Associations to deliver small-scale rural schemes, given the ongoing housing crisis in the Council area?
- There was a noticeable lack of sheltered housing for older people in Rowallane and other parts of the district. Was this something NIHE could prioritise?

The delegation responded as follows:

- A fundamental review of allocations was currently being delivered, which allowed a broader area of choice and provided more accurate data on the nature of housing needs.
- NIHE was acutely aware that the amount offered often did not cover the full cost of required works. Several reviews were underway across various grant programmes however it was the Department that determined the level of grant funding.
- Efforts were made to place individuals as close to their locality as possible, with placements in other areas only when no alternative existed. The number of people requiring emergency accommodation had risen from 3,500 pre-pandemic to between 9,000 and 10,000. NIHE was proactively expanding its temporary accommodation portfolio, though securing local leases remained challenging.
- It remained extremely difficult for housing associations to finalise deals in Newcastle due to strong competition from the private sector. Work at the Downe Hospital main building (Clanmil) was stalled temporarily but had now recommenced. New properties in Castlewellan remained a priority, and proposals for Annsborough were currently under consideration.
- Over 10,000 calls were received daily and were tightly managed in terms of response. There may have been some delays due to the impact of the January storm.
- Staff regularly inspected areas and contractors were held accountable for their performance and the condition of maintained areas.
- NIHE, as the Strategic Housing Authority, acts as an enabler and did not directly build homes. It assessed housing need across all 11 councils, using a well-established model for this purpose.
- The five-year projected social housing need in Ardglass and Killough stood at 42 and 19 units respectively. This data informed Council (as the planning authority) in developing its draft plan strategy. Despite clear housing need and guidance provided by NIHE, there were currently no housing association schemes on the programme for these areas.
- With regard to Blythornan, progress had been delayed due to ongoing engagement and negotiation with affected landowners. The programme was scheduled to commence in 2025/26.
- NIHE rents were currently too low and had not kept pace with investment requirements. Rent had been frozen for several years, widening the gap. Affordability data indicates there was headroom to support a rent increase.
- If properties were available for purchase and met the criteria for temporary accommodation, NIHE could acquire them in limited instances. Meeting demand for temporary accommodation was demand-led and decisions on new build properties rested with the planning authority.
- In relation to the 10-year target, the model was used to assess housing need and projected population growth, household formation, and new market builds. It assumed delivery of both affordable and social housing; if either falls short, it created a knock-on effect.
- It was a positive development that NIHE would now be included in negotiations on the fiscal framework.
- A significant amount of work was underway in relation to rural housing, Although funding had not yet been received for the Housing Executive Land Acquisition (HELA)

programme, initial work had commenced. This programme enabled NIHE to purchase and acquire land for direct transfer to Housing Associations.

- NIHE had several levers available through development planning and management regarding sheltered accommodation and it worked closely with Housing Associations and the Department of Health. A housing and health strategy was being progressed, focusing on solutions for older people and those with specific health needs.
- A total of 377 allocations were made across NIHE and Housing Associations and significant investment had been made through tenancy sustainment programmes, which had proven effective. The cost of tenancy changes varied depending on the condition of the property and where possible, NIHE sought to recover costs from tenants. The total budget spend on tenancy repairs was £518,000, reflecting a downward trend.
- Rigorous inspection processes were in place for maintenance, including random sampling and internal audits and two key performance indicators (KPIs) were used to monitor cost and quality. If trends emerged such as issues with a particular trade or contractor, NIHE adjusted its inspection profile accordingly.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and time.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at **7.09pm**

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 1 September 2025.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive



**Newry, Mourne & Down
District Council**

**NIHE Housing
Investment Plan 2023-26**

Annual Update 2025

26th August 2025



Newry, Mourne and Down

nihe.gov.uk



Community Planning Update

The Housing Executive takes a lead role on the Community Planning priority 'Access to Quality Housing' and chair the Housing Needs Working Group.

During 2024/25, the Working Group published an updated Housing Action Plan which notes the achievements to date and highlights emerging housing issues and priorities. The updated plan has a focus on increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural settlements in the district where the need for new social housing represents almost 40% of all housing need for the district.

Aligned to this action, during 2025/26 the Working Group plan to engage with representatives from the 7 District Electoral Areas to highlight rural housing need and encourage a partnership approach to identifying development opportunities.

nihe.gov.uk



Tenure Breakdown & Total Homes



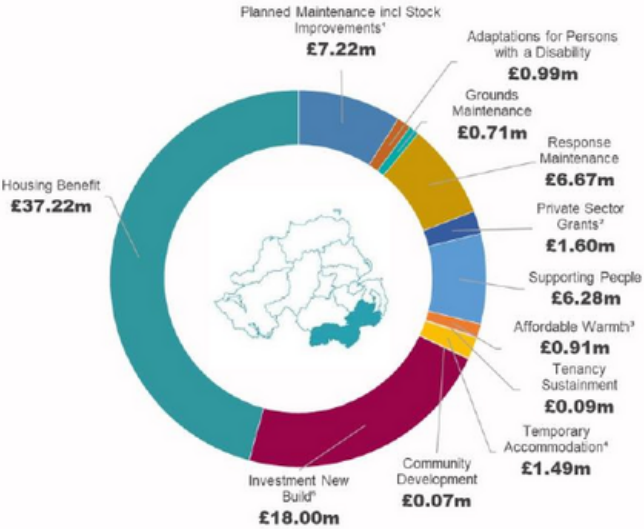
68,398
households

Managed 5,161
social homes



Housing Executive Spend 2024/25

£81.25m





New homes on site in the last year...

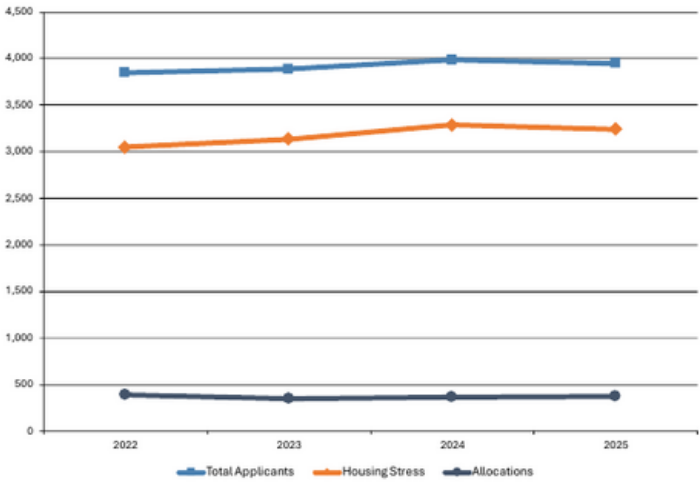
In 2024/25:
£18m was invested in new social housing stock
164 new social homes completed; and
447 new social homes under construction at end of March 2025.



nlhe.gov.uk



Waiting List Trends 2022 - 2025



nlhe.gov.uk



Fifteen Year Housing Market Assessment

- **Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2039** published December 2024 - preparation of associated Action Plan ongoing.
- Systems approach to housing supply to ensure access to secure, affordable and sustainable accommodation.
- NIHE duty to provide housing evidence across tenures.
- **Fifteen Year Housing Market Assessment 2020-2035:**

Local Government District	Market	Intermediate	Social	All Tenures
Newry, Mourne and Down	6,540	1,570	2,520	10,630
Northern Ireland Total	54,890	15,450	25,280	95,620

nihe.gov.uk



Affordable Housing Supply

Social
2025/28 SHDP – 294 (gross) new social housing units programmed
Includes 105 urban units and 189 rural units.

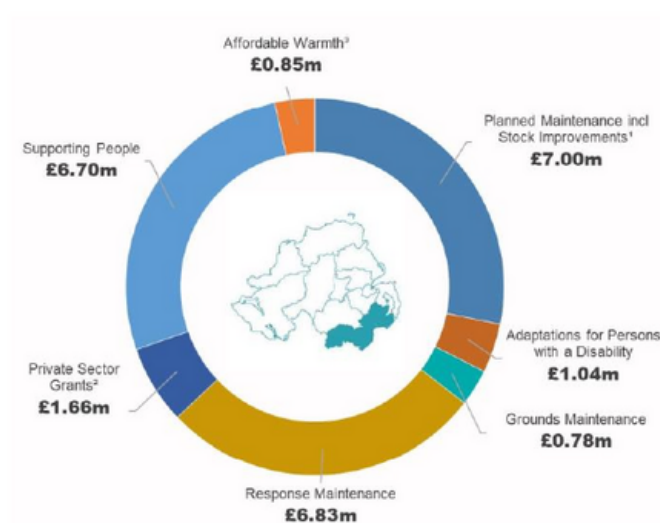
5 Year SHDP Performance
1,080 starts (626 urban and 454 rural) was the SG target for NMD during the 5-year period
702 starts (660 urban and 42 rural) were achieved against the target
Resulting in 378 fewer starts (+34 urban and -412 rural) against the SG target.

Intermediate
Co-ownership Housing Association had an active stock of 606 dwellings at March 2025, 45 of which were purchased during 2024/25.

nihe.gov.uk



**Projected spend
2025/26
£24.86m**



nihe.gov.uk



Key Housing Challenges

- The shortage of social and affordable housing
- Rising homelessness and continued need for temporary and emergency accommodation
- Shortfall in capital funding impacting directly on new social homes delivery, Housing for All and Affordable Warmth scheme
- Uncertainty regarding the long-term funding stream for the maintenance and modernisation of NIHE stock - rental income did not cover our planned investment last year - linked to historic low levels of NIHE rents (£74.35 per week)
- Wider impact of housing issues on health and wellbeing of households
- Growing number of incidents and displays of race hate in NIHE neighbourhoods.

nihe.gov.uk



Key Housing Opportunities

- Programme for Government priority and targets for housing
- Ambition of the Housing Supply Strategy and its cross departmental focus
- Support for Revitalisation of NIHE and possibility of stable long-term investment in NIHE homes and new build
- Survey of NIHE stock to set the investment requirement going forward
- Funding for homelessness prevention and especially the New Foundations Programme to help young people leaving care avoid homelessness
- Acquisition of 600 new properties across NI for use as temporary accommodation
- Potential of new additional pilot projects similar to the construction of six new homes to PassivHaus standard in North Belfast and retro fit programme.

nihe.gov.uk



Thank you



Q&A

nihe.gov.uk

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 22 September 2025 at 6.00pm in Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor P Campbell

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor J Brennan
Councillor P Byrne	Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor V Harte	Councillor R Howell
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor A King
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor A Mathers
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor H Young	

In attendance via Teams:

Councillor W Clarke	Councillor L Devlin
Councillor C Enright	Councillor K Feehan
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor R Howell
Councillor J Jackson	Councillor C King
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S Murphy	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Ruane
Councillor D Taylor	

In attendance in Chamber: (Officials)

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance in Chamber:

National Trust
Ms H MacLachlan – Director for Northern Ireland
Mr P Lynch – General Manager South Down Property Portfolio
Mr J Clarke – Assistant Director of Operations, NI
Ms R Donnelly – Project Manager
Ms V Magreehan – External Affairs & Corporate Communications Manager
Mr R McKenna – Senior Estates Manager

SC/014/2025 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Andrews, Finn, Hanlon, Hearty, Magennis, McEvoy, Rice and Truesdale.

SC/015/2025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bowsie requested clarification that there were no members of the National Trust present.

Mrs Ward clarified that it was for Members to decide whether they had a conflict of interest and to declare same.

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/016/2025 NATIONAL TRUST

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation and invited them to make their presentation. (Copy attached to these minutes)

Ms MacLachlan introduced her team and thanked Members for the opportunity to discuss their recent decision regarding a land lease at Thomas' Quarry. She outlined the National Trust's role as custodian of places of historical and natural beauty for the benefit of all, noting that the Trust managed 1% of Northern Ireland's landmass and 22% of its coastline, including a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI). She confirmed that the Trust's primary responsibility was to safeguard the mountains for the public benefit.

Mr Lynch described the ecology of the area, including wet and dry heath, blanket bog, and montane heath. He confirmed that over £1m had been invested to date in path repairs and wildlife recovery following the devastation of the 2021 wildfires. He further advised that while the Trust aimed to restore and protect the Mourne and maintain sustainable access for visitors, both the Donard Nature Recovery Report and NIEA's condition assessment indicated that habitats were under pressure from current visitor levels. He stressed the need for appropriate infrastructure and visitor dispersal plans to protect the landscape.

Mr Clarke highlighted the Trust's long-standing involvement as a stakeholder in the Mourne Mountain Gateway Project, noting that concerns over the gondola element had been raised as early as 2017. While the Trust had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Council at Tourism NI's request, this had been a statement of mutual interest in preserving and promoting appropriate access, not a commitment to any course of action.

Mr Clarke explained that the decision not to lease Thomas Quarry had been made in light of the area's fragility, evidence from monitoring and reports, and DAERA-funded recovery programmes. He noted that public opinion and communication from Trust members had also influenced the decision. He acknowledged the disappointment caused but stated that the National Trust hoped BRCD funding would remain in the Newcastle area. He expressed the Trust's willingness to work with Council and stakeholders on alternative, sustainable options that aligned with environmental, cultural, and economic needs.

Following the presentation the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

- A request was made for a copy of the map showing the National Trust's areas of responsibility in the Mourne.
- Members emphasised their wish for Council and the National Trust to work together respectfully.
- Concern was expressed at the timing of the decision on the lease, particularly as the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), had not been completed. Members questioned how a decision could be made without expert evidence.

- Why had the National Trust not awaited the outcome of the EIA before making its decision, as agreed in the MOU?
- Why had Council received only 20 minutes' notice before the public statement was released?
- Would it have been more prudent to arrange an emergency meeting with Council to discuss the decision, rather than Members learning of it through the press release?
- Some Members expressed difficulty in trusting the National Trust to work with Council again to secure funding for the District.
- While acknowledging the National Trust's commitment to the Mournes, Members questioned the speed of the announcement given the substantial public and political interest.
- Had the National Trust considered the implications of public spending when agreeing to wait for the EIA, which had been commissioned using ratepayers' money?
- Given the reported information already available on habitats and ecology, why had the Trust agreed to await the commissioned EIA if sufficient evidence already existed?
- Could the National Trust recognise the issue of trust created by stating in April 2025 that they would wait for specialist reports, then announcing a decision within a week?
- Caring for the environment had to be balanced with pragmatism; why was the Trust opposed to significant investment to showcase the Mournes in a controlled manner, where mitigating measures could ensure environmental protections?
- The National Trust's statement cited environmental concerns, yet it had not awaited the EIA as supporting evidence, which called their integrity into question.
- Did the National Trust consider it amicable or professional to have provided only 20 minutes' notice before issuing its statement?
- Had Council failed to adhere to any aspect of the MOU?
- Why did the National Trust decline a seat on the Programme Board?
- Had the final decision been influenced by public or political lobbying and pressure?
- Could the National Trust acknowledge that not awaiting the EIA had led to public money being wasted?
- Had the National Trust raised concerns about spending public funds in any communication with Council?
- Would the Trust be willing to share its internal records relating to the decision-making process?
- A Member expressed concern that the MOU had been taken as a declaration of intent, which was misleading to the public.
- A Member claimed the project risk register was inaccurate as it did not include land ownership as a risk.
- Members requested clarity on the status of the MOU, noting it contained a five-year expiry clause.
- Members suggested that both parties reflect on lessons learned from the project process.
- Members expressed disbelief that the Trust claimed to be unaware of the scope of the EIA and requested clarification.
- Members asked that the Trust notify Council of any future decisions before making them public.
- Was the Trust aware of the scope of the proposed visitor management plan designed to control access from the visitor site, and if not, why not?
- Members noted that achieving a BRCD-compliant solution would be challenging and that false narratives circulating publicly were placing unnecessary pressure on stakeholders.

The delegation responded as follows:

- The requested map of National Trust areas within the Mourne would be circulated to Members.
- Mr Clarke confirmed that the National Trust had gathered four years of evidence and made its decision to prevent further public money being spent on the EIA.
- Mr McKenna advised that section 3.5 of the MOU required the National Trust to report its decision within 48 hours, which it did as soon as the decision had been reached.
- Ms MacLachlan confirmed that analysis of the higher Mourne path network showed that the infrastructure could not support additional visitors.
- Ms MacLachlan stated that they were at times frustrated by a lack of response to specific requests for information, despite the MOU agreement in terms of communication.
- Ms MacLachlan confirmed that the National Trust was not aware of whether the EIA covered only the gondola footprint or the wider Mourne, or indeed the full scope of the report.
- Mr Clarke stated that the National Trust had declined a seat on the Programme Board as this would have created a conflict of interest, given its position as landowner. She stated that not being on the Programme Board meant the National Trust was not fully aware of the project scope and found it difficult to assess the wider impact of increased visitor numbers.
- Mr Clarke stated that the National Trust had been consistent in its communications throughout the process.
- Mr Clarke advised that multiple reports already evidenced environmental concerns, and that another report would simply reinforce existing evidence.
- Mr Clarke confirmed that the National Trust had not acted under pressure but had listened to its members, which outnumbered the membership of all political parties combined.
- Mr Clarke stated that the National Trust could not share its internal decision-making records but stood over its process as appropriate.
- Mr Clarke rejected any suggestion of compromised integrity, stating that the National Trust had behaved consistently.
- Mr McKenna confirmed that the National Trust decision had been announced in order to safeguard future public funds.
- Mr McKenna confirmed that the MOU remained specific to the project and as it was no longer progressing, the MOU had no effect; it was never a legally binding document.
- Ms Magreehan explained that a National Trust-commissioned report had already shown the fragility of the mountain and that it could not accommodate additional footfall. This evidence formed the basis for refusing the lease, as the Trust could not risk an EIA reaching a different conclusion or recommending a further investigation.
- Mr McKenna stated that while a gateway to the Mourne was an attractive concept, the mountain was already at capacity. Opening it further would have been detrimental, and as custodians, the National Trust had a duty to protect the area. He stated that any control measures were subject to failure and would further damage the fragile environment.

The Chief Executive and Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism also replied to some comments from Members as outlined below:

- Mrs Ward confirmed that Council's Corporate Plan sought to stimulate the local economy through tourism but stressed that this would not be at the expense of the environment, which was the driver for commissioning the EIA.
- Mrs Ward further confirmed that the Senior Management Team were continuing to work with BRCD partners and Members to secure funding for the District.
- Mr Mallon confirmed that more than 40 pieces of information had been shared with the National Trust, including the Strategic Outline Case and the Executive summary of the Outline Business Case, which contained objectives, benefits, and projected visitor

numbers. He noted that some commercially sensitive information could not be shared, and this was acknowledged and agreed within the MOU.

- Mrs Ward clarified that the MOU had never been presented by Council officers as a commitment to proceed, but as an agreement on communication and cooperation and any statement to the contrary was misrepresentation.
- Mr Mallon confirmed that a meeting in December 2024 had discussed environmental issues in detail, including the EIA scope, and that National Trust representatives had been present.
- Mr Mallon confirmed that the consultants' risk register included land assembly as a high risk and had been presented to the Programme Board, and statements to the contrary were misleading.
- Mr Mallon confirmed that a visitor management plan had been under development to strategically manage access from the visitor attraction to the mountain, and confirmed that the projected visitor numbers were widely known.

Cllrs C King, Jackson, Enright, Reilly and Ruane left the meeting during the above discussions – 6.58pm, 6.59pm, 7.01pm, 7.02pm and 7.12pm respectively.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and time.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at **7.23pm**

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 6 October 2025.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive



Mourne Mountains Gateway Project & Thomas's Quarry

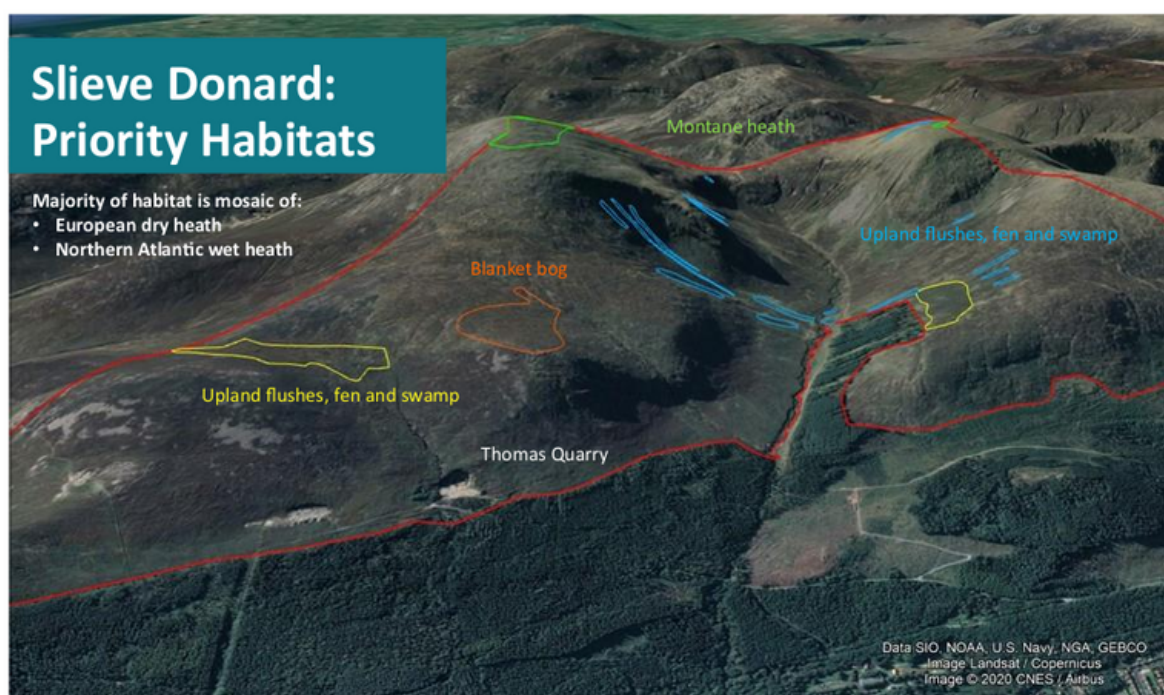
Presentation to Newry, Mourne & Down District Council to discuss the National Trust's decision regarding a lease for Thomas's Quarry.

22 September 2025



National Trust in the Mournes

The National Trust is responsible for managing 526ha of upland habitat in the Eastern Mournes ASSI / SAC, including Slieve Donard and Slieve Commedagh.



Engagement with the MMGP

- Engaged with Council in goodwill since 2017
- However, we consistently expressed our concerns
- RSK Report (June 2022) highlighted significant environmental impacts
- Transparent in our approach - sharing data, presenting to committee, meeting with officers & consultants





Our decision

- Core purpose to look after nature, beauty and history for everyone, for ever
- Informed by discussions with partners and stakeholders
- Growing body of evidence, including recent 'Donard Nature Recovery Report', confirms significant environmental risk

Looking to the future

- Opportunity for an adapted Mournes Gateway project that is truly sustainable
- Continue to work with the Council and other bodies, including through Forever Mournes Partnership





The Mourne:
Building a Sustainable Future Together

NEWRY MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on Monday 8 September 2025 at 6.00pm in Boardroom, Warrenpoint Town Hall

Chairperson: Councillor D Lee-Surginor

**Committee Members
in attendance:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor W Clarke
Councillor O Hanlon	Councillor G Hanna
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor S Murphy	Councillor M Ruane
Councillor J Tinnelly	

Committee Members

in attendance via Teams: Councillor K Feehan Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor A Quinn

Non-Committee Members

in attendance via Teams: Councillor D Finn

Officials in attendance:

Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Regeneration
Ms A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth and Tourism
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

ERT/083/2025

APOLOGIES / CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillor H Young.

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.

The Chairperson noted Councillor Gareth Sharvin's resignation after 14 years of service, commending his hard work and strong advocacy for the Downpatrick DEA, and took the opportunity to wish him well for the future. Councillors Hanlon and Andrews echoed the Chairperson's sentiments.

ERT/084/2025

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

ERT/085/2025

**ACTION SHEET ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM
COMMITTEE MEETING MONDAY 11 AUGUST 2025**

Read: Action Sheet arising out of the Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on Monday 11 August 2025 **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet arising from the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on Monday 11 August 2025.**

FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION

ERT/086/2025 ESTABLISHMENT OF ARTS WORKING GROUP – NOTICE OF MOTION

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism regarding Establishment of Arts Working Group. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Finn expressed her longstanding support for the arts across the District and welcomed the establishment of a working group to support individuals working within the sector, including those involved in amateur dramatics and professional careers. She highlighted ongoing underfunding and a lack of recognition for the arts' contribution to health, wellbeing, and mental health, particularly among young people. She emphasised the District's wealth of talent and the importance of nurturing and valuing those involved in the arts. She welcomed the redevelopment of Newry Town Hall into a theatre space, but noted concerns raised by local arts groups regarding communication and uncertainty about future performance venues. Councillor Finn stressed the importance of clear communication and ongoing support for the arts sector and requested that the working group's Terms of Reference included representation from groups across the district to ensure inclusive engagement and meaningful feedback.

Mr Mallon advised that the Terms of Reference for the working group, including its membership, would be determined by the group itself once established and advised that Councillor Finn's comments would be considered as part of the group's remit, subject to Council approval.

Councillors Feehan, Andrews and Clarke all welcomed the motion.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Clarke, it was agreed to approve the recommendation for the establishment of an Arts Working Group.**

ERT/087/2025 PEACEPLUS

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

Ms Smyth presented the report and accompanying business case relating to Strand 2.5 of the PEACEPLUS Action Plan: Cross Community Festival Programme.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Clarke, it was agreed to approve the business case and procure the related elements of the Action Plan for: Strand 2.5 Cross-community Festival Programme – “Celebrating Languages Together”.

ERT/088/2025

**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI)
PLANNING FUNCTIONS**

Read:

Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Regeneration, regarding Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) – Revision 2. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr McGilly advised that the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) required revision due to the relocation of the Planning Service from Monaghan Row to Greenbank. He noted that a 12-week consultation period was underway, and the Draft Plan Strategy would remain available at Monaghan Row until 22 September, for the next stage the location would move to Warrenpoint Town Hall. The Strategy would remain available online as per the original SCI. He further advised that this revised SCI would be submitted to the Department for approval as part of the Local Development Plan legislative process.

In response to a query from Councillor Andrews regarding wider availability, Mr McGilly confirmed that the document was accessible in Council offices and online.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Ruane, the following was agreed:

- **The amendments to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as set out within the Report and within the attached SCI (Appendix 1).**
- **The submission of the revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) to the Department for Infrastructure for their agreement and carrying out any legislative requirements in terms of publication of the revised SCI.**

ERT/089/2025

**TOURISM EVENTS, FACILITIES AND VISITOR SERVICING
PROCUREMENTS**

Read:

Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism regarding Tourism Events, Facilities and Visitor Servicing – Supplier procurements. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Smyth outlined the procurement proposals which aimed to support the delivery of tourism events.

In response to a query from Councillor Hanlon regarding whether the procurement related to overall event management or individual business cases, Mr Mallon confirmed that it pertained to separate business cases.

Councillor Hanlon further queried whether event delivery could be managed in-house, to which Ms Smyth advised that this was not feasible. She advised that existing event contracts were due to expire which necessitated the outlined procurement arrangements to ensure appropriate support for future events.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Andrews, it was agreed to proceed to procurement to deliver on Council Tourism Events Programme, Tourism Facilities Operations and Visitor Servicing to include:

- **PA & Lighting**
- **Marquees**
- **Event Staging**
- **Professional Stewarding, Event Safety & Safeguarding**
- **Digital Services for Tourism, Culture & Events**
- **Security Services for Tourism Facilities**

ERT/090/2025

LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN

Read:

Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth and Tourism, regarding Local Economic Partnership. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Smyth advised that the Local Economic Partnership (LEP), established in January 2025, had continued to meet with the aim of developing a draft Action Plan that aligned to the Department for the Economy's (DfE) £45 million sub-regional plan. She noted that, under the LEP governance structure, the Action Plan would be brought to committee for consideration prior to submission to DfE.

Councillor Hanlon welcomed the paper and commended the work of Council officers and members of the working groups. Councillor Andrews echoed these sentiments.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Andrews, it was agreed to note the NMD Local Economic Partnership approval of an action plan and approve submission of the action plan to Department of Economy for consideration.

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

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Kearns, seconded by Councillor S Murphy, 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

AGREED: particular person (including the Council holding that information).
On the proposal of Councillor Kearns, seconded by Councillor Ruane, it was agreed to come out of Closed Session.

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

ERT/091/2025

NEWRY CHAMBER MUSIC ARTS & OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding Newry Chamber Music – Arts & Community Outreach Programme. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Clarke, it was agreed to provide support via a letter of offer to Newry Chamber Music for the delivery of an arts & community outreach programme in the 2025/26 season.

FOR NOTING

ERT/092/2025

HERITAGE PROJECTS UPDATE

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding NMD Heritage Projects Update. **(Copy circulated)**

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

ERT/093/2025

NMD MUSEUMS UPDATE

Read: Report from Mrs A Smyth, Assistant Director of Economy, Growth & Tourism, regarding NMD Museums Update (Q1 25/26 Apr-June). **(Copy circulated)**

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

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 6.28pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 6 October 2025

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

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**Minutes of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on
Thursday 11 September 2025 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic
Centre**

In the Chair: Councillor O Hanlon

**In Attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor P Byrne	Councillor C Enright
Councillor M Hearty	Councillor R Howell
Councillor A King	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor D Taylor	

**Committee Members in
Attendance via Teams:**

Councillor T Howie	Councillor D McAteer
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Non-Committee Members

In Attendance via teams: Councillor C Bowsie

**Officials in Attendance
in Chamber:**

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities
Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director of Capital, Estates & Procurement
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance
Ms C McClean, Assistant Director of People & Legal
Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability
Ms S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment
Mrs F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

SPR/141/2025:

APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSONS REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillor C King and Mrs Kelly, Director of Corporate Services and Mrs Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment.

Councillor Hanlon welcomed Councillor A King to the chamber.

SPR/142/2025:

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SPR/143/2025:

**ACTION SHEET OF STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES
MEETING HELD ON 12 JUNE 2025**

Read:

Action Sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting held 14 August 2025. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Howell, it was agreed to approve the action sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 14 August 2025.

FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION

SPR/144/2025:

PROCUREMENT POLICY

Read:

Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Procurement Policy, presented by Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director of Capital, Estates & Procurement, regarding Procurement Policy. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Boyd provided an overview of the updated Procurement Policy, noting that the Policy had been revised following the introduction of the Procurement Act, which came into effect in Northern Ireland in February 2025. He confirmed that the updated Policy also reflected the recent changes to the Northern Ireland Procurement Policy, as outlined within the report.

Councillor Hearty referred to Mr Boyd's reference to the Procurement Act of 2025 and noted that the report cited the Procurement Act of 2023 and queried whether this was an error.

Mr Boyd clarified that the Procurement Act had been passed by Parliament in 2023 and was originally due to come into effect in Northern Ireland in October 2024. However, due to delays, the Act did not come into effect in Northern Ireland until February 2025.

Councillor Hearty further noted that The Executive had published an updated Procurement Policy Statement in June 2025, which included expanded guidance on ethical procurement and queried whether these updates had been reflected in the Council's Procurement Policy.

Mr Boyd confirmed that the Procurement Policy was a live document and would be amended on an ongoing basis to remain in line with legislative and policy developments, and any such amendments would be brought before Members for confirmation as required.

Councillor Reilly queried the extent of premarket engagement currently in place and asked whether there was a greater emphasis on transparency within the procurement process.

Mr Boyd advised that, in accordance with Procurement Business Plans, the Council was required to undertake premarket engagement activities, including "meet the buyer" events. He further confirmed that for contracts above the procurement threshold, there was a prerequisite to engage with the market prior to the commencement of the procurement process, to ensure appropriate market feedback was obtained. Mr Boyd added that, in line with current legislation, all changes to contracts must be publicly notified, which contributed to enhanced transparency.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Hearty, seconded by Councillor Reilly, the following was agreed:

- **To approve the updated Procurement Policy.**
- **To approve the revised Procurement Limits as detailed in the Policy.**

- To note that the Council approval limits for expenditure have not changed and remain at £30,000.
- Note the legislative updates contained within the Report.

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

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor Howell, 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 O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Howell, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.

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

SPR/145/2025: RESERVES POLICY

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Reserves Policy, presented by Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of People Finance & Performance, regarding Reserves Policy. **(Copy circulated)**

As there was dissent in the Chamber, the item was put to a show of hands vote, with the results as follows:

FOR	11
AGAINST	3
ABSTENTIONS	0

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to approve the Reserves Policy.

SPR/146/2025: RENEWAL OF NORTHERN IRELAND MAPPING AGREEMENT

Read: Report from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director of Community Development, presented by Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities, regarding Renewal of NI Mapping Agreement. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Taylor, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to approve the STA as outlined within the Officer's Report.

SPR/147/2025: AHC CAPITAL PROJECTS DELIVERY

Read: Report from Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities, regarding AHC Capital Projects Delivery. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to proceed to RIBA Stage 4 for Newry City Park and to commence procurement of the Integrated Supply Team to progress the project delivery, subject to planning permission.

SPR/148/2025: FUNDED PROGRAMME (WALKING FOR ALL)

Read: Report from Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities, regarding Funded Programme (Walking for All) **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to approve Council's participation in the funded programme, and for the recruitment of the Programme Officer for Walking for All as outlined within the Officer's Report.

SPR/149/2025: BUSINESS CASE FOR MIXED DRY RECYCLABLES CONTRACT

Read: Report from Ms S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, regarding Business Case for Mixed Dry Recyclables Contract. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve the business case for the mixed dry recyclables and to proceed to procurement as detailed in the Officer's Report.

SPR/150/2025: CASTLEWELLAN FOREST PARK RESOURCING

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Castlewellan Forest Park Resourcing. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Howell, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to approve the additional grounds maintenance staffing resources for Castlewellan Forest Park as outlined in section 2.1 of the Officer's Report.

SPR/151/2025: INSURANCE COSTS UPDATE

Read: Report from Ms S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, regarding Insurance Costs Update. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Taylor, it was agreed to approve the additional expenditure required for the insurance premiums for 2025/26.

SPR/152/2025: BUSINESS CASE FOR QUOILE CAR PARK RESURFACING

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Business Case for Quoile Car Park Resurfacing. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed to approve the Capital Business Case as detailed at Appendix 1 of the Officer's Report.

SPR/153/2025: BUSINESS CASE FOR HEIGHT RESTRICTING BARRIER AT CASTLE PARK

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Business Case for Height Restricting Barrier at Castle Park. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve the Capital Business Case as detailed at Appendix 1 of the Officer's Report.

SPR/154/2025: CONCESSION AGREEMENT EV CHARGE POINTS

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Concession Agreement EV Charge Points. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to sign The Concession Agreement and ancillary Licences between the Council and the Company noted in the report, to facilitate the installation of EV

Charge Points and satisfy the funding requirements.

SPR/155/2025: REQUEST TO PURCHASE STRIP OF LAND ADJACENT TO NEWRY CANAL

Read: Report from Mrs C McClean, Assistant Director of People & Legal, regarding Request to Purchase Strip of Land Adjacent to Newry Canal. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Enright, it was agreed to defer the paper for further consideration at the next SPR Meeting.**

Cllr Enright left the meeting – 7.10pm

SPR/156/2025: LEASE FOR CAFÉ AND MINIATURE RAILWAY AT DELAMONT COUNTRY PARK

Read: Report from Mrs C McClean, Assistant Director of People & Legal, regarding Lease for Café & Miniature Railway at Delamont Country Park. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Howie, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to renew the lease for a term of three years, subject to market value rent and the café reopening and offering hot and cold food options.**

SPR/157/2025: DBEC COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT PARTNER

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

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Rice, it was agreed to approve the appointment of the preferred bidder as the DBEC Communications and Engagement Partner as per the recommendations outlined within the Officer's Report.**

SPR/158/2025: PEACEPLUS STAFF RECRUITMENT FOR CMAP

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding PeacePlus Staff Recruitment for CMAP. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Howell, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to approve,**

under the ERT Department, AONB and GeoPark structure, the creation of an additional post and associated recruitment of one full time equivalent staff resource to deliver the CMAP project actions.

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

SPR/159/2025: MINUTES OF NCCR PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING OF 31 JULY 2025

Read: Minutes of NCCR Programme Board Meeting of 31 July 2025.
(Copy circulated)

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

SPR/160/2025: WASTE MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

Read: Report from Ms S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, regarding Waste Management Resources. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to note the contents of the Officer's Report.**

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 7.21pm

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 6 October 2025.

Signed: **Councillor Oonagh Hanlon**
Chairperson

Signed: **Josephine Kelly**
Director of Corporate Services

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ref: AHC/2025

**Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on
Monday 15 September 2025 at 6.00pm in the Council Chambers,
Downshire Civic Centre**

Chairperson: Councillor C Bowsie

**In attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor L Devlin	Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor J Jackson	Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor D Murphy
Councillor K Murphy	Councillor J Truesdale

**Committee Members in
attendance (via Teams):**

Councillor J Brennan	Councillor M Gibbons
Councillor R Howell	Councillor L McEvoy

**Non Committee Members
in attendance:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor A King	Councillor D McAteer

**Non Committee Members
in attendance via teams:**

Councillor A Quinn	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor H Young	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor K Feehan	

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
Mrs F Branagh, Democratic Servies Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

AHC/071/2025: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

An apology was received from Councillor Mathers.

AHC/072/2025: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

**AHC/073/2025: ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM ACTIVE & HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 AUGUST
2025**

Read: Action sheet of the Active & Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on Monday 18 August 2025. **(Copy circulated)**.

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor Finn, to note the Action Sheet of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on Monday 18 August 2025.**

AHC/074/2025: COUNCIL OF SANCTUARY

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director, Community Development regarding Council of Sanctuary. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Robb outlined the report, reminding Members that as agreed at the Council meeting of 7 July 2025 a paper would be brought back to the Committee that outlined the process regarding Council of Sanctuary. She confirmed that all relevant information was detailed within the report and attached appendices regarding the process and aimed to alleviate any concerns that may have arisen.

Councillor D Murphy thanked officers for the report and stated he felt that all issues had been addressed and noted within and proposed to accept the officer's recommendations.

Councillor Jackson noted that it stated within the report that the Council of Sanctuary aligned with Council's statutory responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1988, but stated that Section 75 required more than just alignment, it required screening, equality impact assessments, and public consultation before policy adoption. He requested sight of the equality impact assessment results and raised concerns that, without such assessments and public consultation, proceeding with the report could breach the statutory duty under section 75.

Councillor Jackson, on behalf of the DUP Party, expressed opposition to the move toward becoming a Council of Sanctuary, arguing that Council's existing policies were sufficient and that becoming a Council of Sanctuary could empower outside bodies that were unelected by the public to dictate policy within the Council. He further raised concerns about the ongoing immigration crisis and the strain on public services, particularly in health, education, and infrastructure, and suggested that the public would prioritise addressing these service pressures over adopting the Council of Sanctuary initiative. He stated that there was no support among rate payers in the District for the initiative, citing other councils that had scrapped similar plans following community feedback, and concluded by stating that he would be voting against Council joining the City of Sanctuary local authority network.

Mrs Robb confirmed that Council has statutory responsibility under Section 75, particularly in relation to equality of opportunity and fostering good relations. She confirmed that at this time, Council was proposing to join a network and work towards accreditation. She confirmed that the initial recommendation had been equality screened and passed by Council's Head of Corporate Policy, would be reported in Council's quarterly policy screening report for the period July – September 2025 and would subsequently be uploaded to Council's website. She confirmed that officers would continue to review and carry out their duties in relation to both equality and rural needs.

Councillor Jackson stated that he felt that the screening results should be published before Council considered the report.

Councillor Finn expressed her support for the report, stating that it served as a tool to counter the prevalent misinformation circulating on online platforms in recent months. She highlighted that the City of Sanctuary Network would position the Council at the forefront of best practice across the UK and Ireland, aligning with other leading organisations in Northern Ireland, such as Queen's University, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, and over 42 schools, which had already received sanctuary awards.

Councillor Finn clarified that the recognition of the City of Sanctuary award did not grant the Council powers over immigration or the authority to decide who may live in the area, emphasising that decisions regarding immigration, asylum, and dispersal were made by the UK Government and the Home Office, not local councils. She reiterated that the focus of the City of Sanctuary initiative was on how people were treated after they arrived, aiming to strengthen communities by fostering relationships based on shared values and understanding between new and existing residents.

Councillor Finn addressed concerns raised regarding housing, education, and healthcare, acknowledging that she shared many of these concerns. She noted that these issues stemmed from broader challenges, such as the collapse of Stormont for five years and the ongoing struggles faced by the health and social care system, childcare, and housing. She pointed out that these frustrations were not caused by the people choosing to make their homes in the District, but were the responsibility of the Executive, which she stated was failing to deliver solutions.

Councillor Finn stressed that this proposal aimed to continue making Newry, Mourne, and Down a welcoming and open place, reflecting the District's existing multicultural character, recognised the vital contributions of people from diverse ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds, particularly in healthcare, education, and other essential services. She concluded by affirming that the SDLP would continue to support and celebrate the diversity of the community, ensuring that all residents would be treated with dignity and respect.

Councillor Magennis welcomed the papers and seconded Councillor D Murphy's proposal to accept the officer's recommendations.

Councillor Reilly queried how the discussion regarding joining the Council of Sanctuary arose, to which Mrs Robb confirmed that Council had not been lobbied by any party with regard to joining, but rather Council officers felt that there was good alignment with the ongoing work carried out regarding ethnic minority, social inclusion and good relations.

Councillor Lewis queried what Council felt that the benefits of joining the scheme would be and what benefits it would bring to the District that were not already in place, to which Mrs Robb confirmed that all the information was contained within the report for Members consideration.

Councillor Gibbons queried why no public consultation had been carried out, given the interest in the topic.

Mrs Robb confirmed that at present Council was proposing to join a network with regard to sharing good practice, and an initial screening exercise had been carried out and confirmed that Council would continue to monitor their equality obligations, which included the need for public consultation.

Councillor Jackson reiterated his concerns with regard the proposal and stated that he felt that the public had a right to be involved in the process, even at this stage, as it was an important issue that should be discussed.

As there was dissent within the Chamber, the matter was put to a recorded vote, with the results as follows: (Copy attached)

FOR:	11
AGAINST:	2
ABSTENTIONS:	1

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor D Murphy, seconded by Councillor Magennis, to note the contents of the report and that Council join the Local Authority Network and work towards formal recognition as a 'Council of Sanctuary'.**

AHC/075/2025: CROTLIEVE MULTI-SPORTS HUB REVIEW

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director of Healthy Living, regarding Crotlieve Multi-Sports Hub Review. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Haughey outlined the report, noting the progress made to date since the 2021 Multi-Sports Facilities Review. He advised that the report focused on the Crotlieve area and the recognised shortfall of 13 one-hour slots for training and highlighted the recommendations as outlined in the report for Member approval.

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor D Murphy, to note the updated Multi-Sports Facilities Review for Crotlieve DEA, and approve the following:**

- **To enter a partnership agreement with St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint to progress the development of an all-weather multi-sport hub utilising the allocated Sports Facility Capital Budget for Crotlieve DEA, including the appointment of a Design Team to progress the project to planning stage.**
- **That officers continue to engage with Newry Rugby Club to assist with the delivery of new rugby pitches at Telford Park.**

AHC/076/2025: KILBRONEY PITCHES

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director of Healthy Living, regarding Kilbroney Pitches. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Haughey outlined the report in relation to the proposed works at Kilbroney Pitch, highlighting correspondence from the Planning Department which raised concerns regarding compliance with Planning Policy. Mr Haughey also referenced additional work that is required in relation to the NI Environment Agency (NIEA) response to the planning

application. He presented the three options that had been put forward for Members' consideration, as detailed within the officer's report.

Councillor Tinnelly expressed his disbelief that Council would consider an option to abandon the project. He noted that the planning process had entered its fifth year but emphasised that the project had been subject to what he considered unnecessary delays over the past 18 months. He expressed his hope that Council would proceed with Option 2, as outlined in the report, stating his belief that any planning concerns could be appropriately mitigated. He further stressed that the outcome would be a Council-owned facility that would provide long-term benefits to the local community.

Councillor Finn proposed to accept Option 2 and queried what engagement had taken place between the NIEA, the Council, and the Planning Department in relation to the project.

Councillor Jackson seconded the proposal to proceed with option 2.

Councillor Truesdale queried the time lapse between NIEA's request for further information and the matter being brought before the Committee. She also raised concerns regarding the disparity between the estimated costs for delivering the project.

Councillor McAteer expressed his hope that the project could be delivered within the area, emphasising the need for the Council to engage closely with the Planning Department, NIEA, and any other necessary statutory consultees.

Councillor Gibbons stressed the need for the project, stating that the local community was in need of appropriate changing facilities.

Mr Haughey confirmed that engagement was ongoing on the issues raised. He cautioned that proceeding with Option 2 would potentially not resolve the Planning Department's concerns regarding compliance with Planning Policy. He also clarified that the disparity in cost figures, as referenced by Councillor Truesdale, related to the pavilion option being removed from the current planning application; however, he noted that it remained included in the overall budget as Council was still committed to delivering this aspect of the project.

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Finn, seconded by Councillor Jackson, to proceed with option 2 as detailed within the officer's report; to commission further consultancy work, at an initial cost of circa £20-£30k (further costs to be determined) in order to respond to NIEA issues, but fundamental planning policy objections will remain.**

AHC/077/2025: DEA FORUM UPDATE REPORT

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director: Community Development, regarding DEA Forum Update Report.
(Copy circulated)

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Finn, seconded by Councillor Jackson, to note the report and approve the actions in the action sheets attached for:**

- **Newry DEA Forum Meeting held on 3 June 2025**

- **Downpatrick DEA Forum Meeting held on 12 August 2025**
- **Crotlieve DEA Forum Meeting held on 12 August 2025**

AHC/078/2025: CONSULTATION RESPONSE ON THE EXECUTIVE'S ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director: Community Development, regarding Consultation Response on the Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Robb outlined the contents of the report and the Council's proposed response to the Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy, confirming that many of the comments within the response had been informed by an engagement session with the Department for Communities (DfC). She stated that while the strategy was broadly welcomed, the response highlighted a number of concerns, as detailed in section 2.2 of the report. These included a lack of consideration for geographic inequalities and a concern that many of the proposed actions were reflective of existing programmes and issues already familiar to the Council. She stressed that it remained unclear how the various elements of the strategy would be linked together in a coherent manner and urged DfC to engage meaningfully with all stakeholders in order to identify gaps in provision and avoid unnecessary duplication.

Mrs Robb further advised that it was felt the strategy did not adequately recognise the role of Councils in relation to Community Planning and Anti-Poverty Action and that additional work was required in this area to ensure an appropriate level of representation and involvement. She also noted that, while the strategy did acknowledge the role of the Community and Voluntary Sector, it failed to outline how that sector could be supported financially in a reliable and sustainable manner.

Mrs Robb highlighted that gaps remained in the available data, particularly in relation to carers, health inequalities, and updated deprivation measures. She concluded by noting that the proposed delivery mechanisms for the strategy were not clearly defined and suggested that consideration should be given to the role of the Council's Community Planning Partnership and the work already being undertaken, to ensure that any new structures created did not duplicate or conflict with existing arrangements.

Councillor Devlin thanked Mrs Robb and her team for the comprehensive response and stated that elected representatives saw first-hand the profound and widespread impact of poverty, which continued to affect every aspect of individuals' lives, and expressed her disappointment that despite the long wait for an anti-poverty strategy, the draft presented by the Executive was overly broad and lacking in the necessary detail, actions, and targets, describing the strategy as a missed opportunity to deliver the scale of intervention required to meaningfully address poverty within communities.

Councillor Devlin highlighted the pressures faced by families across Newry, Mourne and Down due to rising costs, low wages, and cuts to essential services, and noted that what was needed was a bold and ambitious plan – something she felt the current draft failed to deliver. Councillor Devlin confirmed that her Party fully supported the Council's draft response and stressed that any effective strategy must include clear, measurable outcomes, emphasising the importance of not only consulting with, but genuinely listening to, the community and voluntary sector, who were working on the front lines of poverty every day.

Councillor Truesdale thanked officers for the comprehensive response, commending the response in relation to the lack of specific targets, detailed action plan or provisions for independent monitoring, all which could have contributed to providing a stronger foundation for meaningful progress.

Councillor Truesdale referenced Pillar 3: Outcomes Training and Further Education, noting a significant rise in emotional-based school avoidance. She stated that SERC no longer appeared to offer A levels in Newcastle or Downpatrick, and with the Education Minister's proposal to raise the compulsory school age to 18 could negatively impact students who were already facing difficult circumstances while trying to advance.

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Truesdale, to approve Council's response to the Consultation on The Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy (2025-2035)**

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

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Magennis, seconded by Councillor D 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 D Murphy, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.**

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

AHC/079/2025: PROGRAMME DELIVERY PARTNER

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director Healthy Living, regarding Programme Delivery Partner. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor D Murphy, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, to approve the contract extension as outlined within the officer's report.**

FOR NOTING

AHC/080/2025: NEWCASTLE CENTRE SITE SELECTION

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director Healthy Living, regarding Newcastle Centre Site Selection. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Devlin noted the extended timeline associated with the site selection for the proposed leisure centre, highlighting the challenges in identifying land that was both available and not subject to flooding. She advised that several landowners with sites located outside the town boundary had approached her, expressing a desire for their lands to be considered within the new area plan. While she was not requesting this as an option, she sought clarity on any potential risks related to delaying the process in anticipation of land outside the current boundary being zoned for such a purpose.

Mr Patterson advised that officers could not recommend consideration of an alternative site due to the associated risks. He explained that extensive studies carried out as part of the site selection process had led to the recommendation of the Newcastle Centre as the preferred option and cautioned that exploring other potential sites could result in a delay of five to ten years to the overall project. He further noted that the project was nearing a key milestone of the appointment of a consultant team to progress into the planning phase. He advised that public consultation would commence once Members had approved the appointment of the consultant team.

Councillor Truesdale expressed her disappointment that the paper was tabled for noting only, stating that the project warranted further discussion. She proposed that the item be deferred to allow for additional consideration and requested that a paper be brought back to committee outlining the evidence of all sites that had been considered, along with the reasons for the rejection of each.

This was seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor.

Councillor Bowsie confirmed that everyone was in agreement with the recommendation.

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Truesdale, seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor, that the item be deferred for further discussion, and a report be brought back to committee outlining the evidence of all sites that had been considered along with the reasons for the rejection of each.**

AHC/081/2025: GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME UPDATE

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director, Community Development regarding Good Relations Programme Update. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor D Murphy, to note the update provided on the District Council Good Relations Programme 2025/26**

AHC/082/2025: PLAY STRATEGY PROGRAMME OF WORKS FOR YEAR 2 AND 3

Read: Report dated 15 September 2025 from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director, Community Development regarding Good Relations Programme Update. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Finn welcomed the proposed works at Derrybeg and queried whether there were any plans to enhance the accessible play facilities in Kilbroney Park.

Mr Haughey advised that Kilbroney Play Park was managed by the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Directorate and confirmed that the current play strategy had taken the park into consideration and had included recommendations for upgrading the facilities.

Councillor Galbraith emphasised the need for improvements at Millfield Play Park in Killough, noting that the condition of the equipment had become a health and safety concern and queried whether any available underspend could be used to address this.

Mr Haughey advised that the previous play strategy had proposed relocating the play park within the village and confirmed that following the completion of the current play strategy that such projects would be considered subject to available funding.

Councillor Devlin welcomed the scheduled works at Island Play Park and queried if there was an expected completion date, to which Mr Haughey confirmed that the contractor was in the process of manufacturing the new equipment and that completion was expected within 6 to 8 weeks of the commencement date.

Councillor Andrews queried whether any underspend could be allocated toward updating play parks within the Rowallane area. Councillor Lee-Surginor echoed this request.

Mr Haughey confirmed that a maintenance plan was under consideration and that the Rowallane area would be included within that programme.

AGREED: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Magennis, to note the update provided on the Play Strategy Programme of Works for Year 2 and 3.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 7pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 6 October 2025

**Signed: Councillor C Bowsie
Chairperson**

**Signed: Andrew Patterson
Director Active and Healthy Communities**

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 15/09/25

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: AHC Committee

SUBJECT OF VOTE: AHC/074/2025: Council of Sanctuary.

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan	1			
L Devlin	2			
D Finn	3			
C Galbraith	4			
M Gibbons			1	
R Howell	5			
J Jackson		2		
D Lee-Surginor	6			
O Magennis	7			
A Mathers				1
L McEvoy	8			
D Murphy	9			
K Murphy	10			
J Truesdale	11			
TOTALS	11	2	1	1

NEWRY, MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Ref: SE/2025

**Minutes of Sustainability & Environment Committee Meeting held on
Tuesday 16 September 2025 at 6.15pm in Boardroom, Warrenpoint Town
Hall**

Chair: Councillor O Magennis

**In attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor K Feehan
Councillor J Jackson	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor M Ruane

**Committee Members in
Attendance via Teams:**

Councillor W Clarke	Councillor C Enright
Councillor Doire Finn	Councillor M Hearty
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor D Taylor	Councillor Helena Young

**Non-Committee Members
In Attendance via Teams:**

Councillor P Byrne

Officials in Chamber:

Mrs S Murphy, Director, Sustainability and Environment
Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability
Mrs S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

SE/097/2025:

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

There were no apologies.

SE/098/2025:

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SE/099/2025:

**ACTION SHEET: SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 19 AUGUST 2025**

Read: Action Sheet of the Sustainability and Environment Committee
Meeting held on 19 August 2025. **(Copy circulated)**

SE/128/2023 – Upgrade to Town Centre CCTV and Council Facilities CCTV

Councillor Jackson requested an update on the above item and raised concerns about anti social behaviour near Lisburn Street Car Park, Ballynahinch, suggesting the installation of a camera in the area. Mr Sage advised that further investigations had been required and no

official completion date had been confirmed. He stated that the priority remained upgrading existing systems to digital, though options for additional proposals would be considered. Councillor Andrews supported Councillor Jackson's comments regarding the need for a camera at Lisburn Street Car Park.

SE/034/2025 - Officer Report on NOM – Street Lighting

Councillor Finn requested an update on the work undertaken by officers to date and asked whether a response had been received to the letter issued to DFI Roads in March 2025. Mr Sage stated that he would revert to the Member outside of the meeting.

Although not listed on the action sheet, Councillor Jackson enquired about the Public Conveniences Strategy, specifically regarding toilet upgrades in the Rowallane area. Councillor Andrews reported receiving several complaints from constituents in Crossgar about the poor condition of public toilets. Mr Sage advised that upgrade projects in Newcastle and Dundrum had been completed, and a risk matrix had been finalised for all other facilities across the District. Mr Sage confirmed that an update would be provided at a subsequent meeting.

Councillor Feehan expressed concern about the number of agenda items held in closed session and asked whether more information could be extracted to allow Members to better inform the public. Mrs Murphy explained that the exempt items were primarily business cases and contract-related matters, but noted that Members' comments would be taken under consideration.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Andrews, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet of the Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 19 August 2025.**

FOR CONSIDERATION AND/OR DECISION

SE/100/2025: DAERA NICAAP CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding DAERA Consultation on NICCAP3 (the Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaption Programme). **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Sage outlined the report in relation to Council's response to the DAERA consultation on NICAAP3. He advised that the response was broadly supportive of the approach proposed by DAERA, however officers had identified several areas where the approach could have been strengthened and improved. He confirmed that the submission had met the deadline outlined in Appendix 1, with the caveat that it remained subject to Council approval.

Councillor Hearty expressed disappointment that the consultation had made no reference to an all-Ireland dimension, highlighting the Council's existing sustainability agreement with Louth County Council and stated that DAERA had an obligation to address environmental issues on an all-Ireland basis, noting that the Climate Change Act recognised Ireland as a single biogeographic entity.

Councillor Hearty proposed that the Council's response to the Climate Change Adaptation Programme be amended to reflect the importance of all-island co-operation on environmental and climate issues, particularly in relation to Newry, Mourne and Down as a border region with a significant agricultural sector and proximity to Carlingford Lough. He further requested that

the response acknowledge the Council's sustainability agreements with Louth County Council. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Magennis.

Councillor Feehan supported Councillor Hearty's comments but requested clarity on the specific all-island elements to be incorporated into the amended response.

Councillor Finn proposed an additional amendment to page 15 of the consultation response, suggesting the inclusion of comments encouraging cross-border collaboration with Government departments, the Irish Government, and other local County Councils to facilitate resource sharing and best practice.

Councillor Enright left the meeting at 6.42pm.

The Chairperson advised that, in accordance with Standing Orders, only one amendment could be considered at a time. However, given the similarity of the two proposals, the Chairperson suggested they be treated as a joint proposal.

Although Councillor Finn had initially expressed a preference not to combine the two proposals, citing material differences, she agreed to do so and requested to replace Councillor Magennis as the seconder. Councillor Magennis agreed to the change.

Councillor Reilly stated that Northern Ireland had a distinctly different agricultural sector compared to the Republic of Ireland, which he noted had been significantly affected by EU regulations and its government's net zero policies. He stated that alignment with those rules would be unnecessary and counterproductive.

As there was dissent within the Chamber, the matter was put to a recorded vote, with the results as follows: (Copy attached)

FOR:	11
AGAINST:	3
ABSTENTIONS:	0

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Hearty, seconded by Councillor Finn, it was agreed to amend the DAERA consultation response on NICCAP3;

- **To reflect the importance of all-island co-operation on environmental and climate issues, particularly in relation to Newry, Mourne and Down as a border region with a significant agricultural sector and proximity to Carlingford Lough.**
- **To acknowledge the Council's sustainability agreements with Louth County Council.**
- **The inclusion of comments on page 15 of the response, encouraging cross-border collaboration with Government departments, the Irish Government, and other local County Councils to facilitate resource sharing and best practice.**

SE/101/2025:

CONSULTATION ON GREY MARKET GOODS

Read:

Report from Mrs S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, regarding Consultation on Local Authority and District Council Guidance on Grey Market Goods in the United Kingdom. (**Copy circulated**)

Mrs Trainor outlined Council's response to the consultation, which had sought feedback on guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency to assist enforcement authorities in addressing food not intended for the UK market.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Andrews, it was agreed to approve the FSA consultation response in Appendix 1, on Local Authority and District Council Guidance on Grey Market Goods in the United Kingdom.

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

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, 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 (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 Ruane, it was agreed to come out of closed session.

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

RESTRICTED – FOR DECISION

SE/102/2025:

FLEET BUSINESS CASES

Read:

Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Fleet Business Cases. (**Copy circulated**)

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to approve the recommendations of the business cases attached at appendices 1, 2 and 3 of the officer's report.

SE/103/2025:

ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT SURVEYS BUSINESS CASE

Read:

Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Business Case for Asbestos Management Surveys. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Ruane, it was agreed to approve the findings of the business case as detailed at Appendix 1 of the officer's report.

SE/104/2025:

NEWRY CANAL WATER LEVEL MONITORING

Read:

Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Automatic Water Level Monitoring. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Magennis, it was agreed to approve the recommendations of the business case as detailed in Appendix 1 of the officer's report.

SE/105/2025:

SUSTAINABILITY CONTRACT

Read:

Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Sustainability Contract. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Jackson, it was agreed to approve the award of the contract as detailed in Appendix 1 of the officer's report.

SE/106/2025:

WASTE CONTRACTS

Read:

Report from Mrs S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, regarding Waste Management Contracts. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Jackson, it was agreed to approve the price uplift and contract modification as detailed in section 2.2 of the officer's report.

SE/107/2025:

DEEP CLEANSING BUSINESS CASE

Read:

Report from Mrs S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, regarding Deep Cleansing Contract. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Ruane, seconded by Councillor Jackson, it was agreed to approve award of the contract for deep cleansing of the district as detailed in section 1.3 of the officer's report.

SE/108/2025: CORPORATE HEALTH & SAFETY TRAINING

Read: Report from Mrs S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, regarding Corporate Health & Safety Training. (**Copy circulated**)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Larkin, it was agreed to approve the recommendations of the business case attached at appendix 1 of the officer's report.

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

SE/109/2025: ACTION SHEET AND PRESENTATION FROM CLEANSING AND REFUSE TASK GROUP MEETING OF 19 AUGUST 2025

Read: Action Sheet and Presentation from Cleansing and Refuse Task Group Meeting of 19 August 2025. (**Copy circulated**)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to note the action sheet and presentation.

SE/110/2025: ARC21 JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING IN COMMITTEE MINUTES OF THURSDAY 26 JUNE 2025 & ARC21 JOINT COMMITTEE MEMBERS' MONTHLY BULLETIN HELD ON 28 AUGUST 2025

Read: ARC21 Joint Committee Meeting in Committee Minutes of Thursday 26 June 2025 & ARC21 Joint Committee Members' Monthly Bulletin Held On 28 August 2025. (**Copy circulated**)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to note the documents.

FOR NOTING

SE/111/2025: ARC21 JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26 JUNE 2025

Read: ARC21 Joint Committee Meeting No 097 Minutes Thursday 26 June 2025. (**Copy circulated**)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the document.

SE/112/2025: CLEANER NEIGHBOURHOODS REPORT 2024/2025

Read: Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2024/2025. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor O’Hare, it was agreed to note the report.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 7.09pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 6 October 2025.

**Signed: Councillor Oonagh Magennis
 Chairperson**

**Signed: Mrs Sinead Murphy
 Director of Sustainability & Environment**

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

67

RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 16/09/25 **VENUE:** Warrenpoint Town Hall **MEETING:** Sustainability and Environment

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Item 4: DAERA NACAAP Consultation Response

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
W Clarke	2			
C Enright				1
K Feehan	<u>3</u>			
D Finn	4			
M Hearty	5			
J Jackson		1		
M Larkin	6			
O Magennis	7			
K Murphy	8			
S O'Hare	9			
H Reilly		2		
M Ruane	10			
D Taylor		3		
H Young	11			
TOTALS	11	3	0	1

Report to:	Council
Date of Meeting:	6 October 2025
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 (Acting)

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 SEHSCT Council received correspondence from SEHSCT in response to NOM, Enhancement of Services at Downe. (C/058/2025)
3.2			Correspondence from Health Minister Council received correspondence from Minister of Health in response to NOM CAR-T Cell Therapy (C/123/2025).
3.3			Correspondence from Home Office Council received correspondence from Home Office in response to NOM – Fishing Industry & Enhancement Support (C/044/2025)
3.4			Correspondence from NI Fish Producers Organisation Council received correspondence from NI Fish Producers Organisation in response to arrange visit (C/128/2025)
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	<i>General proposal with no clearly defined impact upon, or connection to, specific equality and good relations outcomes</i> It is not anticipated the proposal will have an adverse impact upon equality of opportunity or good relations ☒
5.2	<i>Proposal relates to the introduction of a strategy, policy initiative or practice and / or sensitive or contentious decision</i> 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	<i>Proposal initiating consultation</i> 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) ☐ <i>Rationale:</i>
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



**South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust**

Chairman
Jonathan Patton

**Chief
Executive**
Roisin Coulter

8 September 2025

Marie Ward
Chief Executive
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Downpatrick Office
Downshire Civic Centre
Downshire Estate, Ardglass Road
Downpatrick BT30 6GQ

Dear Marie

Re: Notice of Motion – Enhancement of Services at the Downe

Thank you for your correspondence received 1 August 2025.

I would like to reiterate and reassure the Council and the local community that we remain fully committed to the Downe Hospital. It plays a vital role in our Trust's Hospital Network, delivering a broad range of local hospital and regional Day Procedure services, with excellent feedback from patients.

We continue to consider and explore innovative and sustainable approaches to enhance our services within available resources, across our entire Trust, in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for our local community. We have sustained investments in a range of services in the Downe Hospital and local area, including a more stable permanent workforce within the Urgent Care Centre, expanding our frailty services delivered within our Acute Frailty Unit and a new 'Hospital at Home' model.

The 'Hospital at Home' model launched in the Down area on 11 August, will work in partnership with teams located within the Downe Hospital and enables us to better provide care in the right place, at the right time and improve access to services for frail older people.

We are also proud to deliver the Regional Cataract Service as part of our Day Procedure Unit at the Downe Hospital, treating approximately 2,500 patients from across Northern Ireland each year.

As well as delivering a suite of diagnostic and outpatient services, our inpatient mental health ward and Dementia assessment and treatment unit in the Downe Hospital continue to play a vital role in the provision of high quality care for those who need it.

Regarding wider Future Hospital Reconfiguration Policy referenced, the consultation on 'Hospitals – Creating A Network for Better Outcomes', is being led by the Department of Health. The Outcome report of the consultation is not yet released by the Department of Health so the Trust cannot comment further on that matter.

Yours sincerely

Roisin Coulter
Chief Executive

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Marie Ward
 Chief Executive
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 Stormont Estate
 BELFAST, BT4 3SQ
 Tel: 028 9052 2556
 Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:

Our Ref: COR-1214-2025

Date: 7 September 2025

Dear Marie

Thank you for your correspondence dated 14 August 2025 regarding access to Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell therapy (CAR T-cell therapy) at St James Hospital, Dublin, for eligible Northern Ireland patients.

I very much recognise the benefits of working jointly with the Republic of Ireland (RoI) on areas of health and social care where there are mutual benefits to be gained.

As you are aware, an All-Island Cancer Consortium was established in 1999 as an output from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. The consortium is a tripartite partnership involving Ireland, Northern Ireland and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in the USA that aims to enhance cancer research and cancer care on the island of Ireland.

The Consortium is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ireland, Northern Ireland and the USA. The MoU was refreshed in 2021 and it is envisaged that it will provide high-level political endorsement for all-island co-operation on cancer research and care, serving as a background framework for further co-operation in this area.

Additionally, in March 2023, a North-South Cancer Policy and Strategic Group was established. This group brings together policy and operational staff from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to consider all aspects of cancer care and ensure that patients receive the best care possible across the island of Ireland.

Work to develop an adult CAR T-cell therapy service in Northern Ireland is currently linked to the planned development of the Haematology Ward at the Belfast City Hospital site. The business case for this planned development is currently being finalised for approval by

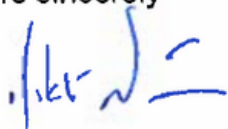
Department officials. I am committed to working towards this planned development proceeding. I envisage that a CAR-T Cell therapy service could be operational in Northern Ireland by 2030-31.

Rol officials have indicated that their CAR-T Cell therapy service is currently operating at capacity and cannot support additional patients accessing these services from Northern Ireland on a cross-border basis at this time. To develop additional capacity would require significant capital investment and therefore take longer to implement than the proposed timeline to develop a Northern Ireland CAR-T cell therapy service. The current position where patients travel to Great Britain for CAR T-cell therapy remains the only viable option for adults from Northern Ireland requiring this treatment at this time.

My Departmental officials will continue to work closely with Rol cancer policy and clinical leads on the development of opportunities for cross-border services for new and emerging therapies and service demand consistent with the commitments of the MOU.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely



Mike Nesbitt MLA
Minister of Health



Mike Tapp MP
Minister for Migration & Citizenship

2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
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Marie Ward
Newry Office, O'Hagan House
Monaghan Row
Newry
BT35 8DJ

DECS Reference: MIN/1335394/25
Your Reference: C/044/2025

24 September 2025

Dear Marie,

Thank you for your letter of 10 March to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on behalf of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council about the fishing industry in South Down. Your letter has been transferred to the Home Office and I am replying as the Minister for Migration & Citizenship. I am sorry for the delay.

My predecessor was in Belfast at the beginning of July, where they had meetings including a trilateral meeting with the Minister for Health and the Minister for Agriculture on the changes set out in the Immigration White Paper.

I understand concerns around labour shortages in the fishing industry and seafood processing sectors, and the importance of the sectors, both to local economies and to UK food security. The remote location of the jobs, as well as pay and the challenging working conditions, all present challenges for UK and Devolved Governments, and the industry, to address.

It is important, however, that the industry looks to the domestic workforce to fill vacancies. Border Force is seeing an increase in British nationals and Skilled Worker visa holders on the vessels they encounter, which are encouraging signs. However, the industry is still far too reliant on illegal working, including through the misuse of seafarer provisions to fill long term vacancies. The Immigration White Paper set out our goal to link migration policy and visa controls to skills and labour market policies, so that immigration is not used as an alternative to training or tackling workforce problems in the UK. We are committed to working with the Devolved Governments, and with businesses in all the UK nations, both to assess how the current system is working, and to analyse the impact of the proposed changes on individual sectors.

The new Labour Market Evidence (LME) Group we have established to carry out that analysis will collaborate with the relevant skills bodies in Northern Ireland (and wider Devolved Governments), and this will be an opportunity for them to feed in the representations of all affected stakeholders, including any labour market data specific to their sectors, so that the LME Group can take that into account as part of its work.

The LME Group has now held its first meeting to establish its objectives and ways of working, and over the coming months it will hold a number of further meetings covering different

sectors of interest and drawing on the best data available to make informed decisions about the state of employment in each sector and the role that different policies should play to support the labour market. The Devolved Governments and stakeholders in each nation will be invited to contribute to those discussions.

The LME Group will also work with the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), the Office for National Statistics and the Office for Budget Responsibility to overhaul future data gathering and identify the research needed in each sector to develop accurate measurements and forward-looking workforce plans. In particular, the MAC will consider the workforce strategy for each sector, focusing on issues such as:

- How far is it underpinned by a skills strategy?
- How far it is underpinned by a commitment to work with the Department for Work and Pensions on a domestic labour strategy?
- How is the sector managing the risk of exploitation of workers, particularly migrant workers in the sector?
- Whether the strategy is sufficiently ambitious?

To support the fishing sector while it makes the transition away from international recruitment, the Skilled Worker visa route continues to include several eligible occupations in the fishing sector, and a bespoke package of support, which includes priority visa and sponsor application services at no cost.

The English language requirement is often cited as a potential barrier to using this route, however, this requirement, as well as helping visa holders to participate in community life and work, can also be important in the workplace, particularly within busy or potentially dangerous environments, and to fulfil health and safety requirements. It also means workers are better able to understand their rights and seek help, should they need to. This makes it an essential safeguard to reduce the risk of exploitation. Unfortunately, there is widespread abuse and exploitation of foreign workers in the industry, and continued support through the immigration system must go hand-in-hand with tackling this. The MAC has cited evidence of wage discrepancies, contractual discrepancies and some foreign national workers in the industry being unclear of their rights or afraid to raise concerns. Given this, the English language requirement is an essential safeguard against these issues becoming worse.

There is a great deal of further work to be done around the reforms set out in the Immigration White Paper, and the key bodies responsible for driving forward that work are just now getting themselves fully established to do so, but I am confident that this work will continue in a collaborative way, with stakeholders from key sectors in Northern Ireland being fully consulted.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Tapp MP
Minister for Migration & Citizenship