

At the Council meeting held on 6 October 2025, the following amendment was notified and agreed by Members:

AHC/080/2025 – It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Hanna, to note the contents of the report on the development of the Newcastle Centre as the preferred site for the redevelopment into a modern leisure complex.

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 J Jackson
Councillor O Magennis
Councillor K Murphy

Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor D Murphy
Councillor J Truesdale

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

Councillor J Brennan
Councillor R Howell

Councillor M Gibbons
Councillor L McEvoy

**Non Committee Members
in attendance:**

Councillor T Andrews
Councillor D Finn
Councillor D McAteer

Councillor P Byrne
Councillor A King

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

Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Young
Councillor K Feehan

Councillor A Lewis
Councillor H Reilly

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 Services 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

