

## **NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Ref: AHC/2026

---

### **Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on Monday 18 May 2026 at 6.00pm in the Council Chambers, Downshire Civic Centre**

---

**Chairperson:** Councillor C Bowsie

**In attendance in  
Chamber:**

Councillor C Galbraith	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor A King	Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor Lee-Surginor	Councillor O Magennis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor K Murphy

**Committee Members in  
attendance via Teams:**

Councillor D Finn	Councillor R Howell
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor J Truesdale

**Officials in Chamber:**

Mr A Patterson, Director, Active and Healthy Communities  
Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director, Healthy Living  
Mrs M Flynn, Head of Community Engagement & Relations  
Ms D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer  
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

**Non-Committee Members  
in Chamber:**

Councillor T Andrews

**Non-Committee Members**

**in attendance via team:** Councillor A Lewis

**AHC/032/2026: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

An apology was received from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director, Healthy Living.

**AHC/033/2026: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**AHC/034/2026: ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM ACTIVE & HEALTHY  
COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL  
2026**

Read: Action sheet of the Active & Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on Monday 27 April 2026. **(Copy circulated)**.

**AGREED:**

**On the proposal of Councillor Magennis, seconded by  
Councillor K Murphy, it was agreed to note the Action**

**Sheet of the Active and Healthy Communities  
Committee Meeting held on Monday 27 April 2026.**

**AHC/035/2026: DISTRICT ELECTORAL AREA (DEA) FORUM UPDATE**

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

*Newry DEA Action Sheet Forum Private Meeting: 23 April 2026*

Councillor Mathers spoke of the recent All Star Taekwondo Championship that was held in Newry Leisure Centre with 170 fighters from 18 clubs across the 32 counties in attendance stating that the event showcased what the leisure centre had to offer.

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

- **Downpatrick DEA Forum Meeting held on 14 April 2026**
- **Rowallane DEA Forum Meeting held on 14 April 2026**
- **Slieve Croob DEA Forum Meeting held on 21 April 2026**
- **Newry DEA Forum Meeting held on 23 April 2026**

**AHC/036/2026: NOTICE OF MOTION - COLD WATER SWIMMING FACILITIES**

Read: Report from Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director, Healthy living regarding the Notice of Motion received from Councillor Lewis at the Council Meeting on 13 April 2026 in relation to cold water swimming facilities . **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Lewis thanked officers for their work on the matter of cold water swimming which had become very popular across the District and explained the motion had been brought as a result of engagement with groups that used Tyrella Beach. He spoke of the importance of looking at ways to promote and enhance the facilities.

Councillor Jackson commended Councillor Lewis on bringing forward the Motion and echoed his sentiments to examining ways to improve and make it safer for users.

In voicing support for the officers recommendations to include further investigation, Councillor Truesdale spoke of concern that Tyrella Beach, like Murlough was tidal and quite isolated, stating that she would be concerned around staffing off season with the opening and closing of facilities and asked that costs be examined.

Mr Haughey confirmed officers would need to engage with colleagues in the ERT department regarding operational matters and costs associated with potentially opening the facility out of season.

Councillor Lawlor welcomed any improvements and stated that Tyrella was one of the most scenic beaches within the District.

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Jackson, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to progress the actions as detailed in the Notice of Motion as follows:

- 1. Engage with local cold water swimming groups to assess current usage and demand**
- 2. Engage with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to explore any existing or potential health-led initiatives involving cold water swimming**
- 3. Assess the feasibility of opening existing shower and changing facilities at Tyrella Beach during the winter period**
- 4. Consider the introduction of a pilot scheme to provide such facilities, with a view to gauging demand, usage, and overall benefit**

**AHC/037/2026: NOTICE OF MOTION - DOG EXERCISE AREA AT DUNLEATH PARK**

Read: Report from Conor Haughey, Assistant Director, Healthy living regarding the Notice of Motion received from Councillor Galbraith at the Council Meeting on 6 October 2025 in relation to a dog exercise area at Dunleath Park. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Galbraith thanked officers for the report and recommendations and spoke at length about residents' concerns about issues relating to Dunleath Playing Fields particularly dog fouling and incidents involving dogs being off lead in inappropriate areas.

He acknowledged the vast majority of dog owners were responsible and wanted safe places to let dogs run and exercise freely with the need to respect other park users however there was a lack of suitable infrastructure to support that balance.

Councillor Galbraith spoke of how other Councils in Northern Ireland had successfully introduced similar dog parks with feedback being overwhelmingly positive with such spaces encouraging good behaviour, provision of a safe outlet for dogs to socialise and offering owners the opportunity to train and manage their pets in a controlled environment. He added that by offering a designated space it would make it easier to enforce existing dog control orders in the rest of the playing fields, clarifying exactly where dogs should be kept on lead and reducing the incidents of fouling and conflict.

Councillor Jackson spoke in support of the Motion stating he had major concerns which had been raised with him from parents about the issue. He stated any improvement in facilities to make it safer for all using the area, especially children would be welcome.

**AGREED:** On the proposal of Councillor Galbraith, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed that consideration of a dedicated dog exercise facility should form part of a wider future development review for Dunleath Park and include engagement with Downpatrick DEA Members.

**AHC/038/2026: NOTICE OF MOTION - UNAUTHORISED USE OF OFF ROAD VEHICLES**

Read: Report from Mrs A Robb, Assistant Director Community Development, delivered by Mrs M Flynn, Head of Engagement regarding the Notice of Motion received from Councillor Mathers at the Council Meeting on 13 April 2026 in relation to unauthorised use of off-road vehicles on Council-owned land. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Mathers stated that the Motion reflected a very real and growing concern across the District stating that parks and public spaces were shared assets, owned by the people of Newry, Mourne and Down and existed to be places where people could enjoy time together and how such vehicles were being driven illegally through these spaces, causing fear and intimidation.

Councillor Mathers pointed out there was a real risk to public safety with scramblers and quad bikes travelling at speed, often without protective equipment and with little regard for others, putting users of these spaces at risk of serious harm, as well as endangering the users of these machines. He stated Council should not wait for a serious incident or tragedy before taking decisive action and work needed to be done to find solutions to the problem.

Councillor Mathers took the opportunity to say clearly that existing legislation already restricted the use of mechanically propelled vehicles on land without the landowner's permission and that it was illegal.

He stated that the Motion called for the development and enforcement of a clear implementation plan in collaboration with the PSNI and local stakeholders including regular joint patrols in known hotspot areas, clear reporting pathways so residents know exactly how and where to raise concerns and the use of signage and other appropriate deterrent measures. He added that this approach would enable focus on enforcement where necessary and also on prevention, communication and partnership. It recognised that this was not just a policing issue or Council issue it was a community issue that required coordinated action.

Councillor Mathers advised this was a problem across Councils in all 32 counties and Grace's Law (Ireland) was the informal name given to new Irish regulations introduced in 2026 that banned the use of scrambler (off road) motorbikes in all public places. The law was named in memory of Grace, a 16 year old girl who was tragically killed after being struck by a scrambler bike in Finglas, Dublin in January 2026 and that was how serious this issue had become.

Mrs Flynn advised the report acknowledged concerns raised by Councillor Mathers and provided a legislative context around the issue. Members were asked to consider the recommendations and mitigations to address this important issue, including the provision of youth diversion programmes across the District, the development of further interagency meetings and engagement and a direct request to PSNI to increase patrols in hotspot areas.

Councillor Mathers took the opportunity to address points within the officers report including the following:

- While there was a need to plan, the problem was not a new one and had been happening for quite a while being brought up consistently at DEA and PCSP meetings.
- Hotspot areas had been identified on many occasions, so it was not about re-identifying them



- 1. Officers in Community Development to hold an inter-agency meeting to agree an approach to address the problem of dangerous and unauthorised use of off-road vehicles focusing initially on current hotspot areas and agreeing an approach which can be used across the District as required;**
- 2. Relevant AHC Officers will identify hotspot sites used for illegal off-road vehicle activity and ensure clear signage is installed. This signage enables the PSNI to exercise their enforcement powers, including the seizure of vehicles;**
- 3. Community Development Officers to develop a District wide awareness campaign for off-road vehicles. Many users may not fully understand the legality or risk involved and a campaign will empower residents with the knowledge of how to report incidents correctly;**
- 4. Community Development Officers to engage with colleagues in the Youth Service and other providers around the development of educational workshops/diversionary activities in hotspot areas;**
- 5. Community Engagement to continue the provision of a small grants scheme through PCSP for local community groups to develop their own localised solutions for community safety/anti-social behaviour issues to address this problem;**
- 6. PSNI to be requested to increase patrols in known hotspot areas and focus on enforcement;**
- 7. The Respect Project to include the risks associated with off-road vehicles as part of their summer diversionary programme delivered on behalf of the PCSP/Council in summer 2026.**
- 8. Issue to be kept under review via relevant DEA Forums and the PCSP Anti-Social Behaviour Subgroup and a progress report brought back to Committee in due course**

There being no further business the meeting ended at 6.26pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 1 June 2026.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Councillor C Bowsie**  
**Chairperson**

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