

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

**Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 1 March 2021 at 6.00pm via
Hybrid in Downshire Chamber and Microsoft Teams**

In the Chair: Councillor L Devlin

In attendance:

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor P Brown
Councillor R Burgess	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor C Casey	Councillor W Clarke
Councillor D Curran	Councillor C Enright
Councillor A Finnegan	Councillor H Gallagher
Councillor M Gibbons	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor V Harte
Councillor R Howell	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor G Malone
Councillor C Mason	Councillor D McAteer
Councillor H McKee	Councillor K McKeivitt
Councillor A McMurray	Councillor D Murphy
Councillor K Owen	Councillor G O'Hare
Councillor B Ó Muirí	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor M Savage
Councillor G Sharvin	Councillor G Stokes
Councillor D Taylor	Councillor J Tinnelly
Councillor W Walker	

(Officials)

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mrs D Carville, Director of Corporate Services
Mr M Lipsett, Director of Active & Healthy Communities
Mr C Mallon, Director of Enterprise, Regeneration & Tourism
Mr J McBride, Director of Neighbourhood Services (Acting)
Mr F O'Connor, Head of Legal & Administration (Acting)
Mr A Patterson, Assistant Director, Culture, Tourism & Events
Mr K Montgomery, Assistant Director, Corporate Services,
Finance
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer
Mrs C McAteer, Democratic Services Officer

C/042/2021

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Doran, Lewis, McEvoy, Mulgrew and Trainor.

The Chairperson congratulated Councillor McEvoy on the birth of her son Pat. On behalf of the Council she wished Leanne and her husband Niall all the best for the future.

The Chairperson highlighted the Covid vaccination programme and encouraged all citizens to avail of the opportunity a vaccine offered to protect themselves and others within community.

4 February 2021 and 18 February 2021 were noted (appendix 6 – restricted item).

Agreed:

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Walker to approve the considerations and recommendations of the Strategic Finance Working Group in relation to the 2021/22 rate setting process, and:

1. Approve an increase in the district rate for 2021-22 of 1.59% based on an estimated penny product of 2,520,986 meaning a non-domestic rate of 23.9970 pence and a domestic rate of 0.4067 pence;

2. Approve the establishment of two new reserves of Council, namely a COVID Revitalisation reserve and an Economic Recovery reserve.

3. Approve the Medium Term Financial plan and authorise the 2021-22 expenditure included in the estimates (Appendix 1);

4. Approve the Capital Strategy Report for 2021-22 as required by the CIPFA Prudential Code. (See Appendix 2);

5. Approve the capital programme (see Appendix 3);

6. Approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2021-22 (see Appendix 4);

7. Approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2021-22 (see Appendix 5).

C/045/2021

ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2021

Read:

Action sheet arising from Council Meeting held on 1 February 2021 (copy circulated).

Agreed:

The Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 1 February 2021 was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Owens, seconded by Councillor Howell.

COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING

C/046/2021

MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2021

Read:

Minutes of Council Meeting held on 1 February 2021 (copy circulated).

Agreed:

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 1 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Stokes, seconded by Councillor Andrews.

C/047/2021

MINUTES OF SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 25

JANUARY 2021

Read: Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 25 January 2021 (copy circulated).

Agreed: The Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held on 25 January 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Magennis.

C/048/2021 MINUTES OF SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2021

Read: Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 17 February 2021 (copy circulated).

Agreed: The Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held on 17 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Mason.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/049/2021 MINUTES OF ENTERPRISE, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2021

Read: Minutes of Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 8 February 2021 (copy circulated).

ERT/026/2021: Full Fibre Operational Costs

Councillor Owen proposed that a Special Council Meeting be arranged with Fibrus and any other network internet providers following complaints received in relation to the roll out of the hyper fast broadband project in the Killyleagh area. This was seconded by Councillor Walker.

Mr Mallon advised the Full Fibre Northern Ireland project had just been awarded and that Stratum was currently being rolled out. He confirmed that once Fibrus was on board with Full Fibre Northern Ireland that it was his intention to call a workshop with providers and Councillors.

Councillors Owen and Walker were content to proceed with a workshop being arranged providing all Councillors were invited to attend.

Councillor McAteer commented that the matters raised by Councillor Owen were regarding operational delivery and that he had requested a meeting to be arranged to get an overview of what was being provided and how it cross referenced with Open Reach.

Agreed: The Minutes of the Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 8 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Stokes, seconded by Councillor Burgess.

It was agreed all Councillors be invited to attend a Workshop with internet providers.

C/050/2021 MINUTES OF STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11 FEBRUARY 2021

Read: Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 February 2021 (copy circulated).

SPR/31/2021: Legal Advice on Judicial Review Challenge against SE Trust

Councillor Hanlon proposed Council also write to the Minister for Health to request he meet with the delegation from the Health Working Group regarding the Downe Hospital and what the future of the hospital might be from his perspective. Furthermore, Council should write to the Health Committee at Stormont to discuss the same. This was seconded by Councillor Brown.

Councillor Hanlon commented that Covid had seriously impacted hospital services, but with recovery and vaccine roll out taking place people needed assurances regarding hospital facilities.

SPR/003/2021: Letter to Health Minister Mr Swann and contact with PHA

Councillor Savage referred to the announcement that the SSE Arena, Belfast was to be used as a mass vaccination hub for the greater Belfast area and proposed Council write to the Minister for Health and the Public Health Agency offering the provision of the Newry Leisure Centre and the Downpatrick Leisure Centre to be used as mass vaccination centres for the Covid vaccination programme. This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Agreed: The Minutes of the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Ó Muirí.

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Council Brown to write to the Minister for Health to request he meet with the delegation from the Health Working Group regarding the Downe Hospital and what the future of the hospital might be from his perspective. Furthermore, Council should also write to the Health Committee at Stormont to discuss the same.

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Savage, seconded by Councillor Andrews to write the Minister for Health and the Public Health Agency offering the provision of the Newry Leisure Centre and the Downpatrick Leisure Centre to be used as mass vaccination centres for the vaccination programme.

C/051/2021

MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 FEBRUARY 2021

Read: Minutes of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 15 February 2021 (copy circulated).

AHC/042/2021 Financial Assistance

In response to a request from Councillor Sharvin, Mr Lipsett provided assurance that applications for grants to the capital financial funds received late that day due to the technical issues would be accepted. He added that in terms of extending the deadline that would be dependent on how things were but that he understood the issues had since been resolved.

Councillor Enright commented that the new system was a welcome development but that there were snags with it and that another 24/48 hours to the deadline would be welcomed.

Agreed: The Minutes of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 15 February 2021 were agreed

as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Ó Muirí, seconded by Councillor Andrews.

C/052/2021 **MINUTES OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2021**

Read: Minutes of Neighbourhood Services Committee Meeting held on 17 February 2021 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of the Neighbourhood Services Committee Meeting held on 17 February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor McKeivitt, seconded by Councillor Mason.**

PLANNING

C/053/2020 **PLANNING MINUTES 10 FEBRUARY 2021**

Noted: There were no issues referred from the Planning Committee Meeting held on 10 February 2021.

FOR NOTING

C/054/2021 **NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING COUNCIL BULLETIN – FEBRUARY 2021**

Read: Bulletin dated February 2021 from Northern Ireland Housing Council. (Copy circulated)

Agreed: **The Northern Ireland Housing Council Bulletin was noted.**

C/055/2020 **NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING COUNCIL MINUTES JANUARY 2021**

Read: Northern Ireland Housing Council Minutes dated 14 January 2021. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Savage welcomed the next 50 years presentation included within the Northern Ireland Housing Council Minutes and spoke at length about the housing crisis within the District.

In response for an update regarding the forthcoming 2nd Housing Needs Symposium, Mr Mallon confirmed he had met with Community Planning staff in the past week and work was ongoing to plan how to best deliver the event in the late summer, early autumn.

Agreed: **The Northern Ireland Housing Council Minutes dated 14 January 2021 were noted.**

CORRESPONDENCE

C/056/2021 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARIES COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHERN IRELAND RE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARIES REVIEW IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

Read: Correspondence dated 3 February 2021 from Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland re: Local Government Boundaries Review in Northern Ireland. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Murphy commented that it would be remiss of Council not to respond as it was an opportunity to look at the name for Council as the name Newry, Mourne Down District Council did not seem to be inclusive to people within South Armagh and proposed that a corporate response be submitted. This was seconded by Councillor Ó Muirí.

Councillor McAteer voiced concern regarding the review following the radical review in 2015 and that a corporate view should be taken, and a response provided.

Agreed: The correspondence was noted.

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Murphy, seconded by Councillor Ó Muirí for Council to examine and submit a corporate response to the Local Government Boundaries Review in Northern Ireland.

C/057/2021 MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE RE: GRUGGANDOO WIND FARM

Read: Correspondence dated 21 December 2021 from the Minister for Infrastructure re: Gruggandoo Wind Farm. (Copy circulated)

Agreed: The correspondence was noted.

C/058/2021 NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY RE: PROTECTION FROM STALKING BILL

Read: Correspondence dated 19 February 2021 from the Northern Ireland Assembly re: Protection from Stalking Bill. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Murphy spoke of the need to ensure the Protection from Stalking Bill remain in its current form and proposed a corporate response be sent from Council. This was seconded by Councillor Magennis.

Agreed: The correspondence was noted.

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Murphy, seconded by Councillor Magennis that a corporate response from Council be sent regarding the Protection from Stalking Bill for it to remain in its current form.

C/059/2021 NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING COUNCIL CONFERENCE 15 APRIL

Read: Programme from Northern Ireland Housing Council Conference to be held on 15 April 2021. (Copy circulated)

Agreed: It was agreed Councillors Savage and Murphy attend the Northern Ireland Housing Council Conference on 15 April 2021.

Councillors Burgess, Enright, Gibbons, Howell, Malone, Owen and Reilly had left by this stage of the meeting.

The Chairperson advised the Notice of Motion had been removed from the agenda and had been tabled and discussed at an earlier Brexit Forum Meeting.

The following Notice of Motion came forward for consideration in the name of Councillor Clarke:

“That this Council welcomes the recent announcement of a £500 Covid Disruption payment for students studying full-time Higher Education courses; notes the exclusion of full-time students studying Further Education courses and students studying Higher Education courses in the south of Ireland or in Britain is unfair; acknowledges the difficulty of part time students facing financial hardship also needs to be addressed; and writes to the Minister for the Economy to address the inequalities and ensure that all students who are currently excluded from the Covid Disruption Payment receive the £500 payment”.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Byrne.

In formally proposing the Motion, Councillor Clarke said it was cruel that so many students in our District, who were studying in Ireland or Britain, had not received the £500 Covid disruption payment. He said it was a token amount, but citizens of our area were being excluded and he believed that extending the payment to all students was a way of engaging with them and getting them involved in politics. He said all students needed support and especially when studying away from home; they had additional travel costs, had lost jobs and were returning to hard pressed families who were having to meet extra costs in terms of food etc.

Councillor Walker said the DUP would support the Motion but asked the proposer if he would accept an amendment to also write to the Executive regarding the payment to all students.

Councillor Clarke said his understanding was that the relevant budget was available but advised he would be willing to accept this amendment.

Councillor Savage said the SDLP would support the Motion, but his understanding was that the Economy Minister had the money to pay this, but it appeared to be that the identification of students from NI who were studying in the Republic or Britain, it was hard for universities to identify them. He asked if the proposer would accept an additional amendment as the easiest mechanism for identifying students from NI was through Student Finance for NI.

Councillor Savage proposed the following amendment: -

“That this Council welcomes the recent announcement of a £500 Covid Disruption payment for students studying full-time Higher Education courses; notes the exclusion of full-time students studying Further Education courses and students studying Higher Education courses in the south of Ireland or in Britain is unfair; acknowledges that the difficulty of part time students facing financial hardship also needs to be addressed; and writes to the Minister for the Economy to find a mechanism to engage with Student Finance Ni to identify all NI students studying in Ireland and Britain, to address the inequalities and ensure that all students who are currently excluded from the Covid Disruption Payment receive the £500 payment”.

Councillor Clarke said he would be willing to accept this second amendment also.

Councillor Taylor spoke in support of the Motion, on behalf of his Party, and said the £500 was an acknowledgement of the difficulties being faced by students and he hoped the Minister would do everything she could to get this over the line.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Byrne that this Council welcomes the recent announcement of a £500 Covid Disruption payment for students studying full-time Higher Education courses; notes the exclusion of full-time students studying Further Education courses and students studying Higher Education courses in the south of Ireland or in Britain is unfair; acknowledges that the difficulty of part time students facing financial hardship also needs to be addressed; and writes to the Minister for the Economy and to the Minister for Finance, to find a mechanism to engage with Student Finance Ni to identify all NI students studying in Ireland and Britain, to address the inequalities and ensure that all students who are currently excluded from the Covid Disruption Payment receive the £500 payment”.

C/062/2021 NOTICE OF MOTION – CITIZENSHIP FOR UNDOCUMENTED IRISH LIVING IN AMERICA

The following Notice of Motion came forward for consideration in the name of Councillor Ó Muirí:

“This Council recognizing the ongoing plight of the thousands of undocumented Irish living in America, many of whom are from this Council region, urges President Biden to prioritise legislation to create a roadmap to citizenship for them and all those classed as undocumented”.

The motion was seconded by Councillor O’Hare.

In formally proposing the Motion, Councillor O’Muirí said President Biden had consistently and continued to be, a strong supporter of the Irish peace process and defender of the Good Friday Agreement. He had also been unequivocal in his stance on Brexit and was deeply proud of his Irish roots, as he was himself a descendant of Irish emigrants to America.

Councillor O’Muirí said it was believed there were as many as 50,000 undocumented Irish people living in the US and this issue impacted many from this area, irrespective of creed or class and it was important all political leaders on this island used their contacts and influence so that the issue of the undocumented Irish in America and all the hardships that go with such status were resolved in a humane manner.

Councillor McAteer welcomed the Motion and said President Biden had given an undertaking, even prior to the election, to ensure the matter was brought to both Houses. He asked if the proposer would accept an amendment to the Motion “to support the E3 Visa Bill through the US Senate”. He said this Bill would grant several thousand two-year renewable working visas to Irish Citizens but was slightly different as visas would be available only to those who had not offended any immigration laws. However, both would enhance the wellbeing of our Irish citizens in the USA.

Councillor O’Muirí said he would be willing to accept this amendment.

Councillor Brown said he would be happy to support the ethos of the Motion.

Councillor Hanna said the DUP would support the Motion but the pathway to citizenship in any country should be done through the legal path. He said he would encourage anyone going to the USA or any other country to always use the legal path.

It was unanimously agreed by qualified majority vote to suspend Standing Orders 16.1.1 (copy attached).

C/064/2021

NOTICE OF MOTION – BANK OF IRELAND PROPOSED CLOSURES

The following Emergency Motion came forward from Councillor Sharvin proposing:

“Following the recent announcement by the Bank of Ireland of its proposed closure of the Downpatrick and Crossmaglen branches, we as a Council are concerned with the detrimental effect that this will have on local jobs, the business and customers in the locality, and urge Bank of Ireland to reconsider and reverse this proposal for the benefit of the people”.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Byrne.

In formally proposing the Motion, Councillor Sharvin said the announcement by the Bank of Ireland was another major loss to the towns of Downpatrick and Crossmaglen. He said we were continuing to see vital services from banking institutes being stripped away from our high streets with jobs being lost or moved away. He said the Bank of Ireland branch in Downpatrick had been a landmark in the Town Centre for many years and had served the community both personal and business banking needs. He said the staff had provided a first-class service and the branch was so important to the experience of the users.

Councillor Sharvin said he was disappointed in this announcement that the Bank used figures during the COVID pandemic as a reason to close the branches, citing a 70% drop in people visiting the branch. He said this was not due to the move from bank to digital but due to the unique environment everyone lived in today and reduced hours at branches. He said the Council needed to ensure that the high street was protected from a mass exodus of banking industries that comes with job losses and the financial impact on local businesses through custom of the workers. He said these closures not only impacted on customers of the bank but the surrounding businesses who benefitted from the bank being in the town centre.

Councillor Sharvin said our rural areas continued to be a target for closures whenever they needed a branch most importantly as their broadband network was not fully fit for purpose for all digital forms of banking.

In formally seconding the Motion, Councillor Byrne said whilst everyone knew over the last couple of months that there was going to be closures, the sheer scale, speed and timing of them was staggering. He said 10 years ago the Bank of Ireland had 44 branches in the North of Ireland, 16 of which had been closed in the last decade and of the remaining 28, over 50% of these would be closed within the next six months. He said this was too fast and too far and would have a massive impact on communities right across the North of Ireland and especially his community in Crossmaglen.

Councillor Byrne said he had pushed hard for town status for Crossmaglen as he firmly believed there was a need to retain and build on the services they already had. Five years ago, they had lost the Northern Bank in the town and were now down to one bank, the Bank of Ireland. He stated the Chief Executive of the Bank of Ireland had advised that services would be established in the Post Office however, the large post office in Crossmaglen had been closed and relegated to the back of the Centra shop in the main street. He said it was a great facility to have in the town but to double up as the main bank in the town for business banking was completely unacceptable.

Councillor Byrne strongly condemned the bank's comparison of figures from 2017 the current climate and said in his view the Bank of Ireland were exploiting the Covid crisis. He said it should not be accepted as a done deal, that over 50% of the branches in the North were being closed, including Crossmaglen which had a counter service.

Councillor Finnegan also strongly condemned the proposed closure of the branch in Crossmaglen and described it as a huge slap in the face for customers especially the elderly and vulnerable; staff and the wider community, just when they needed the extra support

Councillor Hanlon proposed the Council should write to the Chief Executive of the bank outlining the Council's strong opposition to the proposed closures of the Downpatrick and Crossmaglen branches and the impact this would have on customers, staff and local businesses who would be affected by the reduced footfall in the high street.

Councillor Walker voiced his strong opposition to the proposed closures and proposed that that an urgent meeting be sought with the Chief Executive of the Bank of Ireland, DEA Councillors from Downpatrick and Slieve Gullion and Council Officials to discuss this matter. Councillor Taylor said any such meeting would need to have a strong argument in place to ask the Bank to review their decision, with clear facts and figures known in advance and if a rural equality impact assessment had been undertaken.

Councillor Sharvin as the proposer of the Motion agreed to accept the amendment that an urgent meeting be sought with the bank's Chief Executive, DEA Councillors and Council officials.

Councillor Andrews and Councillor Brown also spoke in support of the Motion.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Byrne, that following the recent announcement by the Bank of Ireland of its proposed closure of the Downpatrick and Crossmaglen branches, we as a Council are concerned with the detrimental effect that this will have on local jobs, the business and customers in the locality, and urge Bank of Ireland to reconsider and reverse this proposal for the benefit of the people".**

It was further agreed to seek an urgent meeting with the Chief Executive of the Bank of Ireland; Slieve Gullion and Downpatrick Councillors and relevant Council Officials, to discuss the announcements and seek a review of the decision to close these branches.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 8.00 pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Wednesday 7 April 2021.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 01/03/2021 VENUE: Teams Meeting MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Suspension of Standing Orders – 80% of those present and voting.
28 present and voting - 22 FOR votes required.

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
P Brown	2			
R Burgess				X
P Byrne	3			
C Casey	4			
W Clarke				X
D Curran	5			
L Devlin	6			
S Doran				X
C Enright				X
A Finnegan	7			
H Gallagher	8			
M Gibbons				X
O Hanlon	9			
G Hanna	10			
V Harte	11			
R Howell				X
M Larkin	12			
A Lewis				X
O Magennis	13			
G Malone				X
C Mason	14			
D McAteer	15			
L McEvoy				X
H McKee	16			
K McKeivitt	17			
A McMurray	18			
R Mulgrew				X
D Murphy	19			
G O'Hare	20			
B O Muirí	21			
K Owen				X
H Reilly				X
M Ruane	22			
M Savage	23			
G Sharvin	24			
G Stokes	25			
D Taylor	26			
J Tinnelly	27			
J Trainor				X
B Walker	28			
TOTALS	28	0	0	13