

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 4 December 2023 at 6.00pm in Downshire Chamber

In the Chair: Councillor V Harte

In attendance in Chamber:

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| Councillor C Bowsie | Councillor J Brennan |
| Councillor P Byrne | Councillor P Campbell |
| Councillor L Devlin | Councillor C Enright |
| Councillor K Feehan | Councillor D Finn |
| Councillor A Finnegan | Councillor C Galbraith |
| Councillor O Hanlon | Councillor G Hanna |
| Councillor J Jackson | Councillor G Kearns |
| Councillor C King | Councillor D Lee-Surginor |
| Councillor A Lewis | Councillor O Magennis |
| Councillor A Mathers | Councillor D McAteer |
| Councillor A McMurray | Councillor S O'Hare |
| Councillor D Murphy | Councillor K Murphy |
| Councillor S Murphy | Councillor H Reilly |
| Councillor M Rice | Councillor M Ruane |
| Councillor G Sharvin | Councillor J Truesdale |

In attendance via Teams:

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|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Councillor T Andrews | Councillor W Clarke |
| Councillor R Howell | Councillor M Larkin |
| Councillor L McEvoy | Councillor A Quinn |
| Councillor J Tinnelly | |

**Officials in attendance
in Chamber:**

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr A Cassells, Director of Sustainability and
Environment
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and
Tourism
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer
Mrs F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

C/231/2023 **COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING
OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 6 November 2023 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 6 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Finn, seconded by Councillor Hanlon.**

C/232/2023 **SPECIAL COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING
OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 30 OCTOBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 30 October 2023 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held on 30 October 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Campbell.**

C/233/2023 **SPECIAL COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING
OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 6 November 2023 (copy circulated).

Councillor McMurray enquired whether the independent review into flooding had been progressed and spoke of the importance of elected representatives and those directly affected, including business owners and residents having an avenue to feed into the review.

The Chief Executive confirmed the independent review was being progressed centrally between the Departments and Council was included in that. She added the Terms of Reference had not been agreed however Council was still very much in recovery and response mode. She anticipated information regarding the review would be brought forward with Councillors being able to feed into the review.

Councillor McAteer spoke of how the motion agreed that a robust and comprehensive review of Council's response throughout the incidents would be commenced immediately and he was very keen to have the internal review and report details. He also made reference to the £13million fund that remained and asked whether there had been any discussion with Council officers and relevant Government bodies to release those funds.

The Chief Executive responded that Council was still very much in response and recovery mode, and confirmed an internal meeting was scheduled at officer level. She

added Council had been administering funding on behalf of central government, and the second phase was due to be announced soon as this was being worked on with relevant government departments. This required UK Treasury approval and as soon as an update was provided, she would bring that to Elected Members.

In referring to issues that arose regarding the A2 Coastal route and the Shore Road and Newcastle Road, Kilkeel, Councillor Rice voiced concern that road gullies and storm drains were not appropriately cleaned and proposed a review of the infrastructure and maintenance in the Mourne DEA be included within the internal review. This was seconded by Councillor D Murphy.

Councillor Sharvin asked for clarity on Council's role in the administration of monies, as it was being said that Council were being unnecessarily bureaucratic regarding the criteria that had limited the monies that were being released, which he understood was not correct. He also queried whether there was a doubt within an application if Council sought guidance from the Department on those applications to ensure the right decision had been reached.

Councillor Sharvin welcomed that the Chief Executive was continuing to push for phase two money as quickly as possible because on the ground businesses were still struggling and facing challenges in keeping the doors open.

Mrs Ward pointed out that due to the extent of flooding within the District she had been part of the economic recovery subgroup made up of various different departments across central government and the first package was developed jointly however the money required approval through UK Treasury and had to meet their requirements. Councillor Hanlon welcomed the move towards phase two and spoke of the need to allay fears of the business community. She expressed concern at how funding in phase one was allocated and that it was shortsighted due to the impact the flooding had was something that businesses could legislate for.

Councillor Hanlon proposed that Council write to the Department of Economy asking that Council want them to reexamine funding for those businesses that had missed out on the financial assistance. This was seconded by Councillor Sharvin.

Mrs Ward took the opportunity to point out that Council was undertaking its own internal audit process and would also be subject to audit by the Department for the Economy as well as the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Councillor Reilly advised Mr J McKee from DfI had confirmed provision of a container for sandbags if a location could be located and asked if one could be located within the Mourne area and if the addition of some bags of salt be considered. Mrs Ward advised the matter would be picked up through the emergency planning structures with Rivers Agency.

Agreed: The Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held on 6 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Devlin.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Rice and seconded by Councillor Murphy it was agreed that a Council write to DfI Roads to request a review of the maintenance and infrastructure of the Mournes DEA.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin that Council write to the Department of Economy who were designing the Scheme and put on record that Council want them to reexamine funding for those businesses that had missed out and try and get relief for them.

Councillor Andrews left the meeting for the following item - 6.30pm.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/234/2023 **MINUTES OF ENTERPRISE, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 13 November 2023 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 13 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted on the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor.**

Councillor Andrews rejoined the meeting at this point – 6.31pm.

C/235/2023 **MINUTES OF STRATEGY POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Strategy Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 16 November 2023 and appendix 1, SPR/166/2023 – Newry City Park, Contract for Funding. (copy circulated).

SPR/159/2023: Mid-Year Assessment – Performance Improvement Plan 2023/24

Councillor Byrne referred to his query on the average time taken for a major planning application to be determined, and following discussions with officers it had been explained this was down to how long one application had sat on the system. He spoke of the need for effort to be put in place to address these legacy applications and all other planning applications received.

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor McAteer that a report be brought back to the next Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee regarding the allocation of resources to deal with planning applications.

Appendix 1, SPR/166/2023 – Newry City Park, Contract for Funding

Mrs Ward advised Members that the contract for funding which had been tabled at Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee had a slight operational amendment which she asked Members to note.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 13 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Sharvin.**

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor McAteer that a report be brought back the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee to be held on 18 January 2024 regarding the allocation of resources to deal with planning applications.

C/237/2023 **MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 20 November 2023 (copy circulated).

In response for a timeline in relation to the rollout of more inclusive autism friendly swimming sessions from Councillor Sharvin, the Chief Executive advised an officer would revert to him on the matter.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 20 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Magennis.**

C/238/2023 **MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 22 November 2023 (copy circulated).

SE/127/2023: Fleet Replacement

Councillor Enright welcomed the news that electric vehicles were to be placed in Downpatrick in 2024 as he believed they were financially a better option for small and medium-sized vans however voiced concern at being informed that electric charging

points could not be installed at the Newry depot. He asked that the Newry depot be examined again and that Council look at the whole life costs of every classification of vehicle to try and learn what the Councils in Great Britain were doing.

Mr Cassells clarified that there were limitations on the number of electric vehicle availability at the Newry Depot which was different to the limitation at Strangford Rd. During discussion Councillors Reilly and Andrews spoke of the need for massive investment in electricity infrastructure across the District.

Mr Cassells advised he would bring back a report to the Sustainable and Environment Committee in relation to those green issues and related matters raised.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 22 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Andrews.**

C/239/2023 PLANNING SECTION

There were no issues arising.

CORRESPONDENCE

C/240/2023 LETTER FROM ARMAGH CITY, BANBRIDGE AND CRAIGAVON BOROUGH COUNCIL AND LISBURN AND CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL RE: REPRIORITISATION OF THE A1

Read: Correspondence from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council regarding reprioritisation of A1 dated 13 October and 1 November 2023 respectively and correspondence from Department for Infrastructure and Northern Ireland Office dated 29 November 2023. (Copy circulated)

Councillor K Murphy voiced her disappointment at the correspondence received stating that the safety improvements on the A1 needed to be delivered as a matter of priority with budget constraints affecting every aspect for delivery of key projects. She spoke of how in 2021 officials had indicated with procurement and construction it could take approximately five years to deliver and two years later there was no progression and it was a matter of public safety.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Truesdale, seconded by Councillor Finn to note the correspondence received regarding the Reprioritisation of the A1.**

C/241/2023

**LETTER FROM ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH
COUNCIL RE: LIFELONG LEARNING CAMPAIGN**

Read: Correspondence from Ards and North Down Borough Council regarding Lifelong Learning Campaign dated 20 November 2023. (Copy circulated)

Councillor O'Hare welcomed the correspondence regarding lifelong learning which she felt was positive as this was an area that needed the support of elected representatives. She urged caution as the focus needed to be on providing the funding required by Education to do the job and provide lifelong learning.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Truesdale, seconded by Councillor Finn to note the correspondence received regarding Lifelong Learning Campaign.

C/242/2023

**CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING BARCLAYS, NEWRY
BRANCH**

Read: Correspondence from Barclays regarding Newry Branch. (Copy circulated)

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Truesdale, seconded by Councillor Finn to note the correspondence received regarding Lifelong Learning Campaign.

C/243/2023

NOTICE OF MOTION – FLOOD DEFENCES

The following motion was received from Councillor Enright:

"Recent flooding has exposed the clear inadequacy of flood defences within the District. To address this, and in the absence of a functioning Stormont Executive to swiftly invest in flood defence infrastructure, Council will work with Louth County council, the Irish Government and relevant Stormont Departments to submit a funding application to the Shared Island unit for upgrades to relevant flood defence systems in the district. In particular this work will consider:

The ongoing Newry Flood Alleviation projects; The Shimna and Burren River Flood Alleviation Schemes in Newcastle; The lack of capital investment in Downpatrick with particular reference to water flow at the New Belfast Road Bridge and the lack of capacity and ability of the Quoile Barrier to release enough water between high tides; To seek a replacement for the Quoile Barrier in a similar manner to the Lagan River Barrier with a design suitable for the next 100 years; Examine the outcome of work undertaken in the past in areas like Rostrevor, Flurry Bridge and other areas to assess the effectiveness of investment and any future plans; Seek an update on the adequacy of the schedule of rivers maintenance work across the District".

The motion was seconded by Councillor Truesdale.

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

C/244/2023 NOTICE OF MOTION – FLOOD PREPAREDNESS

The following motion was received from Councillor J Truesdale:

*"That this Council explores the Purchasing and storing of sand-less sandbags and flood barriers and exploration of other forms of more environmentally conscious flood defences suitable for a range of flooding incidents and sewage protection.
-Writes to the NIEA calling for the immediate implementation of a flood warning system in line with England, Scotland and Wales, and fully implement the creation of Community Flood Plans such as those used by the Environment Agency.
-Meets with the Drainage and Flooding Council and Rivers Agency to explore the adequacy and performance of their flood-defence capital investments in the District.
- Examines the maintenance schedules in NM&D District for shores, road sheughs, gullies and major drains like the plank or Saul drains in Downpatrick between the different agencies."*

The motion was seconded by Councillor McMurray.

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

C/245/2023 NOTICE OF MOTION – UTILISING GREEN SPACES

The following motion was received from Councillor Campbell:

"This Council recognises the importance of utilising green spaces and enhancing them for the benefit of our local communities; Council notes the positive impact that green spaces can have on people's mental health and well-being; Council further notes The Woodland Trusts assessment that trees can act as a natural flood mitigation measure; Council therefore will look at options to deliver a native tree planting scheme in Dunleath park which will not only enhance civic greenspace for the local community but will also assist with potential future flooding incidents."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Finnegan.

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

C/246/2023 NOTICE OF MOTION – EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The following motion was received from Councillor Galbraith:

"This Council notes that young people experiencing emotional problems may find it difficult to engage with the education process to reach their full potential, especially those aged 16 – 18, and may require sustained contact with a qualified adult who is not directly involved with their education or training and can provide necessary therapies; welcomes the work undertaken by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) as well as the support in further education to support the emotional health and wellbeing of young people, supports the need for schools, colleges and other youth providers to bring in external agencies with necessary expertise when there is limited access to support and will write to all schools, colleges and youth providers in the District to ascertain the challenges they are facing in obtaining these resources, and commits to revisit this matter once responses have been received to determine if additional financial support may be required."

The motion was seconded by Councillor O'Hare.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Galbraith advised he had had the privilege of meeting young people who were part of a youth led research project conducted by Gets Active Youth Advisory group in Northern Ireland. This was a diverse collective of young people who met regularly to discuss holiday programmes, how to ensure children get enough healthy food and physical activity and how to improve the lives of those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

He asked Members for support in bringing the motion forward to see what other support was required and ensure that Council played an active role moving forward.

Councillor O'Hare spoke of the importance of supporting of young people experiencing emotional difficulties in schools and colleges and is often underfunded and resourced. She sought clarity on the wording and proposed an amendment to include insert the words qualified counsellor as follows:

*"This Council notes that young people experiencing emotional problems may find it difficult to engage with the education process to reach their full potential, especially those aged 16 – 18, and may require sustained contact with a qualified ~~adult~~ **counsellor** who is not directly involved with their education or training and can provide necessary therapies; welcomes the work undertaken by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) as well as the support in further education to support the emotional health and wellbeing of young people, supports the need for schools, colleges and other youth providers to bring in external agencies with necessary expertise when there is limited access to support and will write to all schools, colleges and youth providers in the District to ascertain the challenges they are facing in obtaining these resources, and commits to revisit this matter once responses have been received to determine if additional financial support may be required."*

Councillor Galbraith accepted Councillor O'Hare's proposed amendment.

In welcoming the motion Councillor Truesdale voiced concern at the words 'qualified adult' and 'necessary expertise'.

As a qualified academic Counsellor herself, Councillor Truesdale advised she had no client hours other than training with her class group, but because the UK had no statutory regulation of Counsellors she could put a sign on her door and charge for Counselling and this was concerning. She added that unless people asked the right questions the practice was open to exploitation. The Education Authority had provision set up where schools could opt for a company, or person, from the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy and tender for the work, that usually means the cheapest. This meant there was a high turnover of staff which was not what you need when trying to build relationships, it also meant if a child didn't click with the assigned school Counsellor they were not offered another one.

Councillor Truesdale added current counselling training did not incorporate neurodiversity training as part of the overall diversity modules. Autistic people made up approximately 1% of the population, but 11% of suicides, and that was not considering the figures on ADHD diagnosed and undiagnosed. The current NICE guidelines on therapy state that any form of therapy needed to be adapted for autistic clients but did not offer any guidance as to how.

Councillor Truesdale proposed the motion be amended as follows:

*"This Council notes that young people experiencing emotional problems may find it difficult to engage with the education process to reach their full potential, especially those aged 16 – 18, and may require sustained contact with **a professionally trained adult who has recognised qualifications and experience in the field of youth therapy** who is not directly involved with their education or training and can provide necessary therapies; welcomes the work undertaken by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) as well as the support in further education to support the emotional health and wellbeing of young people, supports the need for schools, colleges and other youth providers to bring in **external agencies with necessary qualifications and expertise recognised by the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society** when there is limited access to support and will write to all schools, colleges and youth providers in the District to ascertain the challenges they are facing in obtaining these resources, and commits to revisit this matter once responses have been received to determine if additional financial support may be required." **And in addition Write to the EA asking for the creation of an accredited Children and Young People register in conjunction with the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society who already have one but which the EA do not recognise. External agencies will also be included on this register with qualifications and accreditations clearly laid out".***

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Byrne for the meeting to recess to consider Councillor Truesdale's amendment.

The meeting did then recess – 7pm

The meeting did then resume – 7.11pm

Following discussion, Councillor Galbraith advised he understood what Councillor Truesdale was proposing, however he did not accept the amendment as it took away from the motion that had been inspired by the young people and suggested it could be brought as a motion separately by Councillor Truesdale.

Councillor Truesdale agreed to withdraw the amendment.

The Motion was unanimously approved and Councillor Galbraith thanked Members for their support.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Galbraith, seconded by Councillor O’Hare that this Council notes that young people experiencing emotional problems may find it difficult to engage with the education process to reach their full potential, especially those aged 16 – 18, and may require sustained contact with a qualified counsellor who is not directly involved with their education or training and can provide necessary therapies; welcomes the work undertaken by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) as well as the support in further education to support the emotional health and wellbeing of young people, supports the need for schools, colleges and other youth providers to bring in external agencies with necessary expertise when there is limited access to support and will write to all schools, colleges and youth providers in the District to ascertain the challenges they are facing in obtaining these resources, and commits to revisit this matter once responses have been received to determine if additional financial support may be required.**

C/247/2023 NOTICE OF MOTION – SUPPORTING FAIR PAY FOR WORKERS

The following motion was received from Councillor Hanlon:

"This Council extends solidarity to education workers who recently took part in strike action; Acknowledges that these workers are vital to running our schools with school transport, school meals, special educational needs support, hygiene and other important support services; Supports them in their campaign for fair pay and conditions; And calls on the Department of Education, the Education Authority and the British Government to work together to deliver fair pay for these public sector workers".

The motion was seconded by Councillor D Murphy.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Hanlon stated Sinn Féin stood in solidarity with staff employed by the Education Authority and teachers who were taking strike action to secure a fair pay settlement and the striking workers who were taking industrial action for a fair pay settlement deserved support and solidarity. She spoke of workers including school bus drivers, escorts, maintenance and catering staff, classroom

assistants, playground supervisors, school administrative staff, cleaners, building supervisors and ground maintenance staff were all essential to the running of schools.

Councillor Hanlon said teachers across the north deserved fair pay and conditions and it was disgraceful that teachers were again being forced on to the picket lines at a time when workers, including teachers, are facing a huge squeeze on their finances due to the cost of living crisis. Teachers had consistently seen their wages fall in real terms year after year and were worse off than their colleagues in the rest of these islands.

Councillor Byrne, on behalf of SDLP, spoke in support of the motion and how he had joined the picket line in St Patricks School, Crossmaglen where he spoke to teachers, classroom assistant and other staff and that it was angry frustration at this point at the difference in pay across the regions. He spoke at length about teachers' salaries and pay parity across the islands and how in England starting salaries were just over £31,000 and Wales are just under £30,000 and Scotland would move to £38,000 from the 1 January 2024 and yet Northern Ireland was sitting at £24,000. He referred to the recent announcement of 6.5% pay ward for teachers in England and Wales and how the decision would trigger the Stormont consequential to get the money here but that it was not ringfenced for Education and that it could actually go towards the debt that had been building from the Stormont overspend.

Councillor Byrne pointed out the motion focused on education however there was a knock-on effect right across the board and long term planning through the Executive being formed was needed to fight for the rights of the people that were meant to be represented.

In supporting the motion on behalf of the Alliance Party, Councillor McMurray said all staff members in schools deserved to be paid fairly for their vital work and were supportive of their right to engage in industrial action. He stated the system was untenable and unsustainable and that it was unforgivable to not have an Education Minister in post to support schools and that the boycott of the Executive was having propound impact across all public services.

Councillor Jackson spoke in support of the motion on behalf of the DUP and how they recognised the value of teachers acknowledging how many kept their classrooms going out of their own pocket. He stated the DUP wanted to see a fair deal for Stormont with proper funding to sustain financing and valuable workers and spoke of financial difficulties faced by the Executive should Stormont return. He spoke of how the UK Government must recognise that a fair deal and adequate funding was necessary to support the teachers and school workers and wanted to see a sustainable budget to facilitate better funding, bringing teachers into line with the rest of UK counterparts.

Councillor Hanlon thanked all parties for supporting the motion which was unanimously approved.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor D Murphy that this Council extends solidarity to education workers who recently took part in strike action; Acknowledges that these workers are vital to running our

schools with school transport, school meals, special educational needs support, hygiene and other important support services;
Supports them in their campaign for fair pay and conditions;
And calls on the Department of Education, the Education Authority and the British Government to work together to deliver fair pay for these public sector workers.

C/248/2023 NOTICE OF MOTION – TOWN & CITY GIFT CARDS

The following motion was received from Councillors Lee-Surginor:

"To support traders in the wake of recent flooding and help stimulate spending in the local economy, Council will explore setting up a local gift card or voucher scheme and, subject to committee approval, support the initial set up costs of such a scheme. This would be similar to the gift card programmes that have been highly successful in Enniskillen, Ballymena, Mid Ulster and elsewhere, which are easily facilitated via a subscription service with a third-party provider. The intention would be to trial this scheme in Downpatrick initially, with potential for expansion to other parts of the District."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Enright.

Agreed: The Motion was referred to the Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6.

C/249/2023 NOTICE OF MOTION – BANK CLOSURES AND EURO ATMS

The following motion was received from Councillor Mathers:

"This Council notes its concern with Ulster Banks decision to close another ten of its branches resulting in the loss of 21 jobs and removal of access to cash and face to face services; acknowledges that the move towards increased digitalisation will make it harder for small businesses to access finance and for people to access cash, advice and ATM services; recognises the worrying trend that 52 branches across various banks have closed in the last three years; and calls on this Council to invite the Financial Services Unions (FSU) to make a presentation to the chamber regarding its campaign calling for Ulster Bank to reverse these closures, protect jobs and maintain its branch network; and supports efforts that would protect our local communities and prevent further branch closures in the next few years. The Council recognises that a considerable number of workers travel across the border to work in our local economy in Newry and surrounding areas; We acknowledge the frustration that these workers have with there being only one ATM in Newry that dispenses their wages in Euros; This Council will write to the main banks and ATM providers to request that additional euro dispensing ATMs are provided in the city and further calls on an incoming Executive to

set up a banking forum to look at the wider issue of access to cash and banking services."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Hanlon.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Mathers stated the announced closure of branches in Downpatrick, Newry and Ballynahinch was a blow to Newry, Mourne and Down Districts local communities and surrounding villages particularly the workers and their families. Local branches were a vital service for both small businesses and personal banking and the loss of these branches would cause huge disruption, particularly for people in rural communities who would have to travel further to access a bank, and for people who were unable to use online banking. He spoke of how in recent years, the closure of banks in Warrenpoint and Newcastle had had a huge impact on residents here.

Councillor Mathers pointed out the closure of branches had further highlighted the need for accessible ATM machines and in particular ATMS that dispense Euros with many employees in Newry and surrounding areas working in the South and requiring access to their salary in Euros. It was inadequate to have only one ATM in the city which was often depleted of cash such was the demand from locals and visitors.

Councillor Mathers added there was an amendment to the motion as follows:

That Council writes to the Financial Conduct Authority urging them to intervene to put a block on any further bank branch closures. We support the FSU in their campaign to reverse the closures of these Ulster Bank branches.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Hanlon voiced concern at hearing there may be job losses as a result of the closures and the impact this would have on workers and their families and that efforts must be made by Ulster Bank to redeploy and re-skill workers. She said that whilst the trend was towards digital banking for some customers this was not possible and rural communities important services were disappearing. Banks were the hub of communities and a vital presence to encourage foot flow onto streets.

Councillors Andrews, Lee-Surginor, Finn, Hanna and Brennan all spoke in support of the motion and the devastating effect bank closures were having on communities within the District.

Councillor Finn proposed the following amendment:

"That Council also contact Link and the Consumer Council to look at the assessment of cash services and the need for Euro ATMs and that Council look at a banking hub within Newry".

Councillor Mathers accepted Councillor Finn's amendment.

Councillor Mathers thanked Members for their support of the motion and the motion was unanimously approved.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Hanlon that Council notes its

concern with Ulster Banks decision to close another ten of its branches resulting in the loss of 21 jobs and removal of access to cash and face to face services; acknowledges that the move towards increased digitalisation will make it harder for small businesses to access finance and for people to access cash, advice and ATM services; recognises the worrying trend that 52 branches across various banks have closed in the last three years; and calls on this Council to invite the Financial Services Unions (FSU) to make a presentation to the chamber regarding its campaign calling for Ulster Bank to reverse these closures, protect jobs and maintain its branch network; and supports efforts that would protect our local communities and prevent further branch closures in the next few years. The Council recognises that a considerable number of workers travel across the border to work in our local economy in Newry and surrounding areas; We acknowledge the frustration that these workers have with there being only one ATM in Newry that dispenses their wages in Euros; This Council will write to the main banks and ATM providers to request that additional euro dispensing ATMs are provided in the city and further calls on an incoming Executive to set up a banking forum to look at the wider issue of access to cash and banking services. It was agreed that Council also contact Link and the Consumer Council to look at the assessment of cash services and the need for Euro ATMs and that Council look at a banking hub within Newry.

C/250/2023

NOTICE OF MOTION – CYSTIC FIBROSIS MEDICATION

The following motion was received from Councillor Andrews:

"That this Council notes with extreme concern proposals by NICE to remove its NHS recommendations for Kaftiro due to rising costs; calls upon NICE to reconsider this proposal without hesitation to make such medication available to all in need; and will write to the Department of Health to request an assessment of the efficacy of this drug to help save lives since its introduction in January 2022; and to consider amending the minimum age for recipients of this medication to 2 so as to ensure that all those who suffer from cystic fibrosis have the best start in life."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Devlin.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Andrews advised he had been contacted by concerned constituents about the NICE proposals that would have a severe impact on the availability of a drug that helped keep children healthy and live a normal life. He spoke of how the proposals were putting a price tag on the lives of so many children and if enacted, those with cystic fibrosis would be in hospital more frequently and sadly dying younger.

If this decision was taken regarding Kaftiro, this cost cutting decision would be taking away an essential lifeline for many parents and their loved ones.

Councillor Andrews pointed out there were other health conditions that were impacted severely by similar proposals, which he believed was shortsighted and urged Council to write to NICE, the Department of Health, the 10 Councils in Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister sending a message that we oppose this and seek a reversal that this medication and others be allowed to be supplied to the National Health Service.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Devlin thanked Councillor Andrews for raising such an important issue and acknowledged the torment it must be to know that help in the form of medication was out there, but a child could not avail of it due to cost. She stated to put a price on a life was abhorrent and the motion to push for the medication that was so badly needed was really important.

Councillor Campbell spoke in support of motion on behalf of Sinn Féin, and how having researched this, that NICE guidelines were also including Orkambi and Symkevi and proposed an amendment to the motion to include these drugs also.

Councillor Campbell stated that proposing to remove medication from NHS over costs was scandalous and that these drugs significantly improved lung function, helping people with cystic fibrosis to breathe more easily and enhanced their overall quality of life. Parents feared that without it their children would not lead the normal lives they were promised at birth. Children who had been diagnosed had hoped with these medications, they would get a better quality of life and live longer and this would potentially be taken away from them if these recommendations were to go ahead.

Councillor Andrews accepted Councillor Campbell's amendment to include Orkambi and Symkevi.

The Motion was unanimously approved.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Devlin that Council notes with extreme concern proposals by NICE to remove its NHS recommendations for Kaftiro, Orkambi and Symkevi due to rising costs; calls upon NICE to reconsider this proposal without hesitation to make such medication available to all in need; and will write to the Department of Health to request an assessment of the efficacy of this drug to help save lives since its introduction in January 2022; and to consider amending the minimum age for recipients of this medication to 2 so as to ensure that all those who suffer from cystic fibrosis have the best start in life."

It was also agreed that Council would write to the other 10 Councils in Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister highlighting Council's opposition to the removal of these drugs and to reverse the decision.

The Chairperson took the opportunity to welcome Councillor Killian Feehan to his first Council Meeting.

The Chairperson wished everyone a happy Christmas and a peaceful new year.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.44pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 8 January 2024.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive