

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 8 January 2024 at 6.00pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick and via Microsoft Teams

In the Chair: Councillor G Sharvin

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor J Brennan
Councillor P Byrne	Councillor P Campbell
Councillor L Devlin	Councillor C Enright
Councillor K Feehan	Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor O Hanlon	Councillor G Hanna
Councillor R Howell	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor T Kelly	Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor A Lewis	Councillor D McAteer
Councillor A McMurray	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor D Taylor	Councillor J Tinnelly

In attendance via Teams:

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor W Clarke
Councillor D Finn	Councillor A Finnegan
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor C King
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor O Magennis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor L McEvoy
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor D Murphy
Councillor S Murphy	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor J Truesdale

**Officials in attendance
in Chamber:**

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

**Officials in attendance
Via Teams:**

Mr A Patterson, Assistant Director, Economy,
Growth & Tourism

As an apology had been tendered by the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

C/001/2024 APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Gibbons and Harte.

The Chairperson on behalf of everyone at Council extended deepest condolences and sympathy to Councillor Valerie Harte on the passing of her step father, John Keenan. Councillors Finnegan, Hanlon, Devlin and Jackson also expressed their condolences to Councillor Harte and her family.

The Chairperson congratulated all community groups involved in organising Christmas tree switch ons and other Christmas events across the District. He spoke of the great community and Christmas spirit created by these events and thanked everyone involved.

Councillor Finnegan congratulated and wished St Patricks Club, Cullyhanna well on reaching the intermediate All Ireland Cub Final to take place on 14 January 2024.

Councillor Reilly congratulated Rory Armstrong from Downpatrick on winning the World Championship in Bahrain after competing against 71 world class drivers. It was agreed a letter of congratulations from the Chairperson would be sent to Rory.

C/002/2024 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

C/003/2024 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2023

Read: Action sheet arising from Council Meeting held on 4 December 2023 (copy circulated).

Agreed: The Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 4 December 2023 was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Hanlon.

C/004/2024

**COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING
OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 4 December 2023 (copy circulated).

In response to a query raised from Councillor McAteer, it was confirmed the interim report into Council's response to recent flooding was included within the Minute and also appeared on the action sheet.

Agreed: The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 4 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor McAteer.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/005/2024

**MINUTES OF ENTERPRISE, REGENERATION AND TOURISM
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 11 December 2023 (copy circulated).

ERT/154/2023: Notice of Motion – Childcare Strategy

Councillor Devlin spoke at length about how the cost of childcare was beyond debilitating, coupled with the spiralling costs of living meant it had become unbearable for many.

A discussion ensued during which Councillor Devlin proposed the following amendment to the motion so that the fully funded element be incorporated:

"And that this Council will;

- Write to the Department of Education; urging them to progress a comprehensive, and fully funded childcare strategy, and calls on the DUP to restore the Executive urgently so that all parties can work together to make childcare a priority.*
- Write to the Department for Communities; to seek an assessment of the impact the lack of an anti-poverty strategy has had on families' access to childcare over the last five years.*
- Assess availability and demand for childcare in the district, to identify areas of most need.*
- Commit to delivering 10 new fully registered childminders, within the next twelve months, in the area through the Labour Market Partnership."*

Councillor Andrews seconded the proposal.

Councillor Bowsie stated although while recognising this was an important issue, DUP's position remained the same regarding the restoration of the Executive.

The Chairperson put Councillor Devlin's amendment to a vote, the results of which were as follows:

FOR: 33
AGAINST: 0
ABSTENTIONS: 5

Councillor Devlin's proposal was agreed.

ERT/156/2023: Financial Assistance Call 3 2024-2025

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

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Tinnelly, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on item ERT/156/2023: Financial Assistance Call 3 2024-25 which related to exempt information by virtue of para. 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local /Government (Northern Ireland) 2014 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information) and the public may, by resolution, be excluded during this item of business.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor McEvoy, seconded by Councillor Finn, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.

The Chairperson advised that whilst in closed session item ERT/156/2023: Financial Assistance Call 3 2024-2025 had been discussed.

Agreed: The Minutes of Enterprise, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 11 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted on the proposal of Councillor Galbraith, seconded by Councillor Campbell.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Andrews that Council would;

- Write to the Department of Education; urging them to progress a comprehensive, and fully funded childcare strategy, and calls on the DUP to restore the Executive urgently so that all parties can work together to make childcare a priority.

- **Write to the Department for Communities; to seek an assessment of the impact the lack of an anti-poverty strategy has had on families' access to childcare over the last five years.**
- **Assess availability and demand for childcare in the district, to identify areas of most need.**
- **Commit to delivering 10 new fully registered childminders, within the next twelve months, in the area through the Labour Market Partnership.**

C/006/2024

**MINUTES OF STRATEGY POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Strategy Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 14 December 2023. (copy circulated).

SPR/176/2023: Draft Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Corporate Plan 2024-2027

Councillor Enright queried the accuracy of the minute stating he felt it had been agreed to reference the climate change emergency more robustly within the corporate plan, in line with the cross-party Notice of Motion tabled in October 2019 regarding the Climate Emergency. He stated the motion had required every plan produced by Council to have a clear reference to the climate emergency with concrete measures outlined to deal with same.

Councillor Enright stated he would propose the minutes with the caveat that the recording would be reviewed, and the agreed action amended.

Councillor McAteer advised he had already proposed and would be content with reviewing the recording.

A lengthy discussion ensued during which Miss Taggart clarified that the minute reflected what had been agreed at the meeting and that the recommendation had been read out to Members who were all in agreement at the meeting.

Councillor Byrne stated he had seconded the proposal in the chat from Councillor McAteer, which he felt was to agree the minute as presented. He stated there had been discussion at the SPR Committee and the wording had been changed to reflect what was presented in the minute.

In response to point put forward by Councillor Byrne, the Chief Executive confirmed it had been said that a notice of motion would not be put into the corporate plan given the sheer volume of motions that come before Council.

Mrs Kelly advised there had been other discussions during the meeting regarding climate change under the performance assessment report.

SPR/178/2023: Officer's Report on Notice of Motion (amended) – Crossgar's Titanic Victim

Councillor Bowsie welcomed that Crossgar's Titanic victims were being recognised and thanked everyone for their support.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 14 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Byrne.**

C/007/2024 **MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 18 December 2023 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 18 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor.**

C/008/2024 **MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 DECEMBER 2023**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 20 December 2023 (copy circulated).

In response to a query about the abandonment of refuse collection services in the Mourne from Councillor Reilly, Mr Cassells explained any decision to withdraw services was not taken lightly, and with ice warnings in place from 5am to 10am that morning, the decision had been taken for health and safety reasons and the risks for large vehicles travelling on rural roads. He advised a dynamic risk assessment were carried out to ensure the health and safety of employees and the general public.

Agreed: **The Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 20 December 2023 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Magennis, seconded by Councillor Kearns.**

C/009/2024 **PLANNING SECTION**

There were no issues arising.

CORRESPONDENCE

C/010/2024 RESPONSE FROM DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RE NOTICE OF MOTION C/203/2023 DAISY HILL HOSPITAL

Read: Correspondence from Department of Health regarding the decision to permanently remove Emergency General Surgery from Daisy Hill Hospital dated 12th December 2023. (Copy circulated)

In referring to the letter from the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health, Councillor Feehan spoke in opposition to the Permanent Secretary's approval of the Southern Trust's decision to withdraw Emergency General Surgery from Daisy Hill Hospital.

He referred to how the Permanent Secretary had cited a shortage of general surgeons as justification for the decision, however when this service collapsed in January 2022, the Southern Trust had made no attempt to recruit general surgeons in the three years preceding the collapse having last recruited in 2019. He added that the claim that there were shortages of general surgeons across the board was undermined by the fact that NHS England had reported a 35% increase in the number of general surgeons on their books since 2011.

Councillor Feehan proposed that an urgent meeting of the Southern Trust Working Group be convened, and that the Chief Executive of the Southern Trust be called before that working group to explain how and why the very clear and unambiguous position of the community had been disregarded.

In seconding Councillor Feehan's proposal, Councillor Finn asked that Council also write to the Permanent Secretary asking him when the decision had been taken to close the Emergency General Surgery at Daisy Hill and also asking him to reverse this decision.

Councillor Taylor spoke of the anger and disappointment of the public at the decision being taken and how the concerns of the elected representatives and the community were being ignored. He pointed out there was a lack of long term strategic planning and investment by the Department and the Southern Health Trust and that there was real need for the Executive to be in place to provide leadership for long term strategic direction.

Councillor Kearns spoke of her disappointment in the decision and how it would cause great concern across all communities served by the hospital. She stated the Southern Trust must be clear about what steps they were taking to secure the safe delivery of services at Daisy Hill now and into the future and that Sinn Féin would continue to work with other parties and experts through the Daisy Hill Future Group to protect Daisy Hill.

Councillor Kearns stated the Health Service was facing huge challenges due to a lack of resources and understaffing and this needed to be urgently addressed and the Executive restored with all parties working together to invest in the health service to help deal with the unprecedented challenges being faced.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the correspondence.**

On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Finn, it was agreed to convene an urgent meeting of the Southern Health Trust Working Group with the CEO of the Trust asked to attend. It was also agreed to write to the Permanent Secretary asking him when the decision had been taken to close the Emergency General Surgery at Daisy Hill and also asking him to reverse this decision.

C/011/2024 **RESPONSE FROM DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RE NOTICE OF MOTION C/255/2023 SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST SMEAR TESTS**

Read: Correspondence from Department of Health regarding smear tests dated 8th December 2023. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Finnegan voiced her disappointment at the response received to a very important motion. She pointed out that there was little detail within the response, however it did state that until a Minister was in place no policy could be set and called upon the DUP to get back to Stormont in order to get a Minister in place to deal with these serious health issues.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the correspondence.**

C/012/2024 **RESPONSE FROM NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE AND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RE NOTICE OF MOTION C/223/2023 PROSTATE CANCER DRUG IN NI**

Read: Correspondence from Northern Ireland Office and Department of Health regarding prostate drug being available in NI dated 1st December 2023 and 8th December 2023. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Lee-Surginor commented that the news that the drug, pivotal in the battle against prostate cancer would not be readily available to men from the initial diagnosis was disheartening. He stated that this was not due to inefficacy or unavailability but a structural issue within the healthcare system as unlike counterparts in Scotland or Wales, the Department of Health in Northern Ireland lacked the crucial entity of a Health Technology Assessment Body.

Councillor Lee-Surginor said it was concerning that despite proven best practices elsewhere in the UK, the Department of Health in Northern Ireland seemed unwilling to adopt these practices to ensure better outcomes for men battling prostate cancer and

that he hoped all parties would return to Stormont, so an Executive could be formed, so a minister could ensure a Health Technology Assessment Body be established and rectify this issue as soon as possible.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the correspondence.**

C/013/2024 **RESPONSE FROM EDUCATION AUTHORITY RE NOTICE OF MOTION C/195/2023 TRANSPORT AND AVAILABILITY OF PLACES FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS**

Read: Correspondence from Education Authority regarding transport and availability of places for children with additional needs dated 11 December 2023. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Galbraith welcomed a response from the Education Authority, given that Council had to send a second letter, however he felt the Education Authority had failed to provide a full response.

Councillor Galbraith said that in relation to transport for young people, whilst he appreciated the huge scale of work required to coordinate transport across the Education Authority, the same issues remained year on year and questioned why it would take up to 8 months to arrange training when the Education Authority would be aware of that at the early stages of the following annual reviews.

Councillor Galbraith voiced his disappointment that the Education Authority had not provided a response regarding the back log of those requiring statements of education or amended statements after the annual review and proposed that Council seek further information from the Education Authority's cross-directorate team asking what provisions would be in place for September 2024, ensuring that there would be placements for those requiring them and that these placements would be within a reasonable distance from where the young people live.

Councillor Andrews seconded Councillor Galbraith's proposal.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the correspondence.**

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Galbraith, seconded by Councillor Andrews that Council seek further information from the Education Authority's cross-directorate team asking what provisions would be in place for September 2024, ensuring that there would be placements for those requiring them and that these placements would be within a reasonable distance from where the young people live.

C/014/2024

RESPONSE FROM FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE RE NOTICE OF MOTION C/224/2023 VIOLENCE IN GAZA AND SOUTHERN ISRAEL

Read: Correspondence from Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office regarding violence in Gaza and Southern Israel dated 8th December 2023. (Copy circulated)

Councillor King said there was no surprise at the response from the British Government and asked how someone could address a letter about the current situation and still use the phrase that Israel had a right to defend itself when over twenty-two thousand Palestinians had been killed. He spoke of how the British, Americans and the EU had it within their power to say to Israel to stop, achieve a ceasefire and bring stability to the region. He added the district and the people of Newry and across the Island saw things for what they were and would be on the right side of history calling for peace and an urgent ceasefire.

Councillor Byrne agreed with Councillor King and said Council should put on record its disappointment at the correspondence received from the UK Government. The motion had been articulated to condemn all killings right across the region and whilst it was positive that the Minister had at least acknowledged that a human tragedy was unfolding in the Middle East, there was nothing in the response that pointed to steps being taken to stop the suffering of innocent Palestinians. The Minister had condemned Hamas but did not condemn the disproportionate actions of Israel and had said that Israel had a right to defend itself. Every human, in every state had a right to defend themselves and not once did the Minister write about the rights of Gazans, Palestinians or people in the West Bank to defend themselves.

In response to a query from Councillor Byrne, the Chief Executive confirmed that a response had not yet been received from the Irish Government.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the correspondence.

C/015/2024

RESPONSE FROM EDUCATION AUTHORITY RE NOTICE OF MOTION C/226/2023 BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Read: Correspondence from Education Authority regarding bereavement support dated 14 December 2023. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Howell welcomed the response from the Education Authority and that it was good to get clarification that there was support regarding bereavement and training for schools.

Councillor Howell proposed Council write back to the Education Authority to ascertain what percentage of schools in the local area partook in bereavement training and ask

how many schools had registered for the Whole School Approach to Bereavement and Critical Incidents program.

Councillor Hanlon seconded Councillor Howell's proposal.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lee-Surginor, seconded by Councillor O'Hare it was agreed to note the correspondence.**

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Howell, seconded by Councillor Hanlon that Council write back to the Education Authority to ascertain what percentage of schools in the local area partook in bereavement training and ask how many schools had registered for the whole school, emotional health and wellbeing program.

C/016/2024 **APSE CONFERENCE – LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC POLICY SYMPOSIUM**

Read: Invitation from APSE regarding Conference on 19 January 2024 (Copy circulated)

Noted: **The conference details were noted.**

C/017/2024 **NOTICE OF MOTION – CLIMATE CHANGE**

The following motion was received from Councillor McMurray:

“That this Council acknowledges the work done to date to help address the climate emergency; reaffirms previous motions regarding the degenerating global situation; and again, reiterates that the crisis is the biggest threat posed to our constituents, our district and our planet. Further acknowledges, however, that recent data collated by Climate Emergency UK ranks NMDDC 8th out of the 11 Councils within NI; and thus, pledges to include ambitious targets in the forthcoming Sustainability and Climate Strategies and Action Plans to expedite implementation. Considers that political instability hinders a transition to a greener economy and thus agrees to write to the Secretary of State for NI, the Shadow Secretary of State for NI, and the Irish Republic's Minister of Foreign Affairs to press the urgent need to reform the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and accept the recommendations contained within the report of the Westminster's Northern Ireland Affairs Committee evaluating their effectiveness”.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Kelly.

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

C/018/2024 NOTICE OF MOTION – GEOGRAPHICAL DISPARITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The following motion was received from Councillor Sharvin:

"Expresses grave concern at the significant geographic disparities in the economy of Northern Ireland between those areas which have experienced economic prosperity and those areas which have been left behind. Recognises that too many of our communities are still trapped in levels of poverty. Expresses concern that the proportion of the population in Newry, Mourne and Down who are living in households where income is below 60% of the NI average (15.3%) is higher than the Northern Ireland average (13.1%) and is the third highest in Northern Ireland after Derry and Strabane and Fermanagh and Omagh. Welcomes the publication of an action plan by Invest Northern Ireland (NI) to implement the recommendations of the recent review which revealed the scale of failure of Invest NI to work as a partner on a sub-regional basis. Welcomes the proposal for legislation to address these regional economic imbalances through a Regional Jobs and Investment Bill. Resolves to take all possible measures to alleviate regional economic imbalances in order to give every citizen equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of geography. Commits to responding to the consultation on this legislation which is currently open."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Devlin.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Sharvin said he believed that a person's chances should not be dictated by a postcode, that every person should have equal opportunities to succeed and go as far as their talents would take them and that jobs, opportunities and investment should be shared equally throughout the North. All too often that it was not the case with too many people trapped in poverty, deprivation and disadvantage in the community.

Councillor Sharvin explained this was the reason he was supporting the proposal for legislation to be brought forward to help combat this to ensure government was taking all necessary steps to spread jobs and investments throughout the North so everyone had a chance to succeed. This proposed law was designed to change the way Stormont worked by placing binding targets on all government departments to ensure that reasonable economic balance was fully considered when planned strategies and initiatives were put together.

Councillor Sharvin made reference to Derry and Belfast and the disparities within the economy, and that Newry, Mourne and Down District deserved to have its voice heard as well. Regional balance was not just about the two largest cities but was about each and every community getting a fair share of jobs and investment.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Devlin made reference to significant pockets of poverty and deprivation in areas that needed additional support and intervention from government and she hoped when the new Executive Assembly was in place that the imbalance which was acutely felt right across the District could be addressed.

In speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Hanlon said Sinn Féin were committed to tackling regional imbalances that existed in terms of employment and investment. She said in the past Invest NI had shown a lack of investment, job creation and investor visits particularly in rural areas and those west of the Bann. There was a clear gap in employment rates between different parts of the north, and this gap had to be narrowed so people across the north could benefit from greater employment opportunities and economic development.

Councillor Hanlon stated Invest NI must work more closely with local councils to promote investment and support job creation in areas which had been historically neglected or disadvantaged and should put in additional resources and upskilling and growing indigenous SME's and micro businesses.

Councillor Hanlon proposed the following amendment to include the following within the motion:

"Calls for the restoration of the Executive and for an incoming Economy Minister, as a priority, resolves to take all possible measures to alleviate regional economic imbalances in order to give every citizen equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of geography."

Councillor Hanlon's amendment was accepted by Councillor Sharvin.

Councillors McMurray, Taylor and Byrne each spoke in support of the motion on behalf of their party's.

Councillor Bowsie advised the DUP were happy to support the original motion but it was regrettable that an unnecessary dig at DUPs legitimate concerns over the Union were inserted with the amendment, and there could not be a collective voice on this important issue as the DUP would be abstaining.

The Chairperson pointed out Councillor Hanlon's amendment had refrained from mentioning the DUP and that it was the importance of restoring the Executive to bring prosperity and opportunity for Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson put Councillor Hanlon's amendment to a vote, the results of which were as follows:

FOR:	34
AGAINST:	0
ABSTENTIONS:	4

The motion was carried.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Devlin that Council:

- Expresses grave concern at the significant geographic disparities in the economy of Northern Ireland between those areas which have experienced economic prosperity and those areas which have been left behind.
- Recognises that too many of our communities are still trapped in levels of poverty. Expresses concern that the proportion of the population in Newry, Mourne and Down who are living in households where income is below 60% of the NI average (15.3%) is higher than the Northern Ireland average (13.1%) and is the third highest in Northern Ireland after Derry and Strabane and Fermanagh and Omagh.
- Welcomes the publication of an action plan by Invest Northern Ireland (NI) to implement the recommendations of the recent review which revealed the scale of failure of Invest NI to work as a partner on a sub-regional basis.
- Welcomes the proposal for legislation to address these regional economic imbalances through a Regional Jobs and Investment Bill.
- Resolves to take all possible measures to alleviate regional economic imbalances in order to give every citizen equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of geography.
- Commits to responding to the consultation on this legislation which is currently open.
- Calls for the restoration of the Executive and for an incoming Economy Minister, as a priority, resolves to take all possible measures to alleviate regional economic imbalances in order to give every citizen equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of geography.

Councillor Reilly left the meeting during the above item.

C/019/2024 NOTICE OF MOTION – KILBRONEY PARK PLAYING PITCHES

The following motion was received from Councillor Tinnelly:

"This Council shares the frustration and disappointment of the wider Crotlieve football & sporting fraternity, that almost three years after a planning application was submitted to upgrade the existing playing pitches at Kilbroney Park, information remains outstanding that would allow the planning department to complete their deliberations and bring forward a recommendation. Council remains very concerned at the unacceptable delay and inertia that has enveloped this process throughout 2023 and the inability of the project managers to progress the application to the stage

where the planning department can conclude their work. Council notes the latest correspondence on the planning portal dated December 7th 2023, between the planning department and the project managers and agrees that an intervention from elected members is both appropriate and necessary to help break the logjam. Council now instructs the project managers to withdraw the pavillion/changing room element from this current application and to immediately provide the remaining outstanding information as requested by the planning department so a recommendation regarding the upgrading the pitches themselves can be made without further delay. Furthermore, project managers will immediately seek to identify an alternative site for the pavilion and will submit a separate planning application for a pavilion within three months of this meeting. Project managers will also provide a monthly update to council regarding the other outstanding matters as requested by the planning department."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Hanna.

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

Councillors Hanna and Jackon left the meeting at this point of the meeting.

C/020/2024 NOTICE OF MOTION – BBC PROGRAMME FARM GATE AND AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

The following motion was received from Councillor McAteer:

"That this Council views with deep concern, BBC Northern Ireland's move to axe the agricultural feature segment programme, "Farm Gate" from their Radio Ulster schedule. And further demands that BBC NI fulfils it's obligations and responsibilities as a public service broadcaster to the farming and rural community. We also call on BBC NI to formally commit to providing regular, adequate, and bespoke coverage of live agricultural issues, including market and produce trends. If passed this motion will be sent to Mr Adam Smyth, BBC Northern Ireland Director."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Byrne.

In presenting the motion, Councillor McAteer advised he had brought it forward following the removal of a feature programme, Farm Gate by BBC Radio Ulster. He explained that recently farming and farmers were coming under greater focus in relation to greenhouse gas reduction and farming practices and to stop the information flow 'to' farmers was untimely and unfair and farmers felt increasingly isolated and pressurised.

Councillor McAteer advised the plan by BBC NI to remove the only broadcast by them, featuring agriculture was creating more angst among farmers and with around 4000 farm businesses in this Council area, forming a constituent part of the local economy, along with the remaining 20,000 other farm businesses throughout Northern Ireland.

Members were told this programme, which had been on air for over 30 years, was an important lifeline reaching into houses, milking parlours and tractors, bringing up to date information to farmers, directly affecting their livelihoods with the majority of farmers being lone workers and living in isolated parts of the country. To cut off this service will only alienate them further.

Councillor McAteer questioned why other minority interests were currently recognised by the BBC including culture, language, or hobbies, so why the removal of agriculture? Also had the BBC gave due regard to Rural Proofing and the Rural Needs Act Northern Ireland, which was enacted in the Assembly in 2016?

In seconding the motion, Councillor Byrne pointed out the program has been going for 30 years, used to have its own segment and over the years this had been reduced down to a five minutes segment on BBC Radio Ulster which had been phased out and removed.

Councillor Byrne advised BBC had a responsibility to the farming and rural community, and being funded by the public purse, the BBC had a responsibility to bring this content to the people. He spoke of the importance of Council supporting the people lobbying for this change to be reversed, and advised the Ulster Farmers Union were meeting with the BBC as they were completely exasperated as to why this decision had been made. As a Council with a huge rural area elected representatives were being urged to put weight behind the campaign to get the decision overturned.

Councillor Magennis voiced support for the motion on behalf of Sinn Féin commenting that it had highlighted the disrespect BBC bosses had for the farming and rural community across the north. Members were advised that an arranged meeting with farmers to discuss the axing of the 30-year-old Farm Gate show just before Christmas had been cancelled and was another setback for an already struggling farming community. There was no other radio programme in the North that delivered information on agriculture, ranging from policy to farm gate prices.

Councillor Magennis spoke of the need for an up and running Executive, with an Agriculture Minister in place to be in a much stronger position to challenge these issues and urged the DUP to end their boycott so as Minister's could be appointed to tackle these issues head on through the Assembly.

Councillors McMurray and Taylor joined in supporting the motion on behalf of their Party's.

Councillor McAteer thanked Members for their support.

Agreed: **It was unanimously agreed on the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Byrne that Council views with deep concern, BBC Northern Ireland's move to axe the agricultural feature segment programme, "Farm Gate" from their Radio Ulster schedule. And further demands that BBC NI fulfils it's obligations and responsibilities as a public**

service broadcaster to the farming and rural community. Also calls on BBC NI to formally commit to providing regular, adequate, and bespoke coverage of live agricultural issues, including market and produce trends. The motion be sent to Mr Adam Smyth, BBC Northern Ireland Director.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.50pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 5 February 2024.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive