

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 1 December 2025 at 6.00pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor P Campbell

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor J Brennan	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor W Clarke	Councillor L Devlin
Councillor K Feehan	Councillor D Finn
Councillor C Galbraith	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor M Hearty
Councillor T Howie	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor A King
Councillor C King	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor A Mathers
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor D Murphy
Councillor S Murphy	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor A Quinn	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Rice	Councillor D Taylor
Councillor H Young	

In attendance via Teams:

Councillor C Enright	Councillor M Gibbons
Councillor R Howell	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor J Truesdale	

Also in attendance:

Mr S Byrne, St Louis' Grammar School
Miss E Comac, St Louis' Grammar School
Miss N Crowley, St Louis' Grammar School
Miss A Dinsmore, St Louis' Grammar School
Mrs B Cunningham, St Louis' Grammar School

Officials in attendance:

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active and Health Communities
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

C/174/2025

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Harte, McEvoy, Ruane and Tinnelly.

The Chairperson delivered the following remarks:

- He welcomed the students from St Louis Grammar School who were the winning school in his recent 'Dragons Den' event that was held during Local Democracy Week. He advised that the students were in attendance to present their winning Notice of Motion to Council for debate.
- He expressed thanks and gratitude to Council staff and community volunteers who had assisted with the Christmas lights switch-on across the District, noting that such events brought people together, strengthened communities, and provided opportunities to pause, reflect, and be thankful.
- He offered heartfelt condolences to Council colleague Donna Starkey, Democratic Services Officer and her family on the recent sad passing of her husband, Richard.
- He, along with Councillor Lee-Surginor expressed sympathy to the victims of the tragic fire in Hong Kong, noting that many citizens within the District had connections to the region.
- He offered a fond farewell to Mrs J. Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, and thanked her for her dedicated service to the Council.

C/175/2025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

Councillor Howie declared an interest in item C/186/2025 as she was an employee of the Royal College of GPs, who had taken a position on the issue.

C/176/2025 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2025

Read: Action sheet from Council Meeting held on 3 November 2025.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor D Murphy, the Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 3 November 2025 was agreed.

COUNCIL MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/177/2025 MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2025

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 3 November 2025 (copy circulated).

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Magennis, seconded by Councillor S Murphy, the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 3 November 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/178/2025

**MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2025**

Read: Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 10 November 2025 (copy circulated).

ERT/109/2025: Friends of Castlewellan Arboretum and Annesley Walled Garden

Councillor Devlin welcomed the recent progress and highlighted that it had always been an important element of what was required within Castlewellan Forest Park.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor, the Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 10 November 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/179/2025

**MINUTES OF STRATEGY POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2025**

Read: Minutes of Strategy Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 13 November 2025 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor McAteer, the Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 13 November 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/180/2025

**MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 NOVEMBER 2025**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 17 November 2025 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor D Murphy, seconded by Councillor Mathers, the Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 17 November 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/181/2025

**MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOVEMBER 2025**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 19 November 2025 (copy circulated).

SE/141/2025: Christmas and New Year Arrangements – Refuse Collections and Household Recycling Centres

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Hanna, Mrs Murphy confirmed that a report had been provided at Committee and that alternative collection days had been approved by Members. She advised that communication in relation to this would be published using both

print and social media, and that stickers would be placed on the bins of affected residents and business customers to advise them of the alternative collection days.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Young, the Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 19 November 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/182/2025 PLANNING SECTION

In response to a request from Councillor Hanna for an update regarding Newry Civic Hub, Mr Mallon advised that email correspondence had been issued to all Councillors the previous week detailing the current position. He added that the application had been submitted to Court and that it was a matter for the Court to determine whether leave would be granted to hear a Judicial Review.

C/183/2025 CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

Read: Report from Mrs Ward, Chief Executive, regarding an update on correspondence received for the attention of Council (copy circulated).

Correspondence from Mid Ulster Council regarding their Motion on Caoimhé's Law

Councillor Galbraith advised that he had a Motion to be heard later in relation to Caoimhé's Law and welcomed the support shown by colleagues in Mid Ulster in confronting an issue that no family should ever have to face.

He stated that in the aftermath of fatal road collisions, while emergency responders worked to save lives, others lifted their phones to film. Before families were informed of their loss, footage was already circulating on social media platforms such as Snapchat and WhatsApp. He emphasised that these were not simply videos but the final moments of someone's loved one.

He referred to the words of the O'Brien family: *"No mother should ever have to race against the internet to tell her own son that his sister has died."* He stressed that their daughter Caoimhé deserved dignity, as did every family, explaining that there were currently no specific laws in Northern Ireland to prevent this harmful and traumatising behaviour. He outlined that Caoimhé's Law sought to protect families, safeguard dignity, and recognised that while a post or message could wait, a family's pain would last forever.

Councillor Galbraith stated that a clear message needed to be sent that compassion must come before curiosity, and that Council should stand with affected families and choose dignity. He advised that it was important for Council to take this vital step toward justice and proposed that Council action the correspondence. This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Galbraith, seconded by Councillor Andrews, to support the position taken by Mid Ulster District Council regarding Caoimhé's law.**

Correspondence from DAERA Minister re NOM – ReGen Waste Storage Operation at Warrenpoint. (C/110/2025), C/135/2025)

Councillor S. Murphy advised that the delayed response from the Minister was unacceptable and again dismissed the obnoxious smell experienced by residents living adjacent to the harbour. He added that it was also unacceptable for the Minister to offer a meeting to the Chairperson and Chief Executive whilst ignoring local Councillors. She proposed that Council wrote back to the Minister to seek a meeting with Crotlieve Councillors in Warrenpoint Town Hall. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Quinn.

Councillor Byrne concurred with Councillor S. Murphy's stating he supported writing a letter but did not agree with stipulating that the Minister meet only with Councillors from a selected area, suggesting instead that the response letter should invite the Minister to meet with Council, which would then choose a delegation, as had always been the case in the past. Councillor S. Murphy accepted this amendment.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor S Murphy, seconded by Councillor Quinn, to send a letter to DAERA Minister inviting him to meet with Council regarding the ReGen Waste Storage Operation at Warrenpoint.

Correspondence from CCMS re NOM – Closure of Local Primary Schools. C/171/2025)

Councillor Rice noted that CCMS had stressed no decision had yet been made. However, he highlighted the feeling within the local community that the closure of Killowen Primary School was inevitable and questioned how much scrutiny would be afforded to all the options going forward.

Councillor Hanna stated that the issue needed to be addressed as soon as possible to provide reassurance for parents and families in the local area. He added that rural schools were very important and formed an integral part of the community.

Correspondence from Southern Regional College re Fishing Industry Visa & Enhancement Support (C/044/2025), (C/056/2025), (C/093/2025)

Councillor Rice welcomed the correspondence and commented that the way SRC had outlined the measures taken to support the fishing industry was helpful. He highlighted, however, that issues remained outstanding for fishing and other industries, noting that these were not going away and were worsening.

Councillor Hanna highlighted that Councillors were often blamed for visa-related issues affecting people in the local fishing industry, despite this being a reserved matter over which they had no influence. He added that it was important for these issues to be resolved as soon as possible.

Correspondence from Infrastructure Minister Kimmins re NOM – Resurfacing and Long-Term repair of main A route between Kilkeel and Newcastle (C/137/2025)

Councillor Devlin described the response from the Minister as disappointing, highlighting that it was a very important issue. She acknowledged the busyness of a Minister's diary; however, she proposed writing back to request a meeting, either in person or virtually, at the earliest available date. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Hanna.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Hanna, to send a further letter to the Minister for Infrastructure to request a meeting, either in person or virtually, at the earliest available date.**

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Finn, seconded by Councillor Galbraith, to note the correspondence report and the following correspondence:**

- **Correspondence from Mid Ulster Council regarding their Motion on Caoimhe's Law**
- **Correspondence from DAERA Minister re NOM – ReGen Waste Storage Operation at Warrenpoint. (C/110/2025), C/135/2025)**
- **Correspondence from CCMS re NOM – Closure of Local Primary Schools. C/171/2025)**
- **Correspondence from Southern Regional College re Fishing Industry Visa & Enhancement Support (C/044/2025), (C/056/2025), (C/093/2025)**
- **Correspondence from Infrastructure Minister Kimmins re NOM – Resurfacing and Long-Term repair of main A route between Kilkeel and Newcastle (C/137/2025)**

C/184/2025 NOTICE OF MOTION – YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO BE BETTER PREPARED BEFORE VOTING AT 18

The following Motion was received from Pupils from St Louis' Grammar School, winners of the Local Democracy Week event held by the Chairperson:

Notice of Motion - "Young people need to be better prepared before voting at 18."

Shay Byrne thanked Councillors for the opportunity to speak on uninformed voting at 18, noting that young people were often expected to vote without adequate political education. He explained this was due to disconnection rather than apathy and asked councillors to debate the issue, observing that many first-time voters simply followed their parents' choices.

Aoife Dinsmore highlighted that the matter was pressing as the UK Government had previously proposed lowering the voting age to 16, affecting around 48,000 young people in Northern Ireland. She noted that supporters believed this would increase youth engagement, while opponents questioned maturity and raised concerns about electoral impact.

Niamh Crowley stated that although she supported voting rights at 16 or 18, many young people lacked the knowledge to make informed decisions. She noted that schools should

have taught politics but that teachers had been hesitant for fear of appearing partisan. She added that the Electoral Commission had been developing unbiased materials, though their use in Northern Ireland would have been for the Education Department to decide.

Erin Comac advised that the Council should assist in the preparation of young people to vote and asked members to debate how they could help. She suggested registration drives in schools, workshops on reading party manifestos, and sixth-form debates, stressing the need for greater understanding of democracy.

Councillor Quinn commended the students' suggestions, endorsed them on behalf of her party, and proposed writing to the Education Authority and local schools outlining the three recommendations. This was seconded by Councillor Campbell.

Councillor Bowsie stated that while the DUP did not support lowering the voting age to 16, they supported ensuring young people were informed at 18.

Councillor Howie agreed young people needed to be informed but noted that some, including the students present, already understood political systems. She proposed writing to the Education Minister to ask how schools were being supported to ensure that young people were informed when the voting age was to be lowered for the upcoming elections, an amendment seconded by Councillor Young and accepted by Councillor Quinn.

Councillor Taylor welcomed the Motion and thanked the pupils, stating that schools needed to do more to prepare young people approaching voting age.

Councillor A. King congratulated the pupils on their Dragons Den success and presentation and suggested an amendment to ensure schools upheld opportunities for Councillors to engage directly with students. This was seconded by Councillor Byrne and accepted by Councillor Quinn.

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

In summing up, Shay Byrne stated that they, as young people, had felt very strongly about the Motion and were delighted it had been passed. He said it would benefit current and future generations by helping them understand that their vote truly mattered, and he expressed gratitude to Councillors for their support.

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Quinn, seconded by Councillor Campbell it was agreed that Council write to the Education Authority and local schools to suggest the following:

- **Council partnering with local schools to run registration drives for sixth form students.**
- **Workshops on reading party manifestos.**
- **Organising sixth form debates on political views.**
- **To ensure schools uphold opportunities for Councillors to engage directly with students.**

It was also agreed that Council write to the Education Minister to ask how the Department was supporting schools to ensure that young people were informed

when the voting age was to be lowered for upcoming elections.

C/185/2025

NOTICE OF MOTION – CAOIMHE'S LAW

The following Motion was received from Councillor Galbraith:

"Caoimhé's Law is a proposed piece of legislation aimed at addressing gaps in road safety measures, particularly those that endanger the lives of vulnerable individuals, such as children and pedestrians. The law is named in memory of Caoimhé O'Brien, whose tragic death has galvanized families and campaigners across Northern Ireland to push for stronger road safety measures. By supporting this Motion, we take a stand for justice and safety, and demonstrate our commitment to protecting the lives of those who are most at risk on our roads.

This Motion calls on this Council to:

- Publicly support Caoimhé's Law;*
- Write to the Minister for Justice, and to MLAs, urging them to prioritise this legislation;*
- Call on the Minister for Infrastructure to begin drafting the law in consultation with families and campaigners;*
- Use Council communications and social media platforms to educate the public;*
- Request the opportunity for campaign representatives to present to the relevant committee;*
- And ask that other councils across Northern Ireland join us in enforcing and promoting this campaign."*

Councillor Galbraith requested that the Motion be withdrawn, given the proposals arising from the discussion regarding C/183/2025 – Correspondence from Mid Ulster Council regarding their Motion on Caoimhé's Law. This was seconded by Councillor Devlin.

Agreed:

It was agreed to withdraw the Motion.

Having previously declared an interest, Councillor Howie left the meeting at this stage – 6.47pm

C/186/2025

NOTICE OF MOTION – PHYSICIAN'S ASSOCIATES

The following Notice of Motion was received from Councillor Rice:

"This Council voices its dismay that the Department of Health has continued to fund this bespoke course, while the previous graduating classes have not been able to secure a job within the North.

This Council recognises the acute pressure our hospitals are under and voices its frustration that many graduates are being forced to leave these shores once they graduate.

This Council calls on the Department of Health to act on the findings of the Leng Review and allocate funding for the positions of Physician Associates within our Hospitals and GP surgeries."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Mathers.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Rice advised that he wished to raise concerns regarding the Department of Health's funding of the Physician Associate (PA) programme at Ulster University and the lack of corresponding posts within the local health service. He referred to the Leng Review, which had emphasised the need for workforce planning, regulation, and defined responsibilities for PAs, and criticised the Department for continuing to fund training without ensuring job opportunities. He stated that the issue was particularly relevant to local hospitals such as the Downe and Daisy Hill, where constituents faced acute challenges. He argued that the current approach undermined public confidence, represented poor value for money, and failed to improve patient care.

In bringing the Motion, he sought answers from the Department of Health on why PA roles were not being recruited, whether there was a strategy to create posts in priority areas such as GP practices and emergency medicine, and how public funding was being aligned with real employment opportunities.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Mathers echoed Councillor Rice's concerns stating that it was deeply frustrating that previous graduating classes had been unable to secure employment in the North at a time when hospitals were under acute pressure and GP practices were struggling. He emphasised that it was unacceptable for highly trained PA graduates to be forced to leave to find work, noting that this represented a loss of skilled staff which the Health Trusts could not afford in the current climate.

Councillor Mathers referred to his local hospital, Daisy Hill, where staff shortages were frequently raised, and observed that similar issues existed in GP services. He concluded that exporting skilled professionals while local communities faced long waiting lists and overstretched services was unsustainable.

Councillor Taylor highlighted the important role Physician Associates played within the Northern Ireland health system, noting that around 80 were currently employed across the five Trusts and primary care. He advised that the Department of Health had supported the two-year Ulster University programme since 2018 and that PAs, working under doctors' supervision, provided diagnosis, treatment, and continuity of care. He stated that evidence showed they had contributed significantly to stabilising clinical teams and improving patient flow at a time of severe service pressures.

Councillor Taylor referred to Professor Leng's review in England, which would help inform future provision in Northern Ireland, and noted that the Department of Health was considering its own evaluation. He expressed hope that this would lead to further PA posts locally.

In supporting the Motion, Councillor Bowsie advised that it was a valid issue. He noted that a class of 18 students had been assured of employment after graduation, yet according to the BBC only two had secured PA posts, which needed to be addressed.

Councillor Bowsie stated that while hospitals faced acute pressures, reliance on PAs to fill gaps raised further concerns. He referred to the Leng Review, which had addressed these

issues and should inform optimal use of PAs, and said the Health Minister must respond to its findings. He added that MLAs should challenge the Minister, particularly through the Health Committee.

Councillor Feehan declared an interest, noting that he had an immediate family member in the medical profession. He thanked Councillor Rice and welcomed the Motion, describing it as a very important issue. He stated that it was a bizarre situation where individuals completed lengthy courses, sometimes lasting up to seven years, only to be told there were no posts available or forced to seek employment in Scotland or England.

He expressed particular frustration as someone involved in the Daisy Hill campaign, noting that the Trust frequently cited a shortage of doctors, which did not align with the reality of qualified medics and Physician Associates being unable to secure placements within the Health Trust system after graduation.

Councillor Feehan proposed two amendments to the motion as follows:

- That Council write to the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Association to request their input on the issue and their assessment of the need to integrate PA placements into Health Trust workforce planning.
- That Council write to the Finance Minister to ask what additional funding could be made available to address the acute shortages in hospital and GP practices.

Councillor Rice accepted the first amendment but did not accept the second amendment, stating that it took away from the central point that the PA course was a bespoke course funded by the Department of Health.

The Chairperson put Councillor Feehan's proposed amendments to the Motion to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows (copy attached): **(Councillor Clarke was out of the room when the vote was taken)**

FOR:	11
AGAINST:	24
ABSTENTIONS:	0

The Chairperson declared Councillor Feehan's proposal lost.

Councillor Truesdale thanked Councillor Rice for bringing the Motion and noted its importance for all members. She stated that GP surgeries in Northern Ireland were at breaking point and that a diversified workforce, including Physician Associates, was necessary to stabilise services and improve recruitment and retention. She acknowledged concerns regarding the parameters of the PA role and advised that the Department of Health was undertaking a review of their use in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson requested a show of hands for Councillor Rice's Motion, seconded by Councillor Mathers and the results were as follows:

FOR	34
AGAINST	0
ABSTENTIONS	0

In summing up, Councillor Rice explained that he had not accepted the second amendment as the issue was not about funding but about the allocation of the role. He stated that

graduates from the programme had been working in agency positions and were being paid more than staff within the system, which had affected morale in hospitals. He emphasised that it was for the Department of Health to decide whether to continue funding the programme and to define the scope of the role. He added that additional funding alone would not have resolved the problem.

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed unanimously.

Mrs Ward joined the meeting during above discussion – 7.00pm

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded that Councillor Mathers, the following was agreed;

- **This Council voices its dismay that the Department of Health has continued to fund this bespoke course, while the previous graduating classes have not been able to secure a job within the North.**
- **This Council recognises the acute pressure our hospitals are under and voices its frustration that many graduates are being forced to leave these shores once they graduate.**
- **This Council calls on the Department of Health to act on the findings of the Leng Review and allocate funding for the positions of Physician Associates within our Hospitals and GP surgeries.**
- **That Council write to the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Association to request their input on the issue and their assessment of the need to integrate Physician Associate placements into Health Trust workforce planning.**

The Chairperson advised there has been a request to hear a Motion on parking and this would normally be referred to Committee however it was timebound therefore it would require a suspension of Standing Order 16.1 via a Qualified Majority Vote, which meant 80% of those members present and voting.

The Chairperson asked for a proposer and seconded to suspend Standing Orders. Councillor Hanlon proposed and this was seconded by Councillor Mathers.

The Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	34
AGAINST:	0
ABSTENTIONS:	0

Ms Taggart confirmed that as there were 34 Members present and voting, a qualified majority had been reached.

The Chairperson advised that Standing Order 16.1 would be suspended by qualified majority vote to hear the Motion.

The following amended Notice of Motion received from Councillor Kearns:

"That this Council recognises the importance of revitalising our town centres and the challenges of parking in Newry city and Downpatrick; acknowledges the need to encourage people to shop locally; further recognises that workers, businesses and shoppers need access to parking and that availability of parking is an asset to the economic development of the area; also acknowledges the commitment of the Minister for Infrastructure to assess all options to ease pressure in relation to on-street parking and to make on-street parking free on public holidays.

Calls on Council officials to introduce appropriate parking incentives for off-street car parks in time for the retail rush ahead of Christmas. This can take the form of free parking for the next three Saturdays.

The amended Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Hanlon.

Councillor Kearns presented the Motion, highlighting the significant pressures around parking for residents, workers, shoppers, and businesses in the district. She noted that each year the Council had encouraged shopping locally to support businesses and proposed incentives for off-street parking ahead of the Christmas retail period, such as reduced rates or free parking. She stated that this would complement the one-hour grace period for on-street parking announced by the Infrastructure Minister.

Councillor Hanlon seconded the motion, stressing that seasonal free parking would have supported families and businesses at a time of financial strain, and confirmed Sinn Féin's commitment to supporting independent retailers. Councillor Lee Surginor proposed an amendment to ensure the measure applied automatically each year across all Council-operated car parks, which was accepted.

Councillor Byrne raised concerns about delays and criticised the need for an emergency Motion. He requested reinstatement of the original wording to include one-hour free parking and/or reduced rates throughout the year. This amendment was seconded by Councillor Andrews and accepted by Councillor Kearns.

Councillor Byrne further highlighted that the matter had been on the agenda for over a year and asked a series of questions:

- Whether there had been any discussion with the car parking working group about recent changes to the DFI parking app, which he believed increased the likelihood of receiving a ticket.
- What the logistics and timelines were for changing the DFI-run app if Council agreed to alter chargeable rates.
- How Council could change the terms and conditions of car parks under its ownership.
- What the income and expenditure figures were for all Council parking apps to inform decisions on costs.

Mrs Ward advised that three free Saturdays could be implemented immediately through advertising and signage, while wider changes such as a free hour of parking would require further consideration by the Sustainability and Environment Committee and legislative adjustments. She reported that comparative income from the three free Saturdays the previous year had been approximately £10,000.

Councillors Hanna and Taylor supported the Motion but emphasised the need for better pre-planning and timely communication. Councillor Hanlon reiterated that the immediate priority was to secure free parking before Christmas, while acknowledging wider car parking issues across the district. Councillor Lee Surginor explained that his amendment had been intended to provide consistency and avoid last-minute arrangements. Councillor Byrne confirmed his support for the Motion despite concerns about information gaps.

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed unanimously.

Councillor Kearns thanked Members for their support.

Councillor Reilly left the meeting during above discussion – 07:20pm

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Kearns, seconded that Councillor Hanlon, the following was agreed:
That this Council recognises the importance of revitalising our town centres and the challenges of parking in Newry city and Downpatrick; acknowledges the need to encourage people to shop locally; further recognises that workers, businesses and shoppers need access to parking and that availability of parking is an asset to the economic development of the area; also acknowledges the commitment of the Minister for Infrastructure to assess all options to ease pressure in relation to on-street parking and to make on-street parking free on public holidays. Calls on Council officials to introduce appropriate parking incentives for off-street car parks in time for the retail rush ahead of Christmas. This can take the form of free parking for the next three Saturdays, one hour free and/or a reduced rate for multiple hours – three hours for £1 making it easier and more attractive for people to shop locally is in the interests of workers, shoppers and businesses, and will lead to greater local economic activity.

C/188/2025

NOTICE OF MOTION – CLOSING OF THE DOWN RECORDER

The following Notice of Motion was received from Councillor Bowsie:

"Newry, Mourne & Down District Council expresses our sadness at the loss of our district's oldest newspaper.

The Down Recorder has been a trusted source of local news since 1836, capturing our district's highest and lowest points for almost two centuries. As a district council, we thank the Down Recorder for their dedication to local news and sport over the decades. Print media captures an array of local news and culture that online media cannot and losing this publication is a great loss for our district. Thus, we express our concern at losing one of our main sources of local journalism and convey our continued support for the important role local news outlets have in local democracy."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Jackson.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Bowsie stated that the closure of the Down Recorder had been a serious blow to local democracy and to his constituency's primary newspaper. He emphasised that local papers had played a vital role in holding Councils to account, reporting decisions, publishing planning notices, and promoting community groups which relied on publicity to sustain membership. He noted that while archives would remain, the absence of new weekly editions meant the loss of a living record of community life, achievements, and history.

Councillor Bowsie acknowledged that younger generations increasingly accessed news online but stressed that the essential point was that constituents continued to receive reliable information.

He concluded by reiterating his sadness at the loss of the Down Recorder, describing it as a blow to community identity and democratic accountability, and called on the Council to demonstrate its support for the local press in making government more open and accessible to the public.

Councillor Jackson seconded, acknowledging the paper's importance for local communities.

Councillor Hanlon described the Down Recorder as an institution, recalling its role in households and its fair and balanced reporting. She expressed sympathy for staff, highlighted the economic impact of the closure on the town centre, and voiced concern at the wider decline of print media.

Councillor Andrews stated that the closure had been met with profound sadness in Rowallane, noting its award-winning coverage and role in launching media careers. He reflected on its contribution to community life and paid tribute to staff, confirming his full support for the Motion. Councillor Lee Surginor emphasised the importance of local journalism in democratic accountability and open justice, thanking staff for their service.

Councillor Taylor expressed sorrow for staff and regret at the decline of local newspapers, stressing their role in holding elected representatives to account. He described the disappearance of local papers as deeply regrettable given their long-standing role in community life. Councillor Lewis echoed previous comments, noting the paper's 189-year history and its importance to councillors and families, and expressed deep regret at its closure.

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed unanimously.

Councillor Bowsie thanked Members for their support.

AGREED:

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded that Councillor Jackson, that the Down Recorder has been a trusted source of local news since 1836, capturing our district's highest and lowest points for almost two centuries and as a district council, we thank the Down Recorder for their dedication to local news and sport over the decades. Print media captures an array of local news and culture that online media cannot and losing this publication is a great loss for our

district and we express our concern at losing one of our main sources of local journalism and convey our continued support for the important role local news outlets have in local democracy.

C/189/2025 NOTICE OF MOTION – WATER COURSES

Notice of Motion received from Councillor Truesdale:

"That this council conducts a scoping exercise and creates an available map of watercourses throughout the district where they are the Riparian owners meaning they are responsible for their maintenance and conducts a survey into their condition and any works required, e.g. dredging, and clearing of debris. Presents a report of costs involved and returns it to council/committee for decision. To write to DfI Rivers with this information outlining watercourses DfI are responsible for ensuring the free flow of to alleviate flooding and to assist land drainage

This council presents a clear timeline with repairs for the retaining walls of the Shimna River Newcastle as well as a plan, in conjunction with DfI, for the Shimna River weir."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Young.

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

C/190/2025 WATER QUALITY

Notice of Motion received from Councillor Finn:

"Newry Mourne and Down District council notes with disappointment recent figures that suggest water quality levels at two lakes in the district were of poor quality; recognises the environmental importance of ensuring our District has clean bodies of water: further recognises the economic potential of ensuring bodies of water such as Newry Canal and Camlough lake are clean and fit for use; and will work with DAERA and other external bodies to support improvements to water quality"

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Feehan.

AGREED: The Motion was referred to the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6

C/191/2025 NEWCASTLE FLOODING

Notice of Motion received from Councillor Devlin:

"That this Council notes with deep concern the recent flooding events in Newcastle, which caused significant distress and disruption to residents; recognises that timely maintenance of

gullies, drains and land is essential to reducing flood risk; and therefore calls on the Department for Infrastructure and DAERA to work together, as a matter of urgency, to: implement a regular programme of inspection, clearance and maintenance of gullies, drains and associated infrastructure in Newcastle, particularly in known flood risk areas; including the need for NI Water to expedite their hydraulic modelling review of the sewerage system serving Marguerite and the surrounding area, publish their results and identify a permanent solution; ensure DAERA-owned or managed lands are maintained to facilitate the free flow of water and prevent blockages; and that both departments engage with this Council, local elected representatives and the Newcastle RCRG to identify priority locations and establish clear lines of accountability and communication ahead of future heavy rainfall events, so that every reasonable step is taken to prevent future flooding and protect local homes, businesses and community facilities."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Clarke.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Devlin stated that the flooding in Newcastle on 19 October had been frightening, with families fearing for their homes. She emphasised that urgent action had been required and that consistent gully and drainage maintenance was the minimum standard residents had expected.

She noted that the flooding had not been solely a roads issue but the result of upstream pressures, with water from Donard Wood overwhelming drains and culverts. She criticised DAERA for failing to manage watercourses and pathways and stressed that replanting native species, while welcome, had not addressed immediate problems.

Councillor Devlin called for DAERA to carry out full inspections, immediate clearing and maintenance, clear mapping of responsibilities, and ongoing monitoring. She stated that residents wanted accountability and cooperation between DAERA, DfI, NI Water, the Council, and Newcastle RCRG. She concluded that Newcastle's geography did not mean inevitable flooding, and that with proper upstream and downstream management and forward planning, homes, businesses, and community spaces could be better protected.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Clarke stated that it had shown a united commitment to protect Newcastle from future flooding. He recognised the distress caused, particularly in Tullybrannigan, and emphasised the need for coordinated action between DfI, NI Water, and the Council. He noted that while agencies had responded well afterwards, earlier inspections during weather warnings could have reduced damage.

He confirmed Sinn Féin's support for regular inspection and maintenance of gullies and drains, particularly in high-risk areas, and stressed the importance of a joint programme shared openly between all responsible bodies. He welcomed NI Water's hydraulic modelling review of the sewage network and urged swift publication of findings.

Councillor Clarke highlighted the need for DAERA-managed land to be properly maintained, welcomed drainage repairs in Donard Forest though noted they should have been completed earlier, and called for upstream soft-engineered approaches to reduce pressure on drainage systems. He also raised concerns about silt build-up in Castle Park Lake and urged remedial works. He paid tribute to the Newcastle Flood Resiliency Group and concluded that the Motion was about ensuring every reasonable step was taken to protect the community and provide residents with security.

Councillor Hanna welcomed the Motion, expressed gratitude that no lives had been lost, and emphasised the need for prevention and a full investigation. Councillor Taylor also welcomed the Motion and highlighted the need for statutory agencies to be more proactive in improving maintenance and infrastructure.

Councillor Truesdale stressed the importance of multi-agency accountability, noting the absence of a flood warning system in Northern Ireland, and called for a working group and clear recommendations from the hydraulic modelling review.

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed unanimously.

In summing up, Councillor Devlin stated that Newcastle had many flood-risk areas and that recent responses had appeared reactionary. She noted that while two flood alleviation schemes had been delivered, surface water remained a significant problem. She highlighted that calls to Floodline had not been prioritised according to risk and stressed the need for consistent communication and a register of vulnerable properties. She concluded that flooding needed to remain on the agenda until long-term solutions were in place.

AGREED:

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded that Councillor Clarke, that this Council notes with deep concern the recent flooding events in Newcastle, which caused significant distress and disruption to residents; recognises that timely maintenance of gullies, drains and land is essential to reducing flood risk; and therefore calls on the Department for Infrastructure and DAERA to work together, as a matter of urgency, to: implement a regular programme of inspection, clearance and maintenance of gullies, drains and associated infrastructure in Newcastle, particularly in known flood risk areas; including the need for NI Water to expedite their hydraulic modelling review of the sewerage system serving Marguerite and the surrounding area, publish their results and identify a permanent solution; ensure DAERA-owned or managed lands are maintained to facilitate the free flow of water and prevent blockages; and that both departments engage with this Council, local elected representatives and the Newcastle RCRG to identify priority locations and establish clear lines of accountability and communication ahead of future heavy rainfall events, so that every reasonable step is taken to prevent future flooding and protect local homes, businesses and community facilities.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 8:05pm

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 12 January 2026.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 01/12/2025

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Accepting Councillor Feehan's Second Amendment

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan		2		
P Byrne	2			
P Campbell		3		
W Clarke				1
L Devlin	3			
C Enright	4			
K Feehan	5			
D Finn	6			
C Galbraith	7			
M Gibbons	8			
O Hanlon		4		
G Hanna		5		
V Harte				
M Hearty		6		
R Howell		7		
T Howie				2
J Jackson		8		
G Kearns		9		
A King	9			
C King		10		
M Larkin		11		
D Lee-Surginor		12		
A Lewis		13		
O Magennis		14		
A Mathers		15		
D McAteer	10			
L McEvoy				3
D Murphy		16		
K Murphy		17		
S Murphy		18		
S O'Hare		19		
A Quinn		20		
H Reilly		21		
M Rice		22		
M Ruane				4
D Taylor	11			
J Tinnelly				5
J Truesdale		23		
H Young		24		
TOTALS	11	24		5

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 01/12/2025

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Suspend Standing Orders via Qualified Majority Vote

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie	2			
J Brennan	3			
P Byrne	4			
P Campbell	5			
W Clarke	6			
L Devlin	7			
C Enright	8			
K Feehan	9			
D Finn	10			
C Galbraith	11			
M Gibbons	12			
O Hanlon	13			
G Hanna	14			
V Harte				1
M Hearty	15			
R Howell	16			
T Howie	17			
J Jackson	18			
G Kearns	19			
A King	20			
C King	21			
M Larkin	22			
D Lee-Surginor	23			
A Lewis	24			
O Magennis	25			
A Mathers	26			
D McAteer	27			
L McEvoy				2
D Murphy	28			
K Murphy	29			
S Murphy	30			
S O'Hare	31			
A Quinn	32			
H Reilly	33			
M Rice	34			
M Ruane				3
D Taylor	35			
J Tinnelly				4
J Truesdale	36			
H Young	37			
TOTALS	37			4