

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

**NMD/C/**

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### **Minutes of Council Meeting held on Tuesday 6 May 2025 at 6.00pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick**

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**In the Chair:** Councillor P Byrne

**In attendance in Chamber:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor J Brennan	Councillor P Campbell
Councillor W Clarke	Councillor L Devlin
Councillor C Enright	Councillor K Feehan
Councillor C Galbraith	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor M Hearty
Councillor T Howie	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor D McAteer
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor D Murphy
Councillor K Murphy	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor G Sharvin	Councillor J Tinnelly
Councillor J Truesdale	Councillor H Young

**In attendance via Teams:**

Councillor M Gibbons	Councillor R Howell
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor L McEvoy
Councillor M Ruane	

**Officials in attendance:**

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive  
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services  
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism  
Mrs S Muphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment  
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active and Healthy Communities  
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager  
Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer

**C/068/2025**

### **APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Finn, Harte, S Murphy and Taylor.

The Chairperson spoke of the recent passing of Pope Francis and thanked all Council staff involved in opening the books of condolences enabling people to physically record their message of condolence in books across multiple venues as well as online and reminded everyone the books would close on 7 May 2025.

The Chairperson expressed his condolences to the family, husband and seven sons of Zipporah Brannigan who had passed away suddenly. On behalf of Councillor Brennan, the

Chairperson wished to highlight all gate proceeds from the Drumaness v Ardglass Gaelic game on 8 May would go to the fundraiser for the family at this very difficult time.

The Chairperson passed on condolences on behalf of Council to Councillor Valerie Harte and her family whose brother had sadly passed away.

Condolences were extended to the family of Peter McParland, who had grown up in Newry and was a former international soccer player who played for Aston Villa and Northern Ireland who had won an FA Cup medal with Aston Villa and played in the World Cup.

The Chairperson offered his congratulations to the following:

- Leo Laverty from Killough who was now an All-Ireland Boxing Champion, highlighted by Councillor Sharvin.
- Daniel Carson on being named the Energia AIL Rugby Referee of the Year, highlighted by Councillor Sharvin.
- Downe Travel team who were crowned the number one travel agency at the top 50 Travel Agencies Northern Ireland Awards night, highlighted by Councillor Sharvin.
- Rostrevor Men Shed on celebrating their 10th anniversary and advised they were hosting a coffee morning on 17 May from 9:00 to 1:00 PM, highlighted by Councillor Finn.
- Emma McArdle from Burren on winning the World Championships for Irish Dance 2025 in Killarney, Emma's second time to win a world title, highlighted on behalf of Councillor S Murphy.
- A happy birthday to Councillor Terry Andrews who had turned 60.
- Conor Og McVeigh who did himself, his school and team Northern Ireland proud at the TCS London Mini Marathon Championships on smashing the 2.6 kilometre road race. He was 2nd Northern Ireland runner along with the Ulster Schools Cross Country Champion Kieran Smith from St Colman's College (highlighted by Councillor Devlin).
- Upper Crossgar who recently became World Pipe Band Champions for which a reception had been held in association with Councillor Lewis
- VE Day celebrations in Kilkeel which had been a remarkable evening with thanks to Councillor Hanna.

The Chairperson asked that it be noted the Greater Newry Business Awards had opened for nominations and anyone that wanted to nominate a business should do so with the awards taking place on 19 September 2025.

The Chairperson referred to the news that had broken the previous week that the National Trust had pulled out of the Mourne Mountain Gateway project. He provided an overview of the Emergency Programme Board Meeting that had been held on 2 May where the members of the Programme Board had a very robust and long discussion on where that left Council.

Members were advised there were a number of proposals arising from the Emergency Programme Board, one of which was to call a Special Council Meeting with the National Trust to answer questions on their decision to pull out and it was hoped that would be happening in the near future. Council officers were asked to engage with the Belfast Region City Deal team to find out what the next steps were for Council going forward.

The Chairperson acknowledged this had been a very disappointing decision for those working on the project and wished to make it clear that the failure or the pulling out of the project did not fall with Council officers who were carrying the request through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed by the National Trust and the Council. The MOU had asked Council to carry out an Independent Environmental Assessment at the request of the National Trust and following the report of the EIA move to

The Chairperson asked that anybody that had ideas or alternatives to contact Senior Management whilst they hold discussions with Belfast Region City Deal panel and once those meetings were concluded Council would be in a better position on how to move forward at the next emergency Programme Board Meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

**Agreed:** The Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 14 April 2025 were agreed as

an accurate record and adopted on the proposal of Hanna, seconded by Councillor Hanlon.

**C/074/2025**

**MINUTES OF STRATEGY POLICY AND RESOURCES  
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 APRIL 2025**

**Read:** Minutes of Strategy Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 17 April 2025 (copy circulated).

**Agreed:** **The Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 17 April 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Quinn.**

**C/075/2025**

**MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE  
MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2025**

**Read:** Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 28 April 2025 (copy circulated).

**Agreed:** **The Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 28 April 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor Lewis.**

**C/076/2025**

**MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
MEETING HELD ON 29 APRIL 2025**

**Read:** Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 29 April 2025 (copy circulated).

*SE/045/2025: Notice of Motion, Newcastle Memorial Garden*

In welcoming the Newcastle Fishing Disaster Memorial, Councillor Bowsie wished to put on record his disappointment that a similar motion he had brought for a maritime disaster, namely the last victim of the Titanic being from Crossgar had not been allowed and asked that in future there was more consistency when it came to memorials in line with Council's policy.

The Chairperson replied there had been a long discussion at that time and it had gone before the Equality and Good Relations Forum where it was highlighted there was another victim from the Jonesborough area and it was about getting a memorial for all victims across the District.

**Agreed:** **The Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 29 April 2025 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Young.**

**C/077/2025**

**PLANNING SECTION**

There were no issues arising.

**C/078/2025**

**CORRESPONDENCE REPORT**

Read: Report dated 6 May 2025 from Mrs Ward, Chief Executive, regarding an update on correspondence received for the attention of Council (copy circulated).

Councillor Young proposed support for the Motion from Mid Ulster District Council regarding safeguarding measures at school bus stops stating there were many rural roads throughout the District on which children were boarding and alighting from school buses and often seen standing on grass verges either waiting to get on a bus or having just got off a bus waiting to cross a road. She spoke of how roads were extremely dangerous with some motorists not adhering to speed limits and others taking risks, particularly while overtaking other vehicles and that anything that could be done to improve road safety and the safety of school children must be welcomed and fully supported.

Councillor Sharvin seconded Councillor Young's proposal to support the Motion from Mid-Ulster District Council and that hopefully there would be a response from the Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Education in tackling the issue.

**Agreed:** **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Young, seconded by Councillor Sharvin that Newry Mourne and Down District Council fully support the Motion from Mid Ulster District Council regarding safeguarding measures at school bus stops.**

**It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Young to note the correspondence report and the following correspondence:**

- **Response from Mid Ulster District Council in relation to a Notice of Motion regarding safeguarding measures at school bus stops.**
- **Response from Scottish Government in relation in relation to a Notice of Motion on Fishing Industry Visa and Enhancement Support.**

**C/079/2025**

**NOTICE OF MOTION – 'NIP IT IN THE BUD' CAMPAIGN**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Galbraith:

*"That this Council notes the importance of farmers and rural dwellers to our society; recognises that farmers, agricultural workers and people living in rural communities can have lower access to cancer services due to the nature of their work and often living in isolated areas; we also recognise the impact that a cancer diagnosis can have on a family business such as a family farm, including housing, the extending family and the welfare of livestock; endorses the 'Nip It In The Bud' campaign delivered by the Farming Community Network in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and acknowledges the benefits to the rural community; pledges to do all we can to raise awareness and save lives, particularly using our social media platforms, to help rural dwellers in this Council area be aware of the*

*symptoms of cancer and to seek immediate medical advice if necessary, as evidence demonstrates that early diagnosis and treatment can save lives."*

The Motion was seconded by Councillor McAteer.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Galbraith advised the Farming Community Network (FCN) was a voluntary organisation and charity that aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of people in farming and assist those people at times of difficulty and change.

Members were advised research indicated people living in rural communities were often presented with more advanced cancer when diagnosed and were 5% less likely to survive than those living in an urban environment. Approximately 36% of Northern Ireland's population lived in a rural area, and this created a unique challenge for accessing services and support. Farmers and people living in rural communities were being urged to 'Nip it in the Bud' and be aware of symptoms and if necessary get checked for early signs of cancer as part of a new UK-wide campaign by The Farming Community Network (FCN).

Members were advised there was a firm belief amongst clinicians who were increasingly concerned that farmers in particular were hesitant to contact their doctor until the late development of the disease and farmers, farm workers and people living in rural communities had lower access to cancer services and support due to the nature of their work and rural life, often in isolated areas with migrant workers facing additional barriers when accessing cancer care.

Councillor Galbraith informed Members the Minister of Health recognised these inequalities in diagnosis and treatment and had included addressing the imbalance's as a priority with research commissioned with the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry to identify the barriers and constraints.

Councillor Galbraith pointed out early diagnosis saved lives therefore it was essential to encourage farmers who faced many challenges and stressful situations to put their health first and support from Council would help this campaign achieve its objective which would undoubtedly save lives.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor McAteer spoke of various forms of skin cancer that were prevalent within the farming community linked to prolonged outdoor work and that it was well recognised that farmers were keener to take care of their livestock and land than they were of themselves. He stated he would like this taken forward to the Active and Health Communities Committee to see what could be done locally to bring this to people's attention within the Council area e.g. At Farmer Markets or other outlets and make people aware of what was available with emphasis on screening and promote that along with the Health Service.

Councillor Hanlon spoke of the importance of highlighting the inequalities that do potentially exist with rural communities and supported the Motion.

Councillor Hanlon proposed the following amendment:

*That Council write to Rural Support (Gyles Dawson) and ask them to provide information on the services they provide to ensure elected representatives and Council Marketing could disseminate advice and guidance for farmers and rural dwellers, and if possible invite them to present to Council Committee.*

Councillor K Murphy seconded Councillor Hanlon's proposed amendment.

Councillor Galbraith accepted Councillor Hanlon's amendment.

Councillors Hanna and Truesdale each voiced support for the Motion on behalf of their parties.

Councillor Galbraith on behalf of the Farming Community Network thanked Members for their support advising they were pushing the campaign across all Council areas and Newry Mourne and Down would now be the second Council area to run with this.

The Chairperson declared the Motion was unanimously passed.

**Agreed:** **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Galbraith, seconded by Councillor McAteer that this Council notes the importance of farmers and rural dwellers to our society; recognises that farmers, agricultural workers and people living in rural communities can have lower access to cancer services due to the nature of their work and often living in isolated areas; we also recognise the impact that a cancer diagnosis can have on a family business such as a family farm, including housing, the extending family and the welfare of livestock; endorses the 'Nip It In The Bud' campaign delivered by the Farming Community Network in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and acknowledges the benefits to the rural community; pledges to do all we can to raise awareness and save lives, particularly using our social media platforms, to help rural dwellers in this Council area be aware of the symptoms of cancer and to seek immediate medical advice if necessary, as evidence demonstrates that early diagnosis and treatment can save lives.**

**It was also agreed that Council write to Rural Support (Gyles Dawson) and ask them to provide information on the services they provide to ensure elected representatives and Council Marketing could disseminate advice and guidance for farmers and rural dwellers, and if possible, invite them to present to Council Committee.**

**C/080/2025**

**NOTICE OF MOTION – MOURNE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY PROJECT**

The following amended Motion was received from Councillor Truesdale:

*"This Council notes the recent announcement that the National Trust decided against leasing it's land to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council regarding the Mourne Mountain Gateway Project.*

*The Council further notes the widespread concern expressed by residents across the district, and recognises that this project, in the absence of a secured lease presents significant financial and legal risks.*

*This Council therefore agrees to Undertake a full review of the project, including the exploration of viable and sustainable alternative proposals to the gondola element of the project — such as the development of a visitor centre in Donard Park — to improve access and enhance tourism in the Mournes".*

The amended Motion was seconded by Councillor Howie.

In response to a query from Councillor Truesdale as to why the Motion was being referred to the Programme Board and not the Project Board, the Chairperson advised when a motion was brought to Council that fell under the remit of Council, it went to the relevant committee that dealt with it under Standing Order 16.1.6.

**Agreed:                                      The Motion was referred to the Mourne Mountain Gateway Programme Board in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6**

**C/081/2025                                      NOTICE OF MOTION – FUNDING TO PRE-SCHOOL GROUPS**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Andrews:

*"Newry, Mourne and Down District Council expresses its deepest concern relating to the lack of available funding to pre-school groups across our District. This Council fully supports groups such as Little Stars Pre-School in Killyleagh who at this time are making strenuous efforts to secure the necessary funding through the Pathfinder Programme to maintain, enhance and continue the excellent standard of education and care that they provide to the community. We call upon the Education Minister and the Education Authority to expedite and release much needed funding to enable groups to do what they know best, providing a service of care and professionalism to their pupils."*

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Howie.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Andrews placed on record appreciation to all the hard work from the team at Little Stars in Killyleagh and to others within the District who carried out sterling service to those in their charge and care.

Councillor Andrews advised that having written to the Minister he had taken on board the sentiments and outlined his plans to extend the Pathways Fund which was to be welcomed and would be asking his colleagues and the Executive to enhance the fund budget from the Early Learning and Childhood Strategy funding being held in the 2024/25 arrangements.

Members were informed that whilst Little Stars met all eligibility requirements available funding was extended, subject to Executive agreement and the decision could take weeks and that time was vital for the long term survival of Little Stars. Council needed to do what it could so the much needed funding be expedited and released to enable groups to do what they know best and provide the service of care and professionalism to pupils.

In seconding the Motion and referring to the news about Little Stars, Councillor Howie said it unfortunately was not an uncommon thing for early years as there were a lot of issues. She welcomed that the Minister was conducting a review of early years across the board as even those preschools and play groups that did have funded places were having to sadly close their doors e.g. Little Sunbeams in Saintfield.

Councillor Howie added that those like Little Stars, which were non-statutory organisations were often left worse off and did not get any funded places and relied entirely on grant funding. She advised it was disappointing that despite Stormont being reestablished and there being an Education Minister in place, there were still difficulties with the scheme and huge difficulties with early years education.

Councillor Howie said she would urge the Minister of Finance to be supportive of the request to enhance pathway funding and support or early years preschools across the District and across Northern Ireland.



Councillor Bowsie welcomed the Motion and referred to a similar problem a number of years ago where funding was at risk but due to work carried out with various MLAs and MP the funding had been reinstated. He spoke of the vulnerability for groups that could not plan long term due to funding risks every year.

Councillor Hanlon spoke in support of the Motion and the importance of funding for all preschool early years to give children the best possible start in life. She stated while Little Stars had been highlighted, unfortunately this had been right through the District with many preschool providers contacting Sinn Féin offices feeling they had been unfairly excluded from key support programmes such as the preschool standardisation programme which offered extended hours of vital childcare to parents and families. She said hopefully these issues could be resolved on a longer term basis and not going year to year with uncertainty for many providers.

Councillor Jackson stated that on 23 May 2024 the Education Minister had set out a package of measures for early learning and childcare that was agreed by the Executive. This included £5 million to begin the transition of all funded preschool education places to 22.5 hours and another £2 million was earmarked for a targeted business support scheme for childcare providers to assist those in need of financial support and the Department for Economy and Invest NI would assist with the design of the scheme. Almost twelve months on, DfE had continued to drag its heels with the work necessary to deliver that money with the latest formal position that 'research was progressing at pace.'

Councillor Jackson stated there needed to be action from the Economy Minister which reciprocated the urgency with which the Education Minister had provided vital support to working parents through the 15% subsidy for childcare bill for 3 and 4 year olds.

In speaking about the amazing work of the staff at Little Stars, Councillor Lee-Surginor implored all MLAs across the parties to work together and to come up with a final solution.

The Chairperson declared the Motion was unanimously passed.

**Agreed:**                    **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Howie that Newry, Mourne and Down District Council expresses its deepest concern relating to the lack of available funding to pre-school groups across our District. This Council fully supports groups such as Little Stars Pre-School in Killyleagh who at this time are making strenuous efforts to secure the necessary funding through the Pathfinder Programme to maintain, enhance and continue the excellent standard of education and care that they provide to the community. We call upon the Education Minister and the Education Authority to expedite and release much needed funding to enable groups to do what they know best, providing a service of care and professionalism to their pupils.**

Councillors Enright and Bowsie left the meeting during the above discussion – 6.48pm and 6.51pm.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 6.55pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 2 June 2025.

**Signed:**

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**Chairperson**

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**Chief Executive**