

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 2 March 2026 at 6.00pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor G Kearns

**In attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor J Brennan	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor W Clarke	Councillor L Devlin
Councillor D Finn	Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor O Hanlon	Councillor G Hanna
Councillor V Harte	Councillor M Hearty
Councillor T Howie	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor A King	Councillor C King
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor D McAteer
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S Murphy	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Rice	Councillor J Tinnelly

**In attendance
via Teams:**

Councillor C Enright	Councillor K Feehan
Councillor M Gibbons	Councillor R Howell
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor A Quinn	Councillor D Taylor
Councillor H Young	

Officials in attendance: Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active and Health Communities
Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of People & Legal
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

C/024/2026

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Campbell, Ruane and Truesdale.

As the Chairperson was an apology, the Deputy Chairperson assumed the role of Chair for the meeting.

On behalf of Councillor Campbell, Councillor Kearns noted his delight at having had the opportunity to host the recent Chairperson's awards and expressed his thanks to the Democratic Services team and to the judging panels for their time and effort.

The Chairperson advised that an emergency notice of motion had been received and would be dealt with at the appropriate time during the meeting.

C/025/2026 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

C/026/2026 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2026

Read: Action sheet from Council Meeting held on 2 February 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

C/010/2026: Planning Section

Councillor Howie asked whether the report to be tabled would be available to all Councillors, or just the Planning Committee.

Mr Mallon confirmed that Councillors had access to all reports at every committee and would have sight of the report.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanna, the Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 2 February 2026 was agreed.

COUNCIL MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/027/2026 MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2026

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 2 February 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Brennan, the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 2 February 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/028/2026 MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 29 JANUARY 2026

Read: Minutes of Audit Committee Meeting held 29 January 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, the Minutes of Audit Committee

Meeting held on 29 January 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

C/029/2026

**MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2026**

Read: Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 February 2026 (**copy circulated**).

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Harte, the Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 February 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/030/2026

**MINUTES OF STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2026**

Read: Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 12 February 2026 (**copy circulated**).

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor C King, the Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 12 February 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/031/2026

**MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 FEBRUARY 2026**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 16 February 2026 (**copy circulated**).

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Jackson, the Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 16 February 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/032/2026

**MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 FEBRUARY 2026**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 February 2026 (**copy circulated**).

SE/017/2026: Health Working Groups

Councillor Reilly welcomed the reinstatement of the working groups and queried if they could be made open to any interested Councillor to attend, noting that it could help increase potential stakeholder attendance.

Ms Taggart advised that anyone who was unable to attend a meeting could nominate a substitute Member to attend on their behalf.

Councillor Reilly noted that it was not the same as being open to every interested Councillor.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Andrews, the Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 February 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Jackson that the Health Working Groups membership be opened to any Member that would like to attend.

C/033/2026 **PLANNING SECTION**

Read: Extract from Minutes of Planning Committee Meeting held on 14 January 2026 in relation to the Local Development Plan (**Copy circulated**)

C/010/2026: Planning Section

Councillor Hanna stated that he had not received any information relating to judicial reviews as he had previously requested.

Mr Mallon advised that as noted from the action sheet and advised to Councillor Howie, a report was being drafted and would be tabled at the Planning Committee when complete.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Larkin to note the extract from Minutes of Planning Committee held on 14 January 2026 in relation to the Local Development Plan.**

C/034/2026 **CORRESPONDENCE REPORT**

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

Correspondence from Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA re NOM CAR-T Cell Therapy (C/123/2025)

Councillor Byrne noted the correspondence, advised that an SDLP delegation had recently met with haematologists and other experts in the field and proposed that Council write to the Minister requesting a meeting with a delegation from Council to discuss the progression of a Belfast based treatment centre. This was seconded by Councillor Devlin.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Devlin, that Council write to the Health Minister requesting a meeting with a delegation**

from Council to discuss the progressing of a Belfast based treatment centre.

Correspondence from Health Minister Kimmins re NOM Resurface and Long-Term Repair (C/110/2025)

Councillor Devlin expressed her disappointment at the Minister's lack of engagement regarding the issue. She advised that her concern was regarding policy directive and did not want to add pressure at local level but acknowledged that there was ongoing dialogue with local officials. She requested that the invite remain open should the Minister's diary find some availability for a meeting.

Councillor Clarke stressed that it was important for the Minister to see the items that were of the utmost importance at local level, noting that the roads were dangerous and needed addressed, with recent weather compounding the problems. He also requested that the invite remain open for the Minister and advised that work with local officials would remain ongoing.

Councillor Hanna echoed the sentiments already expressed, noting a number of issues along the stretch of road. He also stated that with upcoming road closures over the mountains for 16 weeks, and the Newry to Killeel road also partially closing, this would increase traffic on that A1 stretch of road and cause further erosion to the dangerous road. He asked whether there was any date for a meeting with local officials.

Mrs Ward advised that there was nothing confirmed yet but advised that it would be picked up with the Department following the meeting.

Correspondence from Minister of State for Justice (C/011/2026)

Councillor Hearty noted a disappointing response but spoke of his delight that the hunger strike had ended with no loss of life. He noted the recent High Court ruling regarding the proscription of Palestine Action and welcomed the closure of the issue.

Correspondence from Minister Muir MLA re NOM ReGen Waste Warrenpoint (C/183/2025)

Councillor S Murphy welcomed the correspondence and noted that her Party was glad that a meeting would be arranged regarding ReGen Waste storage at Warrenpoint.

Agreed:

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Harte, seconded by Councillor Mathers, to note the correspondence report and the following correspondence:

- **Correspondence from Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD (C/123/2025)**
- **Correspondence from Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA (C/123/2025)**
- **Correspondence from Clare County Council**
- **Correspondence from Minister of State for Justice (C/011/2026)**
- **Correspondence from Minister Muir MLA re NOM ReGen Waste Warrenpoint (C/183/2025)**
- **Correspondence from Minister Kimmins MLA re NOM Resurfacing and Long Term Repair (C/110/2025)**

C/035/2026

NOTICE OF MOTION – SUDDEN UNEXPLAINED DEATH IN CHILDHOOD (SUDC)

The following Motion was received from Councillor Lewis:

"This Council notes that Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) is the sudden and unexpected death of a child aged between 1 and 18 years where no cause of death is identified following thorough investigation, including postmortem examination, and that approximately 40 children are affected each year across the United Kingdom. Council recognises the profound and lasting impact these unexplained deaths have on families, friends, and communities and expresses its sympathy for all those affected by such tragic loss.

Council acknowledges that SUDC is significantly under researched when compared to related conditions such as sudden infant death syndrome and that there remains limited awareness, data collection, professional understanding, and coordinated research into causes, prevention strategies, and bereavement support for families.

Council supports the work of charities and organisations seeking to raise awareness of SUDC, provide support to affected families, and improve research and understanding of this issue.

Accordingly, Council agrees to:

- Request that the Chief Executive writes to the Health Minister asking him to engage with his UK counterparts to support the development of a coordinated national response and research strategy on SUDC, ensuring there is a clear local dimension to this issue.*
- Encourage appropriate awareness of SUDC through Council communications and engagement with relevant community and health partners where appropriate."*

This was seconded by Councillor Bowsie.

Councillor Lewis spoke of the shared trauma and pain experienced by affected families and clarified that the request was not for significant funding or major commitments, but simply for appropriate research to be carried out with proper due regard given to the matter.

Councillor Bowsie stated that the death of a child was especially traumatic for families when it was sudden and unexplained, stressed the need for more research so that grieving families could receive answers, and so that rare health issues could be identified earlier, helping to prevent future tragedies.

Councillor Hanlon welcomed the work of SUDC and the National Child Mortality Database in raising awareness and advocating for improved research, data collection, and support for bereaved families. She confirmed her Party's support for the motion and for efforts to secure greater recognition of sudden unexplained death in childhood, as well as the development of a coordinated, government-backed plan to improve understanding, research, and prevention.

Councillor Lee-Surginor described SUDC as a profound tragedy that affected many families and expressed full support for the motion and emphasised the need to raise awareness among both professionals and parents. Citing findings from the University of Central

Lancashire, he highlighted that families deserved swift, proactive, and informed communication during and after investigations and advised that poor communication not only frustrated families but intensified their grief. He stressed the importance of greater consistency, clarity, and effectiveness in the investigation process to ensure families were never left in the dark.

Councillor Andrews acknowledged the work of various organisations in raising awareness and providing support in relation to SUDC and expressed his Party's full support for the motion.

Councillor Taylor described the issue as extremely traumatic for families and stressed the need to implement better practices that provide comfort, support, and clearer understanding of the causes of such deaths. He highlighted that thorough reviews could also inform prevention efforts and expressed his hope that the Health Minister would respond positively to the initiatives.

Councillor Lewis thanked Members for their support.

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed that this Council notes that Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) is the sudden and unexpected death of a child aged between 1 and 18 years where no cause of death is identified following thorough investigation, including postmortem examination, and that approximately 40 children are affected each year across the United Kingdom.

Council recognises the profound and lasting impact these unexplained deaths have on families, friends, and communities and expresses its sympathy for all those affected by such tragic loss.

Council acknowledges that SUDC is significantly under researched when compared to related conditions such as sudden infant death syndrome and that there remains limited awareness, data collection, professional understanding, and coordinated research into causes, prevention strategies, and bereavement support for families.

Council supports the work of charities and organisations seeking to raise awareness of SUDC, provide support to affected families, and improve research and understanding of this issue.

Accordingly, Council agrees to:

- Request that the Chief Executive writes to the Health Minister asking him to engage with his UK counterparts to support the development of a coordinated national response and research strategy on SUDC, ensuring there is a clear local dimension to this issue.**
- Encourage appropriate awareness of SUDC through Council communications and engagement with**

action, the changes could devastate the local fleet, processors, and coastal communities along the Down coast, threatening a centuries-old fishing tradition.

Councillor Reilly highlighted that the Isle of Man's new regulations had created significant anxiety within the fishing communities of Kilkeel, Portavogie, and Ardglass, affecting traditional fishing grounds used for generations. He noted that the impact extended beyond fishermen to thousands of workers in processing, packaging, transport, and related industries, putting many jobs at risk. He recalled that reciprocal arrangements with the Irish government had previously been lost and now access to Isle of Man waters was also at risk, threatening to devastate the local fishing industry. Councillor Reilly stressed the need for careful consideration by the Isle of Man and emphasised that while encouraging more local people into the industry was important, it remained a long-term goal.

Councillor Rice voiced Sinn Féin support of the motion, emphasising the serious socio-economic consequences of the Isle of Man's legislative changes on Northern Ireland's fishing operators. He explained that many vessels from Portavogie, Kilkeel, and Ardglass relied on access to Manx waters within the 12-mile limit, and the new requirement for crews to hold an Isle of Man work visa, along with the need for businesses to operate as Manx entities, created a major barrier for local operators. He highlighted that this worsened existing labour shortages, already strained by Brexit and the end of free movement, threatening recruitment, retention, and the sustainability of family-run fisheries and coastal communities.

Councillor Rice noted that similar disadvantages had affected the agri-food sector and warned that without intervention, young people would leave the fishing sector and rural communities would weaken. He proposed an amendment to write to Minister Muir to ask his Department to engage with the Isle of Man government to find a constructive solution. This was seconded by Councillor Brennan.

Councillor Hanna advised that he was content to accept the amendment.

Councillor McAteer confirmed his Party's support for the motion, noting that it highlighted the ongoing challenges Northern Irish fishermen faced due to Brexit and increasing regulations, which had placed additional pressure on a significant local industry providing substantial employment. He proposed that Council also write to the Secretary of the British-Irish Council in Edinburgh to raise the matter at the next meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Councillor Hanna accepted the amendment.

Councillor Howie expressed her support for the motion while noting the proactive steps already taken by the Minister and his department, noting that he shared the concerns expressed regarding the Isle of Man immigration policy changes affecting the local fishing industry, highlighting his disappointment over the lack of prior consultation given the significant potential impact on Northern Ireland's fishing fleet. She advised that officials had already met with industry representatives and made representations to the Isle of Man government and stated that Minister Muir had requested meetings with Isle of Man ministers responsible for fisheries and immigration to understand the rationale for the changes and to explore practical solutions to avoid disproportionate effects on Northern Irish vessels.

Councillor Taylor emphasised that the Isle of Man's policy changes had potentially devastating consequences for the local fishing industry, which was a key part of the economy in Newry, Mourne, and Down. He noted that Minister Muir had already raised the

issue with the Isle of Man government and expressed hope that additional representations at both local and executive levels would lead to a review and changes. Councillor Taylor stressed the importance of protecting the local fishing industry and hoped the Isle of Man government would reconsider its proposals.

Councillor Hanna reminded colleagues that the Isle of Man legislation affected thousands of jobs and involved significant economic value, expressing his disbelief that the legislation had progressed without proper awareness or intervention from the relevant Minister.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanna, seconded by Councillor Reilly, it was agreed that council is deeply concerned that the changes by the Isle of Man government to legislation where fishing vessels from NI operating with crews using a transit visa, or a UK Skilled Worker Visa cannot fish commercially in Manx waters. The new legislation requires that an Isle of Man work visa is obtained and to use these visas the business must be an Isle of Man business. This will be difficult. This legislation will damage a large number of Northern Irish fishing vessels who fish within the Isle of Man 12-mile limit. NI fish processors will also suffer, along with the fishing industry throughout County Down. This council should write to the Manx government highlighting the damage to the NI Fishing industry and asking the Isle of Man government to reverse the legislation or delay it for more consultation**

It was also agreed that Council write to Minister Muir to ask his Department to engage with the Isle of Man government to find a constructive solution.

It was also agreed that Council also write to the Secretary of the British-Irish Council in Edinburgh to raise the matter at the next meeting.

C/038/2026

NOTICE OF MOTION – COASTAL PROTECTION

The following Motion was received from Councillor Reilly:

"That this Council requests the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to extend the £10.5billion pounds Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) investment programme to Northern Ireland with a pro-rata financial contribution ring fenced for Local Government use in protecting and refurbishing existing coastal infrastructure and implementing new coastal protection schemes."

This was seconded by Councillor Jackson

Councillor Reilly highlighted that Northern Ireland lacked a coastal protection strategy, dedicated fund, or department to manage coastal infrastructure and while the Northern Ireland Coastal Forum existed, its work was largely academic and not decision-making. He contrasted this with England, which had a dedicated coastal protection fund managed by

local authorities and accessible to community groups, citing examples like Torbay, Dorset, and the Isle of Wight. He advised that Wales also had a dedicated policy and had allocated £85 million for coastal protection that year, supporting both small and large-scale projects. Councillor Reilly stressed that Northern Ireland's coastal infrastructure, including beaches, promenades, and harbours, required refurbishment or replacement. He proposed that Council write to the Northern Ireland Executive Assembly requesting a similar scheme to those in England and Wales to ensure proper maintenance and improvement of coastal and maritime infrastructure.

Councillor Jackson highlighted the geographical extent of the District's Council area, noting the impact that coastal erosion could have on the area.

Councillor Devlin noted her Party's support for the motion, addressing the well-known damage caused by coastal erosion and flooding to towns, communities, and rural areas, and observed that planning decisions were often affected by these issues. She highlighted that there was no dedicated central government resource or funding to address the problem, which would only worsen due to climate change. She concluded that any support or funding from central or local government to help communities would be welcomed and the SDLP would support such measures.

Councillor Lawlor stated that harbours and coastal areas in Newcastle, Kilkeel, and Annalong had suffered significant damage from extreme weather and coastal erosion. He noted that such events were becoming more frequent and severe, with climate change increasing pressure on these communities. He emphasised that investment in defences and adaptation needed to be central to the response and expressed Sinn Féin's support for the sensible and practical proposal.

Councillor Clarke noted a significant increase in storms and tidal energy, which he attributed to climate change, causing damage through coastal erosion and flood risk. He highlighted that while funds were available in Scotland, Wales, and England, Northern Ireland faced challenges in securing resources. He emphasised the need for a dedicated budget and a strategic coastal framework, rather than ad hoc interventions, as past hard-engineered projects, like rock armour at Royal County Down, had unintentionally worsened damage to sand dunes. He also referenced the National Trust's support for soft-engineered solutions, such as allowing sand dunes to recede to replenish beaches. Councillor Clarke recalled past workshops and consultations on coastal erosion, noting little progress had been made, and concluded that a comprehensive coastal strategy, combining both soft and hard engineering solutions, was essential moving forward.

Councillor Howie highlighted that the Alliance Party had a strong focus on environmental and marine protection and emphasised the importance of strategic long-term planning due to rising sea levels. She noted that destructive waves from storms, which had become more frequent in recent years, were the primary cause of coastal erosion, worsened by the climate crisis. Councillor Howie stressed that the coastline needed protection, ideally overseen by an independent environmental agency, and called for all parties to work together to ensure stronger coastal protection, noting that progress had previously been blocked by the DUP at the executive level.

Councillor Hanna also recalled past workshops held in Newcastle and emphasised the need for a comprehensive coastal strategy, describing significant storm damage along the coast, particularly around Cranfield and the south coast, which had almost undermined a road and caused ongoing erosion. Councillor Hanna noted the uncertainty over who held overall

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 02/03/2026 VENUE: Downpatrick MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Suspension of Standing Orders to hear an Emergency Notice of Motion

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan	2			
P Byrne	3			
P Campbell				1
W Clarke		2		
L Devlin	4			
C Enright	5			
K Feehan	6			
D Finn	7			
C Galbraith	8			
M Gibbons	9			
O Hanlon		3		
G Hanna		4		
V Harte		5		
M Hearty		6		
R Howell		7		
T Howie	10			
J Jackson		8		
G Kearns		9		
A King	11			
C King		10		
M Larkin		11		
N Lawlor		12		
D Lee-Surginor	12			
A Lewis		13		
O Magennis		14		
A Mathers		15		
D McAteer	13			
D Murphy		16		
K Murphy		17		
S Murphy		18		
S O'Hare		19		
A Quinn		20		
H Reilly		21		
M Rice		22		
M Ruane				2
D Taylor	14			
J Tinnelly	15			
J Truesdale				3
H Young	16			
TOTALS	16	22	0	3