

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 13 April 2026 at 6.30pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor P Campbell

**In attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor C Bowsie
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 V Harte	Councillor M Hearty
Councillor T Howie	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor A King
Councillor C King	Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor A Lewis	Councillor O Magennis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor D Murphy
Councillor K Murphy	Councillor S Murphy
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor D Taylor	Councillor J Tinnelly
Councillor J Truesdale	Councillor H Young

**In attendance
via Teams:**

Councillor J Brennan	Councillor C Enright
Councillor R Howell	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor M Ruane	

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
Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

C/040/2026

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors McAteer and Lee-Surginor.

The Chairperson thanked Councillor Kearns for stepping in for his absence for the the last Council meeting.

The Saint Patrick Centre was congratulated on 25 years of operation and its contribution to tourism. The Chairperson highlighted the significant role played by the Centre in promoting tourism not only in Downpatrick but across the wider Newry, Mourne and Down District.

The Chairperson referred to the honour of leading the St Patrick's Day Parade in Downpatrick and thanked all organisations involved in its delivery, particularly the grassroots community sector across the District. Appreciation was also expressed to the Events Team for hosting successful events in both Newry and Downpatrick.

Mrs Martina Flynn and the Active and Healthy Communities Team were commended for organising impactful events as part of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls campaign. The Chairperson stated that the work strongly demonstrated the Council's commitment to addressing the issue.

The Chairperson thanked the volunteers at Castlewellan Forest Park and noted that the park had largely reopened. Reference was made to a recent visit by elected representatives to volunteer, during which Members gained insight into horticultural work.

Condolences were extended to the family of Seamus Lonergan, a Newry, Mourne and Down District Council employee who had died suddenly. At the request of Councillor Feehan, condolences were also extended to the family of former Newry and Mourne Council employee Hillary Halliday.

Members joined the Chairperson in wishing Councillor Taylor a happy birthday.

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/041/2026 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

C/042/2026 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2026

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

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor K Murphy, seconded by Councillor Finn, the Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 2 March 2026 was agreed.

COUNCIL MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/043/2026 MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2026

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

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by

Councillor Hanlon, the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 2 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/044/2026 MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 MARCH 2026

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

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

C/045/2026 MINUTES OF STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2026

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

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 12 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

C/046/2026 MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16 MARCH 2026

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

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

C/047/2026 MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 MARCH 2026

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

SE/033/2025: Environment Charges for Financial Year 2026/2027

Councillor Byrne expressed concern that a decision had been taken to increase commercial

waste charges at Household Recycling Centres by 5% for the forthcoming year and questioned why the matter had not been considered by the Strategic Finance Working Group prior to the rates being set.

Councillor Byrne proposed that the Committee decision be reversed and that the 5% uplift not be applied. This was seconded by Councillor Hanna.

Mrs Murphy clarified that Household Recycling Centre commercial charges and trade waste charges were set on a cost-recovery basis, reflecting increases in disposal costs paid by the Council. In response to a query from Councillor Hearty regarding service impact, she advised that service provision would not be affected, but that failure to recover costs would place additional pressure on the ratepayer unless otherwise funded.

Mrs Murphy further advised that trade waste had not been accepted at Household Recycling Centres until the introduction of a new payment arrangement. She also clarified, in response to Councillor Reilly, that charges for additional bins or increased bin capacity were payable by residents, with collection provided without any additional charge.

Councillor Hanlon expressed concern that the issue had been brought forward after the setting of the rates and had not been previously considered by the Strategic Finance Working Group.

Mrs Murphy advised that the matter related to cost recovery and would not directly affect the rate. She explained that the timing aligned with disposal cost increases brought through the committee process in March and April and advised that the issue could be reviewed for the following year.

Councillor Byrne stated that his comments were not directed at officers but reflected concern about public perception given that rates had already been set. He suggested that the Council absorb the cost for the current year and review the matter again to avoid placing further pressure on ratepayers and commercial businesses.

In response, Councillor Hanlon queried how the cost could be absorbed given that budgets across directorates had already been agreed. Mrs Murphy reiterated that if costs were not recovered through charges, they would have to be absorbed within existing revenue budgets.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Hanna, to reverse the Committee's previous decision and not apply the 5% uplift.**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Magennis, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, the Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, subject to the above amendment.**

C/048/2026 **PLANNING SECTION**

There were no issues arising.

C/049/2026 **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 Physician Associates (C/186/2025)

Councillor Rice thanked the Minister for his response but stated that it offered limited reassurance. He advised that reference to budget pressures and engagement with Trusts highlighted the underlying issue, namely that training places had been funded without securing corresponding employment. He noted that the suspension of intake until September 2027, while future placements continued to be planned, demonstrated deficiencies in workforce planning.

Councillor Rice noted that the Minister had described the situation as “unsatisfactory” but stated that it was, in fact, unsustainable. He advised that the motion sought to align investment with service delivery and that, until this occurred, the concerns remained valid.

Correspondence regarding Isle of Man Legislation C/037/2026

Councillor Rice welcomed the response from Minister Muir. He stated that both the Minister and the Secretary of State, Hilary Benn, had heard directly from fishermen and processors in Kilkeel during the previous week regarding the impact of recent Isle of Man fisheries legislation on crews and processors in Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie.

He noted that this issue formed part of a wider range of challenges facing the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. He highlighted that only 2.8% of the Coastal Growth Fund had been allocated to the local fleet, that fuel costs continued to rise across agri-food sectors, and that seasonal visa arrangements had become increasingly bureaucratic. He stated that further engagement from the Minister of Agriculture and the Secretary of State was required, and that meaningful support for fishing communities was needed immediately.

Councillor Hanna stated that fishermen around Kilkeel Harbour had lost confidence in Minister Muir, advising that this view was consistently expressed by those he had engaged with locally. He criticised the Minister’s handling of the Isle of Man legislation, questioning the level of departmental engagement given the length of time required for such legislation to progress..He referred to the loss of access to Isle of Man waters and other fishing grounds, advising that crews were now restricted to a narrow operating area in the Irish Sea, which he noted was also being considered for closure. He warned that, if these measures proceeded alongside forthcoming legislation affecting foreign crews, the fishing industry in Northern Ireland—particularly along the County Down coastline—would be left with minimal viable operating capacity.

Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM CAR T Cell Therapy (C/034/2026)

Councillor Feehan thanked the Health Minister for his response but said it was regrettable he had been unable to meet Members. He noted the Minister's explanation that CAR-T delivery required further accreditation, regulatory approvals and staff training, and that the Department was exploring a phased approach. He said that, based on meetings with charities, clinicians and affected families, senior specialists in Northern Ireland were already qualified to provide this care.

Accepting the Minister's diary constraints, he proposed that Council request a meeting with senior departmental officials to examine the detail of the correspondence and understand why families were being told they must wait for essential treatment.

This was seconded by Councillor Finn.

Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) (C/035/2026)

Councillor Young welcomed the Health Minister's response stating that the community in the Meadow and Armagh Road in Newry had been devastated by the recent loss of 12-year-old Shay Haughey, whose death had cast deep sadness across Newry and beyond. She said Shay had embraced life, loved sport, and was always smiling, and she held his family and friends in her thoughts.

She noted that awareness and research into SUDC were limited, that these deaths could not yet be predicted or prevented, and that they continued to devastate families. She stated that greater collaboration, investment in medical research, improved understanding of SUDC, and better support for affected families were essential.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Feehan seconded by Councillor Finn, that Council write to the Department of Health requesting a meeting with senior departmental officials to examine the detail of the Health Minister's correspondence.**

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

- **Correspondence from Health Minister Mike Nesbitt MLA re NOM Physician Associates (C/186/2025)**
- **Correspondence regarding Isle of Man Legislation**
- **Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM CAR T Cell Therapy C/034/2026**
- **Correspondence from Health Minister re NOM Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) C/035/2026**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Truesdale:

"That this Council strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) by the DUP in the Assembly and Executive; further condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the Lough Neagh crisis, the illegal dump at Mobuoy and wider environmental degradation, but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards; notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained within the New Decade, New Approach Deal; agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask him to urgently convene a process of institutional reform, in consultation with the Irish Government and local parties, to remove blockages and vetoes from Stormont's system of government; and to ask the Secretary of State to take meaningful steps to ensure that commitments in New Decade, New Approach are implemented."

This was seconded by Councillor Howie.

Councillor Truesdale stated that Northern Ireland had been ranked among the most nature-depleted regions globally, with approximately 12% of species threatened with extinction. She advised that decades of intensive agriculture, pollution and climate change had driven significant biodiversity loss, citing the decline of farmland birds, algal blooms in Lough Neagh, poor river health, the Mobuoy landfill site and Northern Ireland's low Biodiversity Intactness Index ranking.

She stated that her Party supported the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), arguing that current structures were ineffective and that progress had stalled despite previous commitments and post-Brexit regulatory changes. She advised that Northern Ireland required a non-departmental public body with robust monitoring and enforcement powers and noted polling evidence indicating public support for such an agency. Councillor Truesdale concluded that reform of power-sharing structures was necessary, stating that the ability of a single party to block environmental action was untenable.

Councillor Hearty confirmed full support for the establishment of an IEPA, stating that existing bodies lacked adequate powers and that the Office for Environmental Protection was not fit for purpose in the North. He advised that a locally based regulator was required to address the island's unique environmental context and to work with counterparts in Ireland, particularly in border regions. He stated that Assembly mechanisms had at times been used to block legislation or avoid scrutiny and that broader institutional reform was required. He added that, while some viewed constitutional change as necessary for full reform, the existing structures still needed to function effectively and, on that basis, confirmed his support for the motion.

Councillor Finn welcomed the motion and thanked Councillor Truesdale, expressing frustration at the lack of progress at Stormont. She stated that the North remained the only jurisdiction in the UK or Ireland without an environmental protection agency, despite severe pollution in Lough Neagh, river failures, biodiversity decline, poor air quality and a slow response to the climate emergency. She noted that, while the DAERA Minister supported the principle, Executive agreement had not been secured, prompting her Party to table an amendment to the Financial Provisions Bill to force Assembly consideration.

Councillor Bowsie stated that his Party would not support what he described as an attempt by the Alliance Party to avoid responsibility. He advised that responsibility for environmental protection lay with the Agriculture Minister through the NIEA and argued that transferring these functions to an unelected body would divert funding from existing agencies. He stated that his Party's agriculture spokesperson had emphasised the need for the Department to demonstrate effective delivery of its current responsibilities. Councillor Bowsie added that the focus should be on accountability and performance rather than additional bureaucracy, and that matters relating to the Executive and Assembly were for Northern Ireland's political parties.

Councillor Taylor stated that his Party supported genuine independence for any environmental regulator, but only where a clear mandate, adequate resourcing and financial transparency was in place. He advised that restructuring should not blur responsibilities or weaken delivery and that any regulator must be trusted, effective and collaborative. He stated that the section of the motion relating to institutional reform was a separate issue and that governance arrangements were a Strand One matter for local political parties without involvement from the Irish Government. On that basis, he advised that he would not support the motion.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	32
AGAINST:	6
ABSTENTIONS:	0

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillor Truesdale stated in summing up that an Independent Environmental Protection Agency would consolidate, rather than duplicate, existing responsibilities, with regulatory and monitoring functions transferring from the Department and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to the new body. She clarified that its establishment would not add an additional layer of governance but would replace current arrangements with a more effective and accountable framework.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Truesdale, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed that this Council strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) by the DUP in the Assembly and Executive; further condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the Lough Neagh crisis, the illegal dump at Mobuoy and wider environmental degradation, but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards; notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained within the New Decade, New Approach Deal; agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask him to urgently convene a process of institutional reform, in consultation with the Irish Government and local parties, to remove blockages and vetoes from Stormont's system of government; and to ask the Secretary of State to take meaningful steps to**

This was seconded by Councillor A King.

Councillor Finn offered her condolences to the family of Michael Patrick (Michael Campbell), whom she described as a highly talented actor. She stated that she had consistently raised in the Chamber the need for better support for artists and noted that while the North celebrated international success in film, television and theatre, many artists felt that achievement occurred despite, rather than because of, public support. She highlighted that per-capita cultural spending in the North was £5.07, compared with £22.50 in the Republic of Ireland, and that culture accounted for approximately 1% of the Department for Communities budget. She further noted that artists were not referenced in the Programme for Government.

Councillor Finn warned that without appropriate investment in grassroots creative workers, the wider cultural ecosystem would be lost. She noted the absence of a multi-year budget and emphasised the role of the Council in advocating for artists who contributed significantly to community wellbeing.

She concluded by expressing the hope that the motion would receive support in order to promote a scheme that properly valued artists.

Councillor C. King thanked Councillor Finn for bringing the motion forward and stated that his Party recognised the contribution of artists to communities and the economy. He referred to major cultural events such as the Fleadh in Belfast and local festivals including Wake the Giant, Eats & Beats and Footsteps in the Forest, and highlighted the positive impact of arts engagement locally in Newry, including through organisations such as Sticky Fingers Arts.

He advised that his Party supported the principle of a basic income scheme for artists and had advocated for the continuation of the scheme in the Republic of Ireland. He stated that the Communities Minister should consider proposals to support artists, including potential income support measures. However, he noted that the scheme in the Republic had cost over €18 million and questioned how a similar programme could be funded in the North given budgetary constraints and limited fiscal autonomy.

Councillor Young thanked Councillor Finn for bringing forward the motion, which she stated her Party supported. She emphasised the importance of adequate support for the arts and referred to the basic income scheme operating in the Republic of Ireland. She advised that artists had raised concerns regarding any local implementation, particularly around reduced duration and potential dilution of support.

She noted that the original scheme in the Republic had not included a time limit and had provided longer-term stability, whereas the revised scheme operated over three years. She stated that, while this could leave some artists worse off in the longer term, she considered it preferable to some level of support being available to a wider group. She requested that the motion be amended to include reference to a defined timeframe for receipt of the benefit.

Councillor Finn accepted the amendment.

Councillor Taylor acknowledged that the motion had been brought forward with genuine concern and highlighted the economic, tourism and personal development benefits of the arts. He stated that his Party would not block the motion from progressing for Executive

consideration but raised concerns regarding affordability and precedent, noting that other sectors could also argue for similar support. He further stated that the proposal would require qualifying criteria rather than unconditional support and that significant further work would be needed before full support could be given. He confirmed, however, that his Party would not oppose the motion at this stage.

Councillor Hanna stated that the DUP had significant concerns regarding the motion, several of which had already been raised during the debate.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	32
AGAINST:	0
ABSTENTIONS:	6

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillor Finn thanked Members for their support and acknowledged that the scheme would require detailed design and implementation and expressed hope that the relevant departments referenced in her motion would assist in taking this forward.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Finn, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed that This Council notes that the arts, culture and creative sectors are central to our social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy. Many artists, performers and creative workers in the district and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis. The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice. The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries. This Council believes that Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity. Newry Mourne and Down's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, mental health, youth engagement and cultural life. A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the districts cultural ecosystem. This Council resolves to call on the Executive to introduce and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, modelled on the Irish Government's programme, providing regular, unconditional income support to**

eligible artists and creative workers to include a timeframe for the receipt of the benefit. Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance, engaging directly with the arts and creative sectors in its design. Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process.

C/053/2026

NOTICE OF MOTION – PORTAFERRY BRIDGE

The following Motion was received from Councillor Bowsie:

"Newry, Mourne & Down District Council recognises the importance of improving connectivity in East Down and the huge benefits this can bring to the wider district; in terms of boosting the local economy, enhancing tourism and tackling isolation. This council is also committed to supporting more reliable, affordable and sustainable forms of travel for residents and visitors within our district.

Furthermore, this Council is concerned about the increase in traffic along roads on both sides of Strangford Lough which could be better served by a fixed crossing between Strangford village and Portaferry. This may also alleviate increasing congestion in parts of Rowallane and Downpatrick DEAs, as well as in the Ards district, thus shortening journey times and improving road safety.

NMD Council, therefore, agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister to request that she secure funding for a feasibility study into a bridge across Strangford Lough from Strangford to Portaferry."

This was seconded by Councillor Lewis.

Councillor Andrews welcomed the motion and noted that the vision for the proposed bridge had existed for many years referencing the SDLP's emphasis on building bridges within communities.

Councillor Andrews further noted that a similar motion had been considered by Ards and North Down Borough Council, where a colleague had written to the Minister for Infrastructure seeking a feasibility study. He advised that the Minister had responded that, within the existing planning framework, there was no immediate requirement for a fixed crossing. Despite previous challenges, Councillor Andrews stated that experience from the Narrow Water Bridge demonstrated that, with appropriate funding, a bridge between Strangford and Portaferry was achievable.

Councillor Campbell advised that Sinn Féin supported the motion in principle, while emphasising that the financial constraints facing the Department for Infrastructure required careful consideration.

Councillor Young confirmed Alliance Party support for the motion and stated that any feasibility study should consider road upgrades on both sides of the lough, the viability of a more sustainable ferry service, and environmental designations. She noted that increased traffic would require significant road improvements and referred to sustainable ferry

developments in Belfast, including hybrid vessels and electric hydrofoils. Reference was made to the Belfast–Bangor pilot service and sustainability investments by Stena Line. Councillor Young further highlighted that Strangford Lough was the largest sea inlet in the British Isles and Northern Ireland’s first Marine Conservation Zone, with both Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area designations.

Councillor Taylor confirmed support for the motion, acknowledged the challenges associated with funding such a project, and stated that a feasibility study would assist in identifying potential issues. He suggested that the Minister give favourable consideration to the proposal.

The Chairperson declared the motion passed unanimously.

In summing up, Councillor Bowsie thanked Members for their support and acknowledged the DUP Deputy Leader, Michelle McIlveen MLA, who had launched the campaign three months earlier alongside councillors from Ards and North Down Borough Council. He added that it was positive to have joint political support from Councils on both sides of Strangford Lough.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed that "Newry, Mourne & Down District Council recognises the importance of improving connectivity in East Down and the huge benefits this can bring to the wider district; in terms of boosting the local economy, enhancing tourism and tackling isolation. This council is also committed to supporting more reliable, affordable and sustainable forms of travel for residents and visitors within our district. Furthermore, this Council is concerned about the increase in traffic along roads on both sides of Strangford Lough which could be better served by a fixed crossing between Strangford village and Portaferry. This may also alleviate increasing congestion in parts of Rowallane and Downpatrick DEAs, as well as in the Ards district, thus shortening journey times and improving road safety. NMD Council, therefore, agrees to write to the Infrastructure Minister to request that she secure funding for a feasibility study into a bridge across Strangford Lough from Strangford to Portaferry.**

C/054/2026

NOTICE OF MOTION - AREAS WITH NATURAL CONSTRAINTS (PAYMENTS) BILL

The following Motion was received from Councillor Rice:

"This Council notes the introduction of the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill in the Assembly.

This Council Recognises the importance of Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) payments in sustaining family farms, supporting rural communities, and maintaining agricultural activity in marginal and upland areas.

This Council Welcomes the Bill's requirement that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs make regulations under the Agriculture Act 2020 to ensure continued and inflation-linked payments to eligible farmers.

This Council calls on all parties in the Assembly, and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to support and progress this legislation without delay."

This was seconded by Councillor Ruane.

Councillor Rice stated that the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Payments Bill was necessary and long overdue for farmers in South Down and across the North. He highlighted the challenges faced by upland and small family-run farms in Severely Disadvantaged Areas, particularly within the Mourne, and emphasised their importance to the rural economy and the wider agricultural supply chain.

He advised that the removal of the former ANC scheme had placed additional financial pressure on farms operating on marginal land with limited diversification opportunities and referred to declining cattle and sheep numbers as evidence of increasing strain within the sector. Councillor Rice outlined that the Bill established a legal framework for an ANC scheme, with funding to be considered through established budgetary processes, and stressed that ANC payments should complement existing farm support schemes and address structural disadvantage.

Councillor Reilly advised that, as of June 2025, Northern Ireland had 25,834 active farmers, the majority operating small family farms, and noted that the farm sustainability payment had a budget of £336 million.

He stated that a mandatory ANC scheme would have required funding from within the existing agriculture budget, potentially displacing support for other farm businesses, and expressed concern that linking ANC payments to inflation could create inequities. He emphasised that future support should focus on efficiency, resilience and productivity rather than further area-based payments. Councillor Reilly highlighted support for a designated sheep scheme and referenced the work of the Northern Ireland Sheep Industry Task Force, while expressing concern about the slow implementation of its recommendations.

Councillor Reilly further challenged the assertion that farms in disadvantaged areas were worse off following the cessation of the ANC scheme, citing adjustments to land-based payments, eligibility changes under the 2026 scheme, current application timelines and the introduction of the suckler cow scheme on 1 April. He concluded that the DUP's position was to maximise direct farmer support, reduce bureaucracy and ensure effective delivery, and confirmed that the Party could not support the motion.

Councillor Taylor noted that the Bill had recently completed Second Stage in the Assembly and advised that his party had offered conditional support based on its stated intent. While acknowledging positive elements, he identified a number of unresolved issues requiring clarification before full support could be confirmed.

He questioned whether the Bill formed part of a coherent long-term agricultural strategy or was a response to short-term pressures, emphasising the need for funding arrangements to be credible, sustainable and fairly targeted. On that basis, Councillor Taylor advised that his party would abstain pending further consideration as the Bill progressed through the Assembly.

Councillor Howie stated that, while the Alliance Party supported fair assistance for farm businesses in disadvantaged areas, it considered that alternative approaches offered better long-term value for public money. She advised that the Bill's progression to Second Stage required robust scrutiny and confirmed that Alliance intended to seek amendments, including environmental conditionality and closer examination of the Bill's financial implications, particularly the proposed inflation-linked uplift. She noted there was no clear evidence of significant land abandonment in ANC areas and highlighted existing and developing supports under the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, including the farm sustainability payment and revised land eligibility rules.

Councillor Howie proposed the following amendment:

Remove all text after 'upland areas' and insert:

This Council supports effective scrutiny of the bill as it progresses through the Assembly, recognising the need to address issues raised during Second Stage debate, including the case for adding nature and biodiversity conditionality to the bill, its affordability if not funded from the earmarked Sustainable Agriculture Programme budget, and the inherent unfairness of linking payments to inflations when no other farm support measures have the same protections in law.

Councillor Rice advised that he did not accept the amendment. Councillor Howie confirmed that, on that basis, the Alliance Party would not support the motion.

Mrs Ward advised that, under Standing Orders 17.1.1, Councillor Howie's amendment could not be accepted as it constituted a direct negative.

Councillor Byrne stated that he did not wish to create unrealistic expectations regarding what the Council could deliver. He noted that the FCLP had supported the Bill at Second Stage but advised that significant questions remained regarding funding, including whether resources would be additional or reallocated within departmental budgets. He stated that these matters required detailed scrutiny at Committee Stage.

Councillor Byrne highlighted that a significant proportion of agricultural land in the North was classified as disadvantaged and advised that, since the cessation of ANC payments in 2018, many farms had experienced herd reductions and financial pressure. While acknowledging differing views on land abandonment, he emphasised the sustained challenges faced by farmers operating on less productive land. He expressed concern about linking payments to inflation where no comparable schemes operated on that basis and cautioned against redistributing funding in a way that disadvantaged other farm sectors.

Councillor Byrne confirmed his support for the motion as drafted and proposed the addition of wording after the reference to eligible farmers: "in line with the Ulster Farmers' Union, provided it is funded through additional resources that are separate from existing direct agricultural support funding."

Following further protracted discussion, Councillor Rice accepted the amendment.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR: 28
AGAINST: 8
ABSTENTIONS: 1

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

In summing up, Councillor Rice stated that not all land was equal and highlighted that farmers in upland areas faced higher costs, lower productivity, and fewer opportunities for diversification. He noted that farmers in these areas experienced particular challenges in meeting the requirements of the suckler cow scheme. In relation to the amendment, Councillor Rice advised that it had been incorporated within the Bill and added that this provision had been instrumental in securing the Ulster Farmers' Union's support during the consultation process prior to the Bill's introduction in the Assembly.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor Ruane, it was agreed that this Council notes the introduction of the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill in the Assembly. This Council Recognises the importance of Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC) payments in sustaining family farms, supporting rural communities, and maintaining agricultural activity in marginal and upland areas. This Council Welcomes the Bill's requirement that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs make regulations under the Agriculture Act 2020 to ensure continued and inflation-linked payments to eligible farmers in line with the Ulster Farmers' Union, provided it is funded through additional resources that are separate from existing direct agricultural support funding. This Council calls on all parties in the Assembly, and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, to support and progress this legislation without delay.**

C/055/2026 NOTICE OF MOTION - WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

The following Motion was received from Councillor Feehan:

"This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting". Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are blocking 1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices.

Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:

- *3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.*
- *1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.*
- *Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.*
- *The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.*

Council therefore agrees to take the following actions:

Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:

- *confirms that the long-term funding required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided*
- *commission an independent review of NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office*
- *Invite the authors of the Newry Next report to attend a Special Council Meeting to Interrogate the recommendations of the report and ascertain the necessary action required to realise its ambition."*

This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Councillor Feehan stated that the Motion had been brought forward to address the clear evidence that inadequate water and wastewater infrastructure was the principal constraint on long-term development in the area. He emphasised that the motion was not intended to allocate blame, but to acknowledge an established capacity crisis which was already restricting housing delivery, delaying commercial development, and constraining investment and employment growth. It was noted that several local wastewater treatment works had no remaining capacity and others were operating under significant pressure.

Councillor Feehan highlighted that house prices and rents in Newry, Mourne and Down had risen faster than elsewhere in the North in the previous year, reinforcing the need to unblock development and increase housing supply.

Councillor Feehan concluded that the issue required a collaborative, evidence-based approach and that water infrastructure needed to be treated as a priority at Executive level in order to support housing delivery and sustainable economic development.

Councillor Andrews concurred with the sentiments expressed in the motion.

Councillor Hanna advised that the DUP fully recognised wastewater infrastructure constraints as a critical barrier to housing development, economic growth and investment. The Councillor stated that a wider infrastructure review across Northern Ireland would be supported in order to assess whether current funding levels met identified need, noting that without functioning infrastructure development could not proceed and communities were bearing the consequences.

Councillor Hanna confirmed willingness to explore options to grant NI Water borrowing powers, provided appropriate protections for vulnerable households were in place, and stressed that wastewater investment must be fairly distributed and not exacerbate regional imbalances.

In conclusion, Councillor Hanna stated that the issue was not solely about increased spending but about ensuring that the system was structurally capable of delivering the infrastructure Northern Ireland required. It was also noted that Gordon Lyons had taken steps to increase housing supply through existing mechanisms, including the introduction of an intermediate rent scheme and increasing property value thresholds to support prospective homeowners.

Councillor D Murphy stated that most, if not all, Executive parties had acknowledged that insufficient funding had been provided from Westminster and expressed concern that this issue had not been addressed within the motion. He indicated that failing to recognise this risked deflecting responsibility from those accountable for departmental underfunding, which was a matter of significance for Sinn Féin. He noted that the current funding model had been introduced in 2021 and brought to the Executive by a former Infrastructure Minister and expressed concern that such a review could lead to proposals for water charges or privatisation, reiterating Sinn Féin's clear opposition to water charges. He emphasised that wastewater capacity constraints were not a new issue and had affected communities, developers and investors for many decades and acknowledged that the Department for Infrastructure faced significant pressures due to an inadequate budget, but stressed the importance of focusing on feasible, solution-based approaches and recognising progress already made, which was not reflected in the motion.

Councillor D Murphy stated that additional investment in wastewater infrastructure required adequate funding from the British Government and support across the Executive. He emphasised the need to lobby Westminster directly to address the core funding issue and expressed concern that the motion risked being perceived as political point-scoring rather than solution-focused.

Councillor D Murphy suggested the following amendments to the motion;

*"This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; **recognises that the north's Executive is chronically underfunded and is trying to deliver public services in the context of decades of British government austerity and underinvestment in critical infrastructure;** recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting", **welcomes the Minister for Infrastructure's innovative approach to these issues, particularly the announced increased capacity at Newry and Annsborough (Castlewellan) treatment facilities, and also welcomes her commitment to pursuing resolution to these issues.***

*Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are blocking **delaying** 1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices.*

Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:

- 3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.
- 1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.
- Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.
- The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.

Council therefore agrees to take the following actions:

Write to the Communities Minister requesting that he outlines his plans for investment in housing across Newry, Mourne and Down

Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:

- confirms that the long term **Outlines her plans for the funding of** required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided
- commission an independent review of NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office

Invite the authors of the Newry Next report to attend a Special Council Meeting to interrogate the recommendations of the report and ascertain the necessary action required to realise this ambition.

Councillor Devlin proposed a recess. This was seconded Councillor Byrne.

The meeting did then recess – 8.20pm

The meeting did then resume – 8.48pm.

The following amendments to the motion were agreed, proposed by Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor D Murphy.

*"This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; **recognises that the Executive is chronically underfunded and is trying to deliver public services in the context of decades of British government austerity and underinvestment in critical infrastructure;** recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting",*

*Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are **delaying 1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been delayed;** recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices. Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:*

- 3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.

- 1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.
- Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.
- The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.

Council therefore agrees to take the following actions:

Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:

- **Details her plans for the funding of** required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided

- Request that the department regularly reviews NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office

Request that Newry Next provide a copy of their report 'Newry Next building regional powerhouse by 2035 and this is tabled on the ERT agenda to ensure it is available.'

Councillor Feehan accepted the amendments.

Councillor Taylor acknowledged that wastewater infrastructure was a significant issue in Northern Ireland and stated that it had developed into a crisis requiring strategic action. He highlighted that the impacts of underfunding were extensive, with construction delays constraining economic growth.

Councillor Reilly stated that he was broadly supportive of the motion but emphasised the importance of prioritising ordinary working-class residents within the district and referred to the number of properties being purchased by residents from the Republic of Ireland in the Newry area.

Councillor Feehan responded that focusing on the eventual occupancy of new-build properties was not relevant to the issue under discussion. He thanked Councillors D Murphy, Harte and Hanlon for their contributions and Members for their support for the motion.

The Chairperson declared the motion passed.

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor D Murphy, it was agreed that "This Council notes the growing social, economic and environmental crisis caused by lack of capacity within the district's wastewater infrastructure which is impeding housing and commercial development; recognises that the Executive is chronically underfunded and is trying to deliver public services in the context of decades of British government austerity and underinvestment in critical infrastructure; recognises that NI Water has identified nine wastewater treatment works locally which do not have any available capacity, and a further nine with capacity issues, also identifying its networks in Newry, Saintfield and Kilkeel as "high polluting", Council notes the contents of the recent report, Newry Next: Building a Regional Powerhouse by 2035, which indicates that wastewater constraints are delaying 1,300 housing units in planning locally and that 29 major commercial schemes have been

delayed; recognises the extraordinary pressures on housing supply in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area and the consequent increase in local house purchase and rent prices.

Council registers its concern at further evidence of the housing crisis in the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area:

- **3,922 applicants on the social housing waiting list of which 3,207 are in housing stress, the third highest level in the North.**
- **1,197 housing units recommended for refusal by NI Water, and a further 122 units that will not get a connection to the public foul network due to closed catchments.**
 - **Only 385 new housing starts locally Q1-Q3 2025, the third lowest in the North.**
 - **The highest annual rent increases in Northern Ireland at 7.2% and the highest annual house price increases in Northern Ireland at 12.4%.**

Council therefore agrees to take the following actions: Write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that she:

- **Details her plans for the funding of required by NI Water to upgrade its wastewater infrastructure locally will be provided**
- **request that the department regularly reviews NI Waters funding and governance arrangements as recommended by the Northern Ireland Audit Office**

Request that Newry Next provide a copy of their report 'Newry Next building regional powerhouse by 2035 and this is tabled on the ERT agenda to ensure it is available.

C/056/2026

NOTICE OF MOTION - COLD WATER SWIMMING FACILITIES AT TYRELLA BEACH

The following Motion was received from Councillor Lewis:

"This Council notes the growing popularity of cold water swimming across the district, including at Tyrella Beach, which provides a picturesque and accessible natural setting for such activity.

Council further notes the recognised physical and mental health benefits associated with cold water swimming, including improved circulation, reduced stress levels, enhanced mood, and its increasing use as a complementary activity promoted through health initiatives.

This Council acknowledges that a number of organised groups and individuals make regular use of Tyrella Beach throughout the year, including during the winter months, often without access to appropriate facilities.

"That this Council further calls on the British government to end its inadequate and delayed response to the fuel crisis, and to act with the urgency that it demands to protect households, sustain local businesses, and safeguard our rural economy. And to write to the British Secretary of State for the North and the Minister of State for Energy to clearly convey this Council's deep frustration at their failure to act, and to demand the immediate delivery of real, effective support for those struggling with rising energy crisis."

The amendment was accepted by Councillor Kearns

Councillor Quinn stated that rising energy, fuel and fertiliser costs had placed severe pressure on farmers, farming families and rural communities. She advised that these cost increases were compounding existing difficulties within the agricultural sector and were contributing to growing financial uncertainty for family farms, particularly in border areas such as South Armagh.

She highlighted significant increases in agricultural diesel and fertiliser costs and stated that farmers across the island were experiencing sustained pressures from multiple directions, noting that border communities were disproportionately affected by rising costs, which were impacting households, farms and small businesses, and referred to the challenges arising from decisions taken by both the British and Irish governments.

She called for urgent and meaningful intervention from the British Government to support local food production and sustain the agri-food sector, stating that existing responses were insufficient. She attributed the crisis to global instability and wider energy market disruption, noting that communities distant from those decisions were bearing the consequences.

In conclusion, Councillor Quinn stated that the ongoing pressures highlighted structural challenges, particularly for border communities, and called for a coordinated and unified response stating that the case for Irish unity had never been more relevant as a practical, common-sense solution. She stressed that Council should send a clear message of support for workers, families, farmers and small businesses and oppose any approach that left rural communities without adequate assistance.

Councillor Hanna stated that the DUP recognised the growing pressure on households, particularly within Newry, Mourne and Down, where high reliance on home-heating oil left families more exposed than elsewhere. He noted that approximately 82% of the district's population lived in rural areas and depended heavily on oil for domestic heating.

He advised that the £17 million allocated for home-heating oil support, equating to approximately £30 per household, did not represent meaningful assistance given the scale of the challenge. Councillor Hanna emphasised the need for clarity regarding responsibility, stating that energy policy and support schemes primarily lay with the Department for the Economy and that future measures required collective agreement and action across the Executive.

He emphasised that responsibility for energy policy primarily rested with the Department for the Economy and required coordinated action across the Executive. Reference was made to the role of the Department for Communities, with Councillor Hanna stating that Minister Gordon Lyons had previously delivered support within his remit and remained prepared to do so again. Concern was also expressed regarding the failure to distribute £81 million in energy support previously allocated by the UK Government.

Councillor Hanna stated that any support should reflect the pressures on working families as well as those in receipt of welfare and highlighted that key levers such as fuel duty and VAT rested with the UK Government. He concluded that meaningful increases in funding, urgent delivery mechanisms and coordinated action by both the Executive and the UK Government were required to provide effective relief.

Councillor Galbraith advised that households across Newry, Mourne and Down were experiencing significant pressure due to sharp increases in home-heating oil prices. He noted that price rises of up to 80% had been observed over a short period and highlighted that the impact was particularly acute in the North, where a majority of households relied on oil for heating, especially within a largely rural district.

Councillor Galbraith confirmed SDLP support for the motion but identified limitations in its current scope. He stated that an energy crisis of this scale required a coordinated Executive-wide response rather than action by a single department. While supporting the proposal to provide urgent financial assistance, he advised that the £17 million allocated for home-heating oil support was insufficient given the number of households affected and stressed the importance of targeting support at the most vulnerable and delivering it quickly. In conclusion, Councillor Galbraith stated that the Executive had tools at its disposal to act collectively and that stronger intervention was required to protect households.

Councillor Galbraith proposed that the following amendment be added to the motion:
"We propose that this Council writes to the First and Deputy First Ministers, the NI Executive and the UK Government to urgently establish a joint energy taskforce to address the following measures:

- *The urgent rollout of the £17 million home heating oil support scheme, including capacity for increased funding as autumn approaches;*
- *Emergency legislation to provide an increased range of energy support mechanisms for households most in need;*
- *Extension of UK rural fuel duty relief to rural parts of Northern Ireland;*
- *Fast-tracking the Warm Healthy Homes Fund;*
- *Exploring reduced public transport fares where appropriate;*
- *And targeted support for those workers who are particularly exposed to fuel costs."*

This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Councillor Kearns did not accept the amendment, stating that it let the British Government 'off the hook' and enabled them to shirk responsibility for people in the North.

Councillor Byrne disagreed and stated that issues such as rural fuel duty, additional support for workers most exposed to fuel costs and reducing transport costs required additional funding and were not being addressed at Assembly level. He advised that the amendment proposed by Councillor Galbraith sought to engage the British Government directly and hold it accountable in relation to these matters.

Councillor Byrne proposed a recess, seconded by Councillor Feehan.

The meeting did then recess – 9.19pm

The meeting did then resume – 9.24pm.

Councillor Kearns noted that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister had written to the British Prime Minister in the previous week, urging the introduction of a package of measures to address fuel costs in the region. She stated that this correspondence addressed the issues raised in the amendment proposed by Councillor Galbraith and, on that basis, confirmed that the amendment was not accepted.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR: 11
AGAINST: 20
ABSTENTIONS: 6

The Chairperson declared the proposal lost.

Councillor Taylor advised that the £17 million financial package represented limited recognition of the fuel cost crisis and was insufficient when set against the scale of fuel duty and VAT revenues collected by the UK Government. He stated that substantially more intervention was required.

He indicated that a targeted support scheme developed in partnership with the Executive would be appropriate for those most affected, but argued that, given the urgency, a universal approach would deliver faster and more effective support for working families.

He referred to the impact of rising transport costs on workers and businesses, noting that increased fuel prices would inevitably be passed on to consumers through higher costs for goods and services. Councillor Taylor highlighted that a significant proportion of fuel prices comprised taxation and stated that government intervention was required beyond existing duty freezes.

In conclusion, Councillor Taylor stated that fuel costs affected all communities regardless of political background and expressed disappointment that broader cross-community consensus had been undermined by constitutional commentary during the debate. He advised that a unified message would have strengthened advocacy on an issue impacting all residents and warned that cost pressures could worsen further in light of ongoing international developments.

As there was dissent in the chamber, the Chairperson put the matter to a recorded vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR: 31
AGAINST: 6
ABSTENTIONS: 0

The Chairperson declared the amended motion passed.

Councillor Kearns thanked Members for their support.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Kearns, seconded by Councillor Quinn, it was agreed that "This Council recognises the immense pressure being placed on workers, families and businesses as a result of huge

The following Motion was received from Councillor Jackson:

"That this Council expresses deep concern that aspirational climate targets are impeding the delivery of high-quality public services and infrastructure that ratepayers deserve; notes that the provisions of the Climate Change Act 2022 have been found by the courts to obstruct the progression of A5 Road Upgrade, with far-reaching consequences for other major projects such as the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass; is alarmed, furthermore, that the current legal requirement for minimum spend on active travel perversely acts as a barrier to vital investment in roads maintenance and repairs; believes Council should conduct a cost-benefit analysis of all climate-related policies and funding streams; calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to withdraw the current draft Climate Action Plan, which contains a range of proposals that are not quantified and would place additional burdens on farmers and households during a cost-of-living crisis; and further calls on the Minister to urgently bring proposals to the Executive to amend the net zero by 2050 emissions target in Northern Ireland."

This was seconded by Councillor Hanna.

Councillor Taylor referred to a recent Audit Office report which highlighted concerns that targets contained within the Climate Change Bill set a very high bar. He stated that his Party recognised these targets were ambitious but believed they were becoming increasingly unrealistic. He referred to perceived failures in achieving energy targets and delivering major road infrastructure projects, which he stated were linked to climate targets, and argued that a review of those targets should be considered. Councillor Taylor stated that while Northern Ireland had a role to play in meeting wider UK climate ambitions, it should not be placed in a position where industries or communities were expected to pursue unachievable goals.

Speaking in opposition to the motion on behalf of his Party, Councillor Hearty stated that the motion did not relate to the A5, the A4, agriculture, ratepayers or the cost-of-living crisis, but represented what he described as a continuation of the DUP's opposition to climate action. He emphasised the importance of agriculture to Ireland's economy, culture and heritage and stated that climate action was essential to safeguarding farming for future generations.

Councillor Hearty referred to the Climate Change Risk Assessment, noting that it identified direct local risks arising from climate change, including increased wildfires, flooding, drought, coastal erosion, soil and water salinisation, threats to carbon sinks, and increased pests, diseases and invasive species. He stated that these impacts posed a greater risk to farming than environmental legislation.

He further stated that references to the A5 were misplaced, noting that the High Court ruling related to the absence of an operational carbon budget against which emissions could be assessed. He advised that this situation arose because the Assembly had collapsed shortly after the Climate Change Act was passed, preventing the implementation of key provisions such as carbon budgets and action plans.

Councillor Hearty stated that refusal to transition away from fossil fuels would exacerbate cost-of-living pressures due to exposure to volatile energy markets. While acknowledging that achieving net zero would be challenging, he argued that it would bring long-term benefits including energy security and greater price stability. He stated that while aspects of climate policy could be improved, abandoning net-zero ambitions would be environmentally damaging and short-sighted.

models, are shared with the Council to ensure alignment with local development and tourism strategies."

This was seconded by Councillor Clarke.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Lawlor stated that it was regrettable that the centre had remained closed for an extended period, particularly given the significant increase in visitor numbers to the Mourne Mountains. He highlighted the role of the centre in safety training and the development of mountain leadership, stating that its value should not be assessed solely on financial performance. He further advised that the centre had the potential to operate as a hub supporting the local community, the outdoor recreation sector and the wider regional economy, and could play a greater role within the Mournes in the future.

Councillor Clarke thanked Councillor Lawlor for bringing the motion forward and stated that the Tollymore Outdoor Centre was a strategically important regional asset, recognised across the island of Ireland as a centre of excellence for outdoor education, mountain leadership and safety training. He outlined the centre's role in developing instructors, teachers, youth leaders and mountain professionals, equipping them with the skills and confidence to manage and enjoy the natural environment safely.

He emphasised the significant growth in visitor numbers to the Mournes in recent years and stated that increased use of the area by walkers, climbers and cyclists reinforced the need for professional training and public safety education. Councillor Clarke advised that a financially sustainable operating model was required which protected core education and training services while improving access for local sports groups, community organisations and families. He confirmed that Sinn Féin supported the reopening of the centre at the earliest possible opportunity under a sustainable future model.

Councillor Devlin confirmed SDLP support for the motion and stated that the Tollymore Outdoor Centre was a vital asset both locally and nationally for those reliant on high-quality outdoor safety training. She advised that greater clarity and commitment regarding the centre's future were required and called on Sport NI to move beyond delay and reopen the facility as soon as possible with a long-term, sustainable operating model that protected its core function and enhanced community access.

Councillor Hanna advised that the DUP recognised the centre as a unique and strategically important facility supporting outdoor education, safety training and tourism. He stated that the Party understood the level of local concern regarding its closure and future direction and supported reopening the centre at the earliest opportunity. He emphasised that any future operating model must be financially sustainable and welcomed the ongoing review and proposed public consultation, stressing the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement. He further stated that Council should play a more proactive role in supporting the future of the centre.

Councillor Truesdale welcomed references within the motion to a long-term, financially sustainable operating model and the findings of the ongoing review. She referred to job losses arising from the centre's closure and to the loss of facilities previously available. Drawing on personal experience, she highlighted the value of the centre in promoting physical and mental wellbeing. Councillor Truesdale stated her Party's full support for the motion, emphasising that the centre should provide broad community access, support the local economy and continue to deliver high-quality training and qualifications.

Councillor Taylor confirmed support for the motion and highlighted the multiple benefits provided by the centre, including its contribution to tourism. He emphasised the importance of clearly demonstrating Council support and urged that certainty be provided urgently by Sport NI on a sustainable future operating model that protected the services previously offered.

With agreement from all the Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillors Ruane and Brennan left the meeting during the above discussion – 9.58pm and 22.03pm respectively.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Lawlor, seconded by Councillor Clarke, it was agreed that this Council notes the ongoing review and current status of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre in Bryansford and recognises the significant concern within the local community and the wider outdoor recreation sector regarding its future. This Council recognises that Tollymore National Outdoor Centre is a world class facility in the heart of the Mourne, providing an essential public service in safety training and the development of mountain leadership. This service must be protected in the context of increasing visitor numbers to the Mourne, ensuring the safety of those using our natural environment. This Council resolves to write to the Chief Executive of Sport NI to reiterate its support for the reopening of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre at the earliest possible opportunity, alongside the development of a long-term, financially sustainable operating model which protects core education and training services while improving access for the local community. The Council will also request that the findings of the ongoing review, and any proposed operating models, are shared with the Council to ensure alignment with local development and tourism strategies.**

C/061/2026 NOTICE OF MOTION - ST PATRICKS DAY

The following Motion was received from Councillor Campbell:

"This Council recognises the local, national and international significance of St Patrick's Day, and commits to establishing a dedicated working group comprising representatives from the community, voluntary and business sectors. The purpose of this group will be to enhance and develop existing St Patrick's Day events in Downpatrick and Newry, with a view to increasing economic opportunities and strengthening the district's tourism offering".

The Chairperson advised the Motion had been deferred.

Agreed: The Motion was deferred.

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received from Councillor Truesdale

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

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received from Councillor Finn

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

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received from Councillor Rice

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

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Amendment to Councillor Kearn's motion by Councillor Galbraith

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

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Councillor Kern's motion

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews	1			
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan	2			
P Byrne	3			
P Campbell	4			
W Clarke	5			
L Devlin	6			
C Enright				1
K Feehan	7			
D Finn	8			
C Galbraith	9			
M Gibbons				2
O Hanlon	10			
G Hanna		2		
V Harte	11			
M Hearty	12			
R Howell	13			
T Howie	14			
J Jackson		3		
G Kearns	15			
A King	16			
C King	17			
M Larkin	18			
N Lawlor	19			
D Lee-Surginor				3
A Lewis		4		
O Magennis	20			
A Mathers	21			
D McAteer				4
D Murphy	22			
K Murphy	23			
S Murphy	24			
S O'Hare	25			
A Quinn	26			
H Reilly		5		
M Rice	27			
M Ruane	28			
D Taylor		6		
J Tinnelly	29			
J Truesdale	30			
H Young	31			
TOTALS	31	6	0	4

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 13/04/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Motion received Councillor Jackson

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews		1		
C Bowsie	1			
J Brennan		2		
P Byrne		3		
P Campbell		4		
W Clarke		5		
L Devlin		6		
C Enright				1
K Feehan		7		
D Finn		8		
C Galbraith		9		
M Gibbons				2
O Hanlon		10		
G Hanna	2			
V Harte		11		
M Hearty		12		
R Howell		13		
T Howie		14		
J Jackson	3			
G Kearns		15		
A King		16		
C King		17		
M Larkin		18		
N Lawlor		19		
D Lee-Surginor				3
A Lewis	4			
O Magennis		20		
A Mathers		21		
D McAteer				4
D Murphy		22		
K Murphy		23		
S Murphy		24		
S O'Hare		25		
A Quinn		26		
H Reilly	5			
M Rice		27		
M Ruane		28		
D Taylor	6			
J Tinnelly		29		
J Truesdale		30		
H Young		31		
TOTALS	6	31	0	4