

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

**Minutes of Council Meeting held on Tuesday 5 May 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 J Brennan	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor L Devlin	Councillor K Feehan
Councillor D Finn	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor V Harte
Councillor M Hearty	Councillor G Kearns
Councillor A King	Councillor C King
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor A Lewis	Councillor O Magennis
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor D McAteer
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor J Truesdale
Councillor H Young	

**In attendance
via Teams:**

Councillor W Clarke	Councillor M Gibbons
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S Murphy	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor D Taylor	

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

C/064/2026

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Enright, Galbraith, Howell and Tinnelly.

The Chairperson on behalf of the entire Council extended sincere condolences to Councillor Jarlath Tinnelly and his family on the tragic loss of his daughter, Aoife.

The Chairperson expressed condolences to Councillor McAteer on the loss of his father.

C/065/2026 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

C/066/2026 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 13 APRIL 2026

Read: Action sheet from Council Meeting held on 13 April 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Hearty, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, the Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 13 April 2026 was agreed.

COUNCIL MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/067/2026 MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 13 APRIL 2026

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 13 April 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Finn, seconded by Councillor D Murphy, the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 13 April 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/068/2026 MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 APRIL 2026

Read: Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 20 April 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Ruane, the Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 20 April 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

C/069/2026 MINUTES OF STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 23 APRIL 2026

Read: Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 23 April 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Mathers, the Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 23 April 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

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

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Hanna, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on the following matters which related to exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Harte, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to come out of closed session.

The Chairperson advised the following had been agreed whilst in closed session:

SPR/054/2026 - KILKEEL TOWN HALL

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

FOR	5
AGAINST	28
ABSTENTION	1

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the Minutes were agreed as presented.

SPR/053/2026 - DUNDRUM PITCHES

It was agreed at the request of Councillor Lewis that Mr Patterson would arrange for officers to meet with the teams that used the old pitches in Dundrum prior to any upgrade works taking place and ensure they were kept up to date.

C/070/2026 **MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL 2026**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 27 April 2026 (**copy circulated**).

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Lawlor, seconded by Councillor Magennis, the Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 27 April 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

C/071/2026

**MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 29 APRIL 2026**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 29 April 2026 (**copy circulated**).

SE/030/2026 – Home to Hospital

Councillor Truesdale asked that it be placed on record that the home to hospital service did not cover Mourne and there had been a number of actionable points put in for the 26-27 year.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Hearty, seconded by Councillor Ruane, the Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 29 April 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

C/072/2026

PLANNING SECTION

C/010/2026: Planning Section

Councillor Hanna enquired when the report would be made available on the Judicial Reviews. The Chief Executive confirmed a report would be presented at the May Planning Committee Meeting.

C/073/2026

CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

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

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

- **Correspondence from DAERA Minister Muir MLA re: Notice of Motion – Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill (C/054/2026)**

EMERGENCY NOTICE OF MOTION

The Chairperson advised an Emergency Notice of Motion had been received, the wording of which had been emailed to all Councillors and to enable it to be heard, it would be necessary to suspend Standing Order 16.1 for which a qualified majority vote was required, no fewer than 80% of Members present and voting.

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

FOR:	30
AGAINST:	4
ABSTENTIONS:	0

Miss Taggart confirmed a qualified majority had been reached.

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

C/074/2026: EMERGENCY NOTICE OF MOTION – FIRES IN THE MOURNES

The following Motion was received from Councillor Truesdale:

"This Council expressed deep concern at the devastating impact that fires have had on the Mourne, putting local communities in danger and destroying precious habitats; commends the heroic bravery of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and PSNI in bringing the fires under control and protecting communities; further commends Mourne Heritage Trust, the National Trust and Mourne Mountain Rescue for their role in managing the Mournes; urges anyone with information on those responsible for malicious wildfires in our countryside to pass on that information to the appropriate authorities; welcomes the appointment of the Pau Costa Foundation to undertake work on wildfire management and response plans; affirms the importance of a collaborative multi-agency response; welcomes the Wildfire Strategic Framework and Action Plan; and resolves to write to the Executive outlining the importance of adequate funding to support preparation, preparedness, response, recovery and enforcement."

Councillor Young seconded the Motion.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Truesdale said the devastating damage scarring the mountains was clear to see with major emergency response teams, hundreds of firefighters and partner agencies working around the clock. She highlighted the benefits of the rich habitat and the suffering when destroyed and how Newcastle residents watched as fire came to their doors with ash falling onto cars and homes with a huge number of people having their chest and asthma conditions worsen.

Councillor Truesdale spoke of how she had advocated for a dedicated ranger service across Mourne and how that piecemeal enforcement had been incredibly successful. Members were reminded that these fires were caused by human activity, whether through carelessness and inattention, out-of-season agricultural practices or malicious fire setting.

Councillor Truesdale thanked colleagues from SDLP and Sinn Fein who along with Alliance attended a meeting of Mourne stakeholders working through shared commonalities. At the meeting three immediate strategic priorities were agreed to include education, enforcement and funding as well as the need for multi agency action.

Councillor Devlin concurred with the sentiment of the motion commenting that unfortunately this had happened many times before with no real tangible results for the people of the Mourne. She stated that people wanted to see action by virtue of the Government stepping up and delivering as that had not happened to date and all the while the environment was being decimated.

Councillor Rice pointed out the Mourne Mountains were one of the most iconic and vulnerable natural assets and how for those who lived nearby it was not just scenery, but a definition of the community and identity, with visitor numbers reaching 500,000 each year. He spoke of how pressure on the landscape was growing fast and what angered people the most was not just the fires but the lack of consequences. The law that existed for enforcement was almost non-existent with those responsible rarely identified or prosecuted.

Councillor Rice went on to point out that whilst a Wildfire Strategy had been brought forward, funding to the Mourne Heritage had been simultaneously cut removing engagement rangers on the ground and that the landscape could not be protected by removing the people who actively protected it. He added the PSNI were not equipped to deal with environmental crime at that level.

Councillor Hanna pointed out that during his time at Council this had been seen regularly and that lessons had not been learnt. He commended the firemen for all their efforts however he felt there was a need for a more efficient way of fighting these fires with more facilities. He suggested the UK and the Republic of Ireland come together to form a unit of helicopters that could drop water onto fires and appropriate places to actually prevent fires from moving as quickly as they did.

Councillor Hanna said he did not attribute blame on any one Minister but pointed out the matter of these fires fell under the responsibility of the Health minister. He added there were little consequences on those causing the fires and spoke of the difficulties faced by the PSNI and how the community had to take some responsibility. He appealed to members of the public to report to PSNI if they saw anything at the earliest opportunity.

Councillor Reilly explained his Party had voted against the emergency Motion on the same grounds they had voted against a similar emergency Motion on potholes as it was not an emergency but rather something that was ongoing.

Councillor Reilly proposed an amendment to the emergency Motion as follows:

"That Council write to the RAF and the Irish Air Corps asking them to cooperate in the formation of a specialist unit to collaborate to put out gorse fires from the air using the rotary aircraft/helicopter."

Councillor Hanna seconded Councillor Reilly's proposed amendment.

Councillor Truesdale did not accept the amendment as her Motion was solely about funding.

The Chairperson requested a show of hands on Councillor Reilly's amendments the results of which were as follows:

FOR: 5
AGAINST: 29
ABSTENTIONS: 1

Councillor Taylor took the opportunity to voice his disappointment that once again Members were discussing the latest wildfires that had that caused devastation of the Mourne Mountains and offered his thanks to the fire service personnel and other statutory agencies involved in the entire operation and put in long hours to get fires under control and securing the safety of people. He pointed out this was becoming an annual pattern which could not continue and any support the Executive could give in respect to dealing with this issue had to be supported.

Councillor Clarke spoke of an earlier Motion he had brought and how there had not been progression since that. He said it was his opinion that DAERA, Department for Justice and the Department of Health needed to work through the Wildfire Strategy and Action Plan with all other stakeholders to bring forward recommendations to reduce the risk to habitat, carbon storage, wildlife and the tourism industry. He added that the Ministers needed to bring forward recommendations and business cases to request funding.

Councillor Clarke spoke of how these deliberate fires, not wildfires, were endangering human life particularly firefighters and everyone needed to be conscious of that.

He spoke of the heartbreak at the damage to the habitat that would take decades to recover and referred to a Wildfire Forum that had not met for two years and the need for collaboration. He added DAREA needed to carry out more outreach and target landowners in rural communities. The action plan needed to be progressed and meetings held regularly.

Councillor Clarke highlighted the need to prioritise the creation of fire breaks, carry out risk assessments with trustees and examination of areas most at risk along with landowners.

In referring to earlier comments about helicopters, Councillor Clarke advised it was currently up to the Health Minister that when there was a risk to life to call in a helicopter and how there were a number of these fires smouldering from early morning that could have been put out quickly saving resources and money. He added there was need to consider new technologies including drones and work with AI in identifying fires, outbreaks of fires, particularly once there was a wildfire warning and have all departments collaborating to prepare.

In response to comments made by Councillor Truesdale, Councillors Hanna and Reilly said their Party had not attended a meeting of Mourne stakeholders as they were not aware of it. Councillor Truesdale advised it was called by Forever Mourne and it pulled together all the Mourne stakeholders, Mourne Heritage Trust, National Trust, Councillors who had attended the previous one in September, MLAs, MPs and that everybody was invited to the meeting in Murlough House.

Councillor Taylor stated for the record a representative from the UUP Party had been in attendance at the event.

Councillor Truesdale thanked Members for their support for the Motion.

The Chairperson declared the Motion passed.

Councillor Devlin pointed out that as it had turned into a debate involving NIFRS that she was declaring an interest as a Member of the NIFRS Board.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Truesdale, seconded by Councillor Young that This Council expressed deep concern at the devastating impact that fires have had on the Mourne, putting local communities in danger and destroying precious habitats; commends the heroic bravery of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and PSNI in bringing the fires under control and protecting communities; further commends Mourne Heritage Trust, the National Trust and Mourne Mountain Rescue for their role in managing the Mourne; urges anyone with information on those responsible for malicious wildfires in our countryside to pass on that information to the appropriate authorities; welcomes the appointment of the Pau Costa Foundation to undertake work on wildfire management and response plans; affirms the importance of a collaborative multi-agency response; welcomes the Wildfire Strategic Framework and Action Plan; and resolves to write to the Executive outlining the importance of adequate funding to support preparation, preparedness, response, recovery and enforcement.**

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.21pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 1 June 2026.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 05/05/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Proposed amendment from Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Hanna.

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

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 05/05/2026

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Qualified Majority Vote

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