

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 6 July 2026 at 6.30pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor G Hanna

**In attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor J Brennan	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor P Campbell	Councillor W Clarke
Councillor K Feehan	Councillor D Finn
Councillor C Galbraith	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor M Hearty	Councillor T Howie
Councillor J Jackson	Councillor G Kearns
Councillor A King	Councillor C King
Councillor M Larkin	Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor A Mathers
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor D Murphy
Councillor K Murphy	Councillor S Murphy
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor J Tinnelly
Councillor H Young	

**In attendance
via Teams:**

Councillor C Enright	Councillor D Taylor
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Officials in attendance: Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment
Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of People & Legal
Ms D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

C/089/2026

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Devlin, Gibbons, Harte, Howell, O'Hare, Truesdale and Quinn and Mr Patterson, Director of Active and Health Communities.

C/090/2026

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

C/091/2026 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 1 JUNE 2026

Read: Action sheet from Council Meeting held on 1 June 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Campbell, seconded by Councillor D Murphy the Action Sheet from Council Meeting held on 1 June 2026 was agreed.

COUNCIL MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/092/2026 MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON 1 JUNE 2026

Read: Minutes of Annual Meeting held on 1 June 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor McAteer, the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 1 June 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

C/093/2026 MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 1 JUNE 2026

Read: Minutes of Council Meeting held on 1 June 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Campbell, the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 1 June 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.

The Chairperson advised that he was affording Councillor Tinnelly the opportunity to make a personal statement regarding circumstances over the previous month or two.

Councillor Tinnelly referred to the tragic loss of his daughter on 20 April and advised that it was in that context that he wished to address Members regarding a matter of concern. He outlined that, like all other Elected Members, he had received an email on 19 May providing an update on the Judicial Review (JR) relating to the Civic and Regional Hub, which included the following sentence:
"The applicant's solicitor had failed to honour the timetable agreed and advised on 22 April they could not present their skeleton argument, as they required an affidavit from an elected member."

Councillor Tinnelly stated that, over the following weeks, he had been informed by a number of fellow Councillors that the elected member referred to in the email was himself. He stated that any suggestion he had played a part in the JR was false. He further stated that, in his view, it was unacceptable that a Council officer had identified him in that manner without first discussing the matter with him, particularly during what had been an extremely difficult personal period.

Councillor Tinnelly informed Members that he had subsequently spoken with the Council officer concerned but stated that they did not accept that any wrongdoing had occurred and had declined to apologise. He further stated that, during that conversation, he had been informed of a legal letter dated 23 April from a Belfast-based solicitor to the High Court, which indicated that an affidavit from him was awaited. He said that he had been advised the Council had received a copy of the letter and, although it was not legally privileged, it had been brought to the attention of Party Group Leaders, who were expected to treat the matter confidentially.

Councillor Tinnelly stated that this explanation was undermined when he became aware that, subsequent to that discussion, he had also been identified by the same Council officer at a number of Party Group meetings with the senior management team, together with another meeting attended by Councillors other than Party Group Leaders.

Councillor Tinnelly questioned why he had been the last Councillor to become aware of the matter. He referred to the letter dated 23 April which named him and stated that the same Council officer had attended his daughter's funeral on 24 April whilst, in his view, already being aware of the contents of that correspondence. He stated that he believed his name had subsequently been repeated in an attempt to undermine his integrity, call into question his credibility and create difficulties for him in his role as an Elected Member.

Councillor Tinnelly further stated that, despite the impression given that the JR depended upon the affidavit referred to, the case had since proceeded and was listed for a full High Court hearing later in the year. He stated that the Council officer had failed to recognise the seriousness of the matter, had not accepted that an error of judgement had been made and had declined the opportunity to apologise.

Councillor Tinnelly requested the support of Members in asking the Council officer to reflect upon the matters raised in the Chamber, acknowledge that erroneous and inaccurate information had been presented as fact without first verifying its accuracy, recognise the hurt caused and issue a full, unqualified and unequivocal apology within the following week. He stated that such an apology would bring the matter to a close. He added that, should this not occur, he would have no alternative but to request an external independent investigation by the appropriate body, which could potentially involve a number of individuals within the Chamber being called as witnesses, together with the associated reputational implications for the Council.

Councillor Tinnelly stated that he wished to place this request before his fellow Elected Members but advised that, should Members not support his request, he would pursue the matter independently, including exploring the possibility of initiating civil proceedings. He also appealed to Council officers who were aware of the matter to reflect upon the circumstances and, where appropriate, use their influence to assist in bringing the matter to a resolution.

In response to the statement made by Councillor Tinnelly, Ms Kirk confirmed, firstly, that the statement had been made in open session and that she had previously advised Councillor Tinnelly that any comments made in open Council were a matter for him. Secondly, Ms Kirk advised that, in relation to the ongoing JR proceedings, it was incumbent upon her to protect the interests of the Council as a body corporate. She stated that, where any conflicts of interest arose and no declarations had been made in relation to the relevant item, consideration would need to be given to the existence and management of any such conflict.

She added that, given the ongoing JR proceedings, it would be inappropriate to comment further in open session on matters relating to legal advice or legal correspondence and confirmed that she would take the matter forward accordingly.

The Chairperson then went on to outline the following which he had intended to raise under Chairperson's Remarks

- An overview of events attended were highlighted as follows:

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COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/094/2026 MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 JUNE 202

Read: Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 8 June 2026 (**copy circulated**).

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Young, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 8 June 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/095/2026 MINUTES OF STRATEGY, POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11 JUNE 2026

Read: Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 June 2026 (**copy circulated**).

SPR/096/Greenway Feasibility and Design: Warrenpoint to Newcastle

Councillor Rice asked that specific enquiries be made to see if there were any proposed Greenways that could link the centre of Ballymartin village and the GAA grounds. He explained this had been raised with him by local residents following Committee approval of the feasibility study.

Mr Mallon advised approval was for a Greenway from Warrenpoint to Newcastle around the coast which would encompass Ballymartin and that other linkages that were required could be a local linkage as opposed to part of project. He added the route had not yet been determined and that was what the feasibility study would do.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 June 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/096/2026 MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 2026

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 15 June 2026 (**copy circulated**).

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Brennan, seconded by Councillor K Murphy, the Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 15 June 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted.**

C/097/2026

**MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 17 JUNE 2026**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 17 June 2026 **(copy circulated)**.

SE/076/2026: Bus Shelter Requests

In response to a query from Councillor Lewis regarding the approval granted for the bus stop in Spa and the timeframe for works to begin, Mrs Murphy confirmed that following approval by Council and the subsequent call in period, works could commence in 5 days' time.

Councillor Reilly asked for an update on the amount of income generated from the waste at recycling centres and bottle banks.

Mrs Murphy advised there were a number of different waste contracts that were income based and that in 2025/26 there had been an income of £125,000 for items such as things like scrap metal, cardboard, glass etc.

Councillor Reilly stated that was really encouraging as it was a huge amount of money and there was incentive for the public to know that recycling was generating an income for Council and how it was important to put that message out.

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Campbell, seconded by Councillor Hearty, the Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 20 May 2026 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, subject to a minor amendment to the attendance sheet.

C/098/2026

PLANNING SECTION

There were no planning issues arising.

C/099 /2026

CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

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

In response for an update from Councillor Bowsie in relation to correspondence sent to the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the Portaferry Bridge, the Chief Executive advised a response had been received late that day and would be tabled at the August Council Meeting.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor D Murphy, to note the correspondence report and the following correspondence:

people in the Republic viewed what was happening as an attack on Irish sovereignty, but would also mean implementing harsh, fast-track border detentions and deportations. The DUP group was concerned that many illegals now resident in the Republic of Ireland would be displaced to Northern Ireland and especially to Newry Mourne and Down District.

Councillor Reilly said as Council had recently voted through plans to designate the District as a sanctuary region for refugees and asylum seekers, his Party was concerned that as the Irish government established accelerated processing and return hubs to comply with EU legislation, Newry Mourne and Down District could be inundated with foreign nationals who would become eligible for deportation from the Republic. He stated this was something that could not be coped with as public services were already at breaking point and unable to cope with present demands. The DUP called on the UK authorities to closely liaise with the Irish authorities to prepare and initiate rigorous checks with stop and search, and any person not in possession of a standard visitor visa or UK electronic travel authorisation arrested and detained until deportations could be arranged. He said it could not be allowed for the Newry Mourne Down District to develop as an escape hatch for illegals who were no longer eligible to remain in the Republic of Ireland.

Councillor Reilly pointed out his Party did not lack compassion for people genuinely fleeing oppression and danger but believed that the needs and interests of locals must be put first in order to preserve way of life and maintain the District as a safe and prosperous place for future generations.

Councillor Reilly added that this was a place where Protestant, Catholic and dissenter could now live together peacefully. He stated that, at present Council was a non-awarded member of the City and District of Sanctuary and to become a full member would be a highly political exercise that would bind the District to do things that were not in the interest of the community. He argued that the issue required public consultation and would potentially result in expenses that would be imposed on the ratepayer at a time when families were already struggling.

Councillor Reilly proposed that Newry and Mourne and Down District Council suspend its obligation to become a full member of the City and Region of Sanctuary.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Bowsie pointed out the new EU Migration and Asylum Pact was significantly tougher on irregular immigration and asylum and when voted on in the Republic last month, Sinn Fein had voted against these stricter border controls. He stated that he believed that Sinn Fein would rejoin the EU tomorrow if they could and would hand over control of these borders to Brussels.

Councillor Bowsie said that whilst the EU's new asylum rules would be stricter and streamline the asylum process, it was uncertain what impact this would have on encouraging asylum seekers to illegally cross the Irish border. With up to 90% of asylum seekers in the Republic of Ireland being 'secondary movers' from another EU country, stricter measures against secondary movement could see asylum seekers from the South come north to UK to evade the EU's immigration system and deportation to the country of first entry.

He continued that whilst this was ultimately a problem for the UK government to deal with, the last thing as a border Council needed to be doing was to incentivise the use of this loophole further by having 'District of Sanctuary' written across the border.

Councillor Bowsie spoke at length about how the City of Sanctuary UK Network seemed harmless however he felt it was nonsense with page after page of meaningless talk about solidarity and compassion, devoid of any specific policy points and did nothing to improve the immigration system for anyone. He continued by highlighting points and criteria that Council would need to meet in order to achieve accreditation, which he believed would be a waste of Council resources and stated Council needed to stop the gesture politics and start delivering for local communities.

Councillor D Murphy stated Sinn Féin was opposed to the motion, commenting that despite stating clearly that the DUP was uncertain about the effect of Ireland joining the EU Migration Pact, they had deliberately and knowingly sought to use it to revisit an issue which had been hijacked by the Far Right in 2025 to spread hatred and fear within the District.

Councillor D Murphy stated it had to be one of the most dangerous and provocative motions to come before Council in many years. He said it was dangerous, in the dog whistling sense, given last year in the City of Newry and this year in many loyalist areas of Belfast, the Far Right was on standby to use all opportunities to racially attack international workers and decent people who were willing to protect them. He stated that this motion had sent a signal to the Far Right, a group that did not distinguish between illegal immigrants and the international workers who complimented the highly skilled and dedicated people that were keeping hospitals open and the economy from collapsing.

Councillor D Murphy highlighted that the people who were targeted merely a few weeks ago in Belfast were NHS workers, who were here legally, and how the fear, fermented by the Far Right, was constant and aimed to distract from the inadequacies of failing capitalist governments and systems generating fear, hate and division throughout the world. He made reference to a bomb being placed outside the Sinn Féin office last year and how death threats being received by Members had brought home the fact that the criminal Far Right was intent on creating fear within the District and in particular the City of Newry, a city which was investing a significant amount of money to regenerate it and the surrounding areas, and compared that with what the Far Right had to offer, which was faux concern about housing and our health system.

Councillor D Murphy stated immigration policy needed to be comprehensive, compassionate and enforceable, unlike this motion, and reiterated that Sinn Féin was categorically opposed to the motion.

On behalf of her Party Councillor Howie stated she was deeply disappointed that the Motion was before Council particularly in the wake of the riots and violence that Northern Ireland experienced only weeks ago and went on to condemn, without reservation, the violence that was witnessed.

Councillor Howie stated people across Northern Ireland had every right to be frustrated as they were living with real pressures that deserved real political attention referring to the pressures on the health system, children living in poverty, unaffordable housing, the highest rates of violence against women and how political institutions had suffered repeated periods of instability and collapse. She stated that these were the things people were angry with, and needed solutions, none of which had been caused by asylum seekers or immigrants.

Councillor Howie spoke at length on how the Motion was asking Council to accept the false premise that migration was to blame for the challenges currently facing communities and that it was a false and convenient scapegoat for the DUP from difficult decisions and their

policy failures that had left many people feeling let down, such as successive former DUP Ministers failing to get to grips with the structural barriers to build more homes leading to the housing crisis that working families found themselves in, workers in NI struggling under low wages and exploitative workplace practices that had fallen behind the rest of the UK yet the DUP were blocking the Good Jobs Bill, children were living in poverty yet the DUP's anti-poverty strategy was not worth the paper it was written on.

Councillor Howie pointed out that none of the issues cited were due to immigration or asylum seekers in NI and that the District of Sanctuary initiative was about committing to being a welcoming, inclusive and compassionate community for people who had fled war, persecution and violence.

Councillor Byrne stated the SDLP would be voting against the Motion and voiced dismay and disappointment at its wording despite months of conversations held across Partys within the Chamber. He asserted that the DUP were not interested in facts or correct information and were fanning the flames with misleading information. He questioned how many times did it have to be said that the Council of Sanctuary, the City Sanctuary Network did not control nor have bearing on immigration.

Councillor Byrne spoke at length about what people in Belfast and other areas were facing, such as being burnt out of their homes, hospital workers living in fear and how as elected representatives, Members should be serving everybody within the community no matter what background they come from to make the District welcoming for all.

Councillor Byrne reminded Members that it was requested at the first Committee meeting that all questions be put forward to be answered and further information would be brought back to Committee, yet the DUP had voted against that proposal and continued to use divisive language and failed to recognise that they had it within their own government policy in the New Decade, New Approach.

Councillor Byrne pointed out that the language being used was designed to provoke emotion and that decisions made within the Chamber should be done so on facts, evidence and the information presented only, not emotion. He said there were genuine questions that people had around immigration and around housing, healthcare, government failure and funding from the UK government. He added pointing the finger was to cover up for the lack of delivery in government and not the fault of the vulnerable people who had been settled here and who were welcomed into the community. He stated that the talk about immigration and floodgates was simply not true, and everybody from a vulnerable minority group or a vulnerable background was as welcome in this Council area as anyone else

Councillor Byrne asked that Members treat people with compassion and humanity and put out the correct facts and stop politicking on the issue as he believed it was putting people's lives in danger.

Councillor Jackson agreed with Councillor Byrne's point that things were real and these issues were real in the community, continuing that people did have genuine concerns, and those concerns were centred around illegal and uncontrolled immigration and the impact that that was having in some communities. He argued that what the DUP was saying was those genuine concerns were not being listened to.

Councillor Taylor spoke in support of the Motion highlighting there were genuine concerns about the issue of immigration and it was essential to decouple legal and illegal immigration

in politics and public debate as mixing the two was a disservice to those who had come here lawfully and contributed enormously to society. However he said illegal immigration was a serious issue and one that needed to be tackled head on.

Councillor Taylor said there were genuine concerns regarding what the city of sanctuary actually entailed and he did not think Council had taken enough time to reflect on those concerns.

Councillor Tinnelly joined in voicing support for the Motion, stating that he believed there were legitimate concerns raised by numerous citizens within the District and that he personally had noticed drastic changes within the city of Newry and whilst he supported those that were here to support and enhance essential services, he believed there were those that did not, and for that reason he was convinced Council needed to know more about what the City of Sanctuary entailed and therefore pause to obtain further information.

Councillor Reilly took the opportunity to voice his disappointment in Sinn Féin's description that it was a dangerous motion and that it was not about being anti-immigrant, it was about being pro-controlled immigration and requested Councillor D Murphy withdraw his comments. He added Council had to live in the real world and put local people, Catholic, Protestant, and dissenter, the people who have lived here for generations, first, and that was where his Party stood with them.

On a point of clarity Councillor Byrne asked that Councillor Reilly look at the figures and spoke of how from Belfast City Council signed up to the Council of Sanctuary the number of people that were placed that year to the following year had dropped by 24% and to say that it was going to open the floodgates was misleading as it had done the opposite.

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:	7
AGAINST:	27
ABSTENTIONS:	0

The Chairperson declared the proposal lost.

Agreed: **The Motion was lost.**

Cllr Enright left the meeting at this point – 7.23pm.

**C/102/2026: NOTICE OF MOTION – 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CATALPA
ESCAPE**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Mathers:

"This Council notes the 150th anniversary of the Catalpa Escape which occurs this year. The audacious escape of 6 Fenian prisoners from the British penal colony of Western Australia was one of the greatest ever prison breaks."

One of the escapees was James McNally, from Newry. It was McNally who actually wrote the famous 'Voice from the Tomb' letter to the IRB leaders in America which put the escape in motion.

On this the 150th anniversary, this Council notes the limited commemorative events taking place in Ireland and compares this to events which have been organised in Australia and America, including a 9-day Fenian Festival in Fremantle Western Australia which has recently concluded.

This Council will write to the Minister for Communities in the Executive and the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport in the Dublin government to request the hosting of commemorative events.

This Council will also examine the possibility of hosting a commemorative event in the district to acknowledge the bravery of the escapees, in particular James McNally, and those who planned and participated in the Catalpa Rescue."

This was seconded by Councillor C King.

Agreed: **The Motion was referred to the Good Relations Forum Communities Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6**

C/103/2026: NOTICE OF MOTION – ADDITIONAL TRAINING PROVISION FOR GAELIC GAMES

The following Motion was received from Councillor Campbell:

"This Council recognises the significant growth in participation levels across Gaelic Games within the district and acknowledges that a number of clubs are experiencing increasing pressure on existing training and playing facilities.

We would ask that Council Undertake a review of Council owned sporting facilities and land assets to identify opportunities for additional training provision for Gaelic Games. Engage with clubs that have demonstrated, through membership figures, participation rates, facility demand and development plans, that their existing sporting infrastructure is insufficient to meet current need.

Explore options for the temporary, seasonal or permanent use of underutilised Council facilities and lands to accommodate training activity where such use is compatible with existing operational requirements and community need.

Consider such arrangements as an interim measure to support clubs experiencing capacity pressures until the completion and full operation of the Down GAA Centre of Excellence at Ballykinlar."

This was seconded by Councillor Rice.

Agreed: **The Motion was referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6**

C/104/2026: NOTICE OF MOTION – PURCHASE OF SAINTFIELD BUS DEPOT FOR PARKING

The following Motion was received from Councillor Bowsie:

"This Council recognises the chronic lack of parking in Saintfield and the impact this has on a flourishing high street. The sole off-street carpark on Downpatrick Street has merely 66 spaces and is at full capacity most days, causing parking problems elsewhere in the village. The former Saintfield Bus Depot on Belfast Road has the potential to create 42 much-needed additional parking spaces in Saintfield. Translink has agreed to sell this 1/3-acre site to NMD Council. This offer will be honoured until the end of August, before the site is put onto the open market.

"This council agrees to buy this last remaining brown-field site in Saintfield for the purposes of creating additional public car parking to meet local community needs."

This was seconded by Councillor Jackson.

Agreed: The Motion was referred to the Strategic Finance Working Group in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.6

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.28pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 3 August 2026.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 6th July 2026 VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Notice of Motion - Suspension of Membership the of City and District of Sanctuary

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