

# **Newry, Mourne and Down District Council**

## **Good Relations Audit and Strategy 2024**

**February 2024**

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....	4
<b>2. Newry, Mourne and Down District</b> .....	7
2.1 Introduction .....	7
2.2 Area Overview .....	7
2.3 Elected Representation .....	9
2.4 Good Relations Management and Accountability.....	10
<b>3. Demographic Analysis of Newry, Mourne and Down District</b> .....	11
3.1 Introduction .....	11
3.2 Population and Age within Our District .....	13
3.3 Ethnicity and languages spoken within our District. ....	14
3.4 Religion within our District .....	16
3.5 Education and Work within our District.....	17
<b>4. Northern Ireland Policy and Context of Good Relations</b> .....	18
4.1 Introduction .....	18
4.2 Northern Ireland Legislative Context.....	18
4.3 Together Building a United Community (T: BUC) (2013).....	19
4.4 The Delivering Social Change Framework (2013) .....	19
4.5 The Fresh Start Stormont Agreement (2015) .....	20
4.6 The Peace Monitoring Report (2017/18).....	20
4.7 Programme For Government (PFG) Framework (2016-21).....	21
<b>5. Our current policy approach to Good Relations</b> .....	21
5.1 Introduction .....	21
5.3 Newry, Mourne and Down’s Community Plan 2020 - Living Well Together .....	22
5.4 Policing and Community Safety Partnership Action Plan .....	23
5.5 PCSP Bonfire Sub Group .....	24
5.6 Good Relations Financial Assistance Programme.....	24
5.7 Equality and Good Relations Reference Group .....	24
<b>6. Our recent Good Relations Successes</b> .....	25
6.1 Introduction .....	25
6.2 Ethnic Minority Support Centre .....	25
6.3 PCSP Bonfire Sub Group.....	26
6.4 Newry, Mourne and Down Newcomer Stakeholder Forums .....	26
6.5 Cultural Events.....	27
6.6 Age.....	27

6.8 Disability.....	28
<b>7. Challenges to Good Relations within our District .....</b>	<b>28</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	28
7.2 Education and Young People .....	28
7.3 Deprivation .....	29
7.4 Rural Access to Services .....	31
7.5 Segregation.....	32
7.6 Regional Policing.....	32
7.7 Suicide and Mental Health.....	34
7.8 Sectarianism and Cultural Expression.....	34
7.9 Brexit .....	35
7.10 Political Environment.....	35
<b>8. Our Good Relation Priorities.....</b>	<b>36</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	36
8.2 Survey findings.....	36
8.3 Priorities .....	42
<b>9. Delivery Mechanisms .....</b>	<b>48</b>
9.1 Introduction .....	48
9.2 Staff Structure .....	48
9.3 Delivering in Partnership .....	49
9.4 Accountability .....	49
9.5 Resource Allocation .....	49

## 1. Executive Summary

The Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Good Relations Strategy creates a framework for improving community integration, cohesion and belonging across the Council area. It supports Council to actualise initiatives which positively promote Good Relations, based upon evidence, research and good practice. This Strategy will be actioned with leadership and support from political, statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

Good Relations Programmes in all Council areas have to date been 75% funded by The Executive Office (TEO). Together Building a United Community (T: BUC) reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society. TEO proposes to work with Councils based on their current Good Relations audits and to focus on delivering Good Relations outcomes under four key themes:





-  Our Children and Young People
-  Our Shared Community
-  Our Safe Community
-  Our Cultural Expression

Table 1 outlines key elements of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Strategy – aims and objectives based on the Together Building a United Community (T: BUC) Good Relations outcomes under their four key themes.

The Strategy presented from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council includes a summary of our key successes and issues within Good Relations which were identified through the audit process. This included an examination of the demographics and the changing environment of our Council District within the overall context of Good Relations. Data was then used to undertake a comparative analysis of the priority issues facing Newry, Mourne and Down Council in relation to Good Relations and community cohesion.

The Good Relations Strategy is supported by a monitoring and evaluation framework and toolkit. The Good Relations Action Plan covers outcomes, indicators, measures, and actions for projects, supported by budgets and resources under the four T: BUC themes.

**Table 1: Outline of the key elements of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council’s Strategy – based on Together Building a United Community (T: BUC), Good Relations outcomes under their four key themes.**

<b>T:BUC Theme</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
Our Children and Young People	To continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building Good Relations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Deliver cross community events involving Children and Young People on a quarterly basis.</li> <li>➤ Facilitate Children and Young People’s attendance at cross community shared history/heritage events which develop their interests/issues that they have in common leading to better understanding of identity and improved attitudes towards others.</li> <li>➤ Organise cross community visits and shared activities to be carried out by Children and Young People to encourage them to consider their neighbourhoods, towns and villages as shared spaces.</li> <li>➤ Develop and provide an increased range and type of opportunities for engagement of Children and Young People,</li> <li>➤ Create opportunities for Children and Young People to raise and discuss Good Relations issues that matter to them.</li> </ul>
Our Shared Community	To create a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support programmes/events to encourage use of shared spaces.</li> <li>➤ Initiate cross and intra community discussions to consider and address issues that cause division and segregation within and between communities.</li> <li>➤ Work with schools, community organisations and others to encourage sharing facilities that might be perceived as ‘belonging’ to one side or another.</li> <li>➤ Promote cross community discussion on shared spaces to explore and share information on what makes people feel</li> </ul>

		uncomfortable and identify what a shared space should be like.
Our Safe Community	To create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Participate/facilitate discussion with local people on physical barriers and on perceived interface barriers e.g. bus routes/villages.</li> <li>➤ Promote cross and intra community discussion on general community safety. Establish views on what makes people unsafe or feel unsafe. Consider opportunities to feed information from these exercises into Policing and Community Safety Action Plans.</li> <li>➤ Challenge the perception of no-go areas and establish links with local representatives and communities to develop and implement action plans to make areas welcome to all.</li> </ul>
Our Cultural Expression	To create a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity, and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Host annual cultural awareness days to include programmes that showcase the diversity of all cultural backgrounds in their areas, with focus on education and understanding about what makes people identify with certain cultures and backgrounds.</li> <li>➤ Facilitate cross and intra community events and dialogue around cultural expression – seeking to encourage learning and mutual understanding and stimulate conversation and debate.</li> <li>➤ Support shared events around cultural expression. Encourage organisations who promote events which encompass different groups and cultural backgrounds.</li> <li>➤ Develop capacity at community level to undertake plan and manage community celebration events.</li> </ul>

## **2. Newry, Mourne and Down District**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Good Relations Strategy (The Strategy) provides the strategic direction to ensure Newry, Mourne and Down Council area is welcoming, accessible and inclusive to all.

The Strategy has been prepared within the overarching framework of the Council's Community Plan and supports our goal to lead and serve a Newry, Mourne and Down which is a safe and strong place to live filled with vibrant communities. The Council's Community Plan also aims to ensure everyone in Newry, Mourne and Down has a good quality of life and equal access to opportunities, choices and high-quality services which are sustainable, accessible, and meet people's needs.

The work builds on a strong foundation of inter-community working and good practice developed over many years, and it provides opportunities to further improve cohesion and connectivity across Newry, Mourne and Down.

### **2.2 Area Overview**

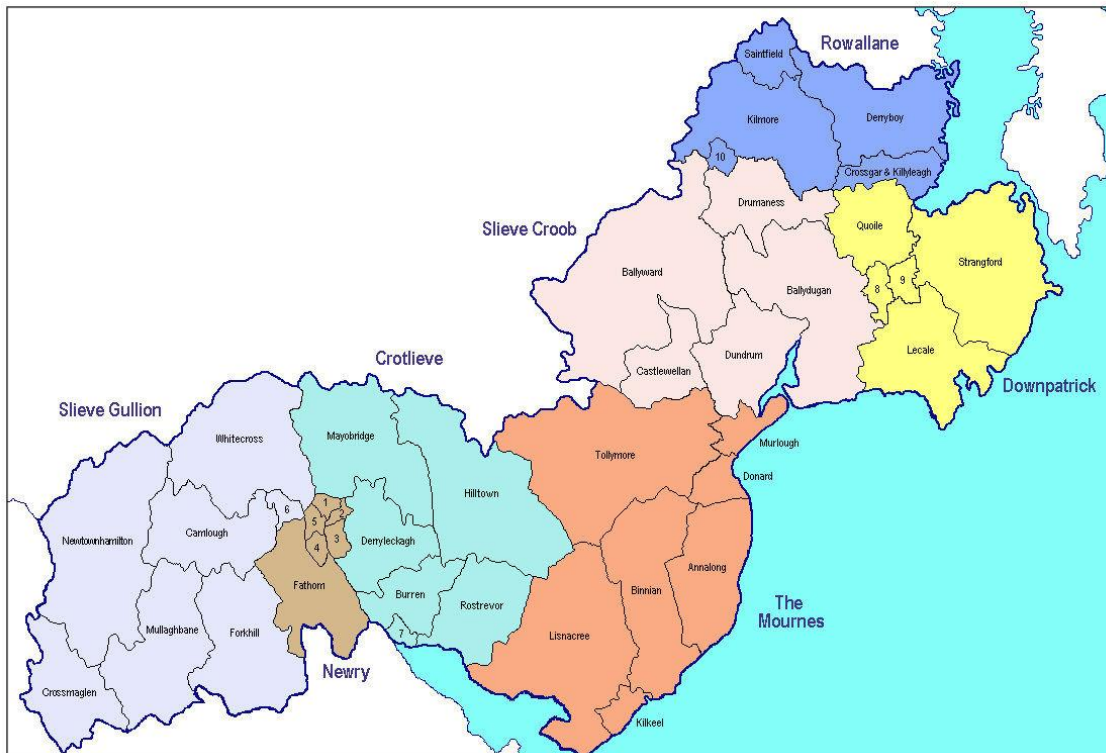
In April 2015, Local Government reform saw the establishment of the new Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. The new Council area is primarily made up of the former Newry & Mourne and Down District Council areas. It also includes the Ballyward electoral ward which was previously within the Banbridge District Council area.

Newry, Mourne and Down District is in the south east of Northern Ireland, covering parts of Counties Down and Armagh. As the third largest Council area within Northern Ireland, it comprises approximately 10% of the total land area of Northern Ireland, has more than 100 miles of coastline, and provides services to over 180,000 residents (9.6% of the Northern Ireland population)<sup>1</sup> The District is an eclectic mixture of urban and rural, of towns and villages through to small hamlets and micro communities, interspersed with a mixed socio-economic profile. In addition to Newry City, the principal towns within the District are Ballynahinch, Crossmaglen, Downpatrick, Kilkeel, Newcastle and Warrenpoint.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://explore.nisra.gov.uk/area-explorer-2021/N09000010/>

<sup>2</sup> Living Well Together – A community Plan for Newry, Mourne and Down to 2030 p.10



**Figure 1: Newry Mourne and Down Area Map**

Of the eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designated in Northern Ireland, three of them lie within Newry, Mourne and Down District - Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB, Ring of Gullion AONB and Mourne AONB. The District contains numerous Blue Flag beaches, and an unrivalled link to St Patrick. Over half (55%) of overnight trips to the District are for holiday purposes, the second highest in Northern Ireland after the Causeway Coast and Glens.

To complement the outstanding natural assets, Newry, Mourne and Down District is also home to a number of significant built heritage assets. This historic environment not only makes a wonderful landscape in which to live, but also creates a very distinctive sense of place that is attractive to those visiting the area. Parts of the District also enjoy excellent road and rail links with Dublin as well as Belfast, with several ports and harbours along the coast, providing direct access by water.<sup>3</sup>

Key statistics include:

- ✚ The estimated population of Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District at the time of the 2021 census was 182,074, of which 49% were male and 51% were female.
- ✚ For the Newry, Mourne and Down area 2021 Census figures show that the area population has increased by 6.1% since 2011. The Council District has 68,397 households, a 10.3% rise since 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Living Well Together – A community Plan for Newry, Mourne and Down to 2030 p.14

- ✚ Age demographics from the 2021 Census show that 40 - 64-year-olds are the largest age sector at 32%, roughly the same as the 2011 Census which was 31%. The population is ageing with the 65 plus grouping at 17%, which is an increase from 13% recorded in 2011. 0–14-year-old age category stayed the same at 21%, while the 15-39 age group saw a decrease from 34% in the 2011 Census compared to 34% recorded in 2021.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.3 Elected Representation

The Council Political representation is made up as follows:

**Table 2: Membership of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council**

Political Party	Seats
Sinn Fein	20
SDLP	8
DUP	5
UUP	1
Alliance	5
Independent	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

**Table 3: Elected Council members by District Electoral Area (DEA)**

DEA	Councillor Name	Political Party
Crotlieve	M. Gibbons	Independent
	J. Tinnelly	Independent
	K. Murphy	SF
	S. Murphy	SF
	M. Ruane	SF
	D. McAteer	SDLP
Downpatrick	P. Campbell	SF
	C. Enright	Alliance
	C. Galbraith	SDLP
	O. Hanlon	SF
	G. Sharvin	SDLP
Newry	V. Harte	SF
	C. King	SF
	G. Kearns	SF
	A. Mathers	SF
	K. Feehan	SDLP
	D. Finn	SDLP
Rowallane	T. Andrews	SDLP
	C. Bowsie	DUP
	J. Jackson	DUP

<sup>4</sup> <https://explore.nisra.gov.uk/area-explorer-2021/N09000010/>

DEA	Councillor Name	Political Party
	T. Kelly	Alliance
	D. Lee-Surginor	Alliance
Slieve Croob	J. Brennan	SF
	R. Howell	SF
	A. Lewis	DUP
	S. O'Hare	SF
	A. McMurray	Alliance
Slieve Gullion	P. Byrne	SDLP
	O. Magennis	SF
	M. Larkin	SF
	A. Finnegan	SF
	D. Murphy	SF
	A. Quinn	SF
	D. Taylor	UUP
The Mournes	W. Clarke	SF
	L. Devlin	SDLP
	G. Hanna	DUP
	L. McEvoy	SF
	H. Reilly	DUP
	M. Rice	SF
	J. Truesdale	Alliance

Elected Council members provide leadership and oversee the day to day running of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. They represent the interests of their constituents and ensure the views of people across Newry, Mourne and Down are reflected in the Council's decisions and how services are delivered.

The Council is also well resourced with highly competent DEA Co-Ordinators, all of whom have a very clear and structured view on the issues and the challenges facing their respective areas. The existence of the DEA Forums and their composition of community representatives and Elected Members mean that the Newry, Mourne and Down Good Relations Strategy will take a centred approach, and therefore create a localised framework for local engagement, mediation, and discussion on contentious issues.

## 2.4 Good Relations Management and Accountability

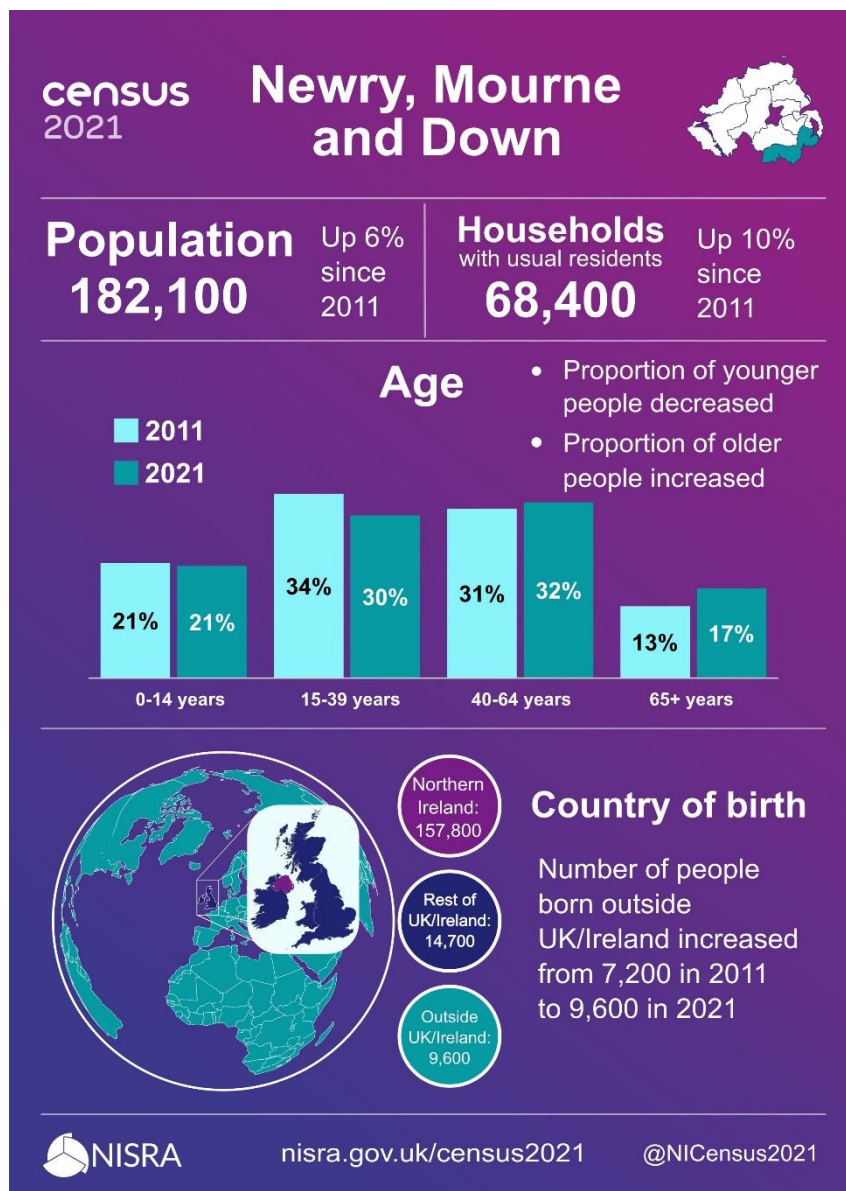
Good Relations is situated within the Active & Healthy Communities Directorate. The AHC Director is responsible for Community Development, Health and Wellbeing and Leisure and Sport. The Head of Engagement has overall responsibility for Community Engagement, the Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Good Relations, Neighbourhood Renewal, and the DEA Co-Ordinators.

### 3. Demographic Analysis of Newry, Mourne and Down District

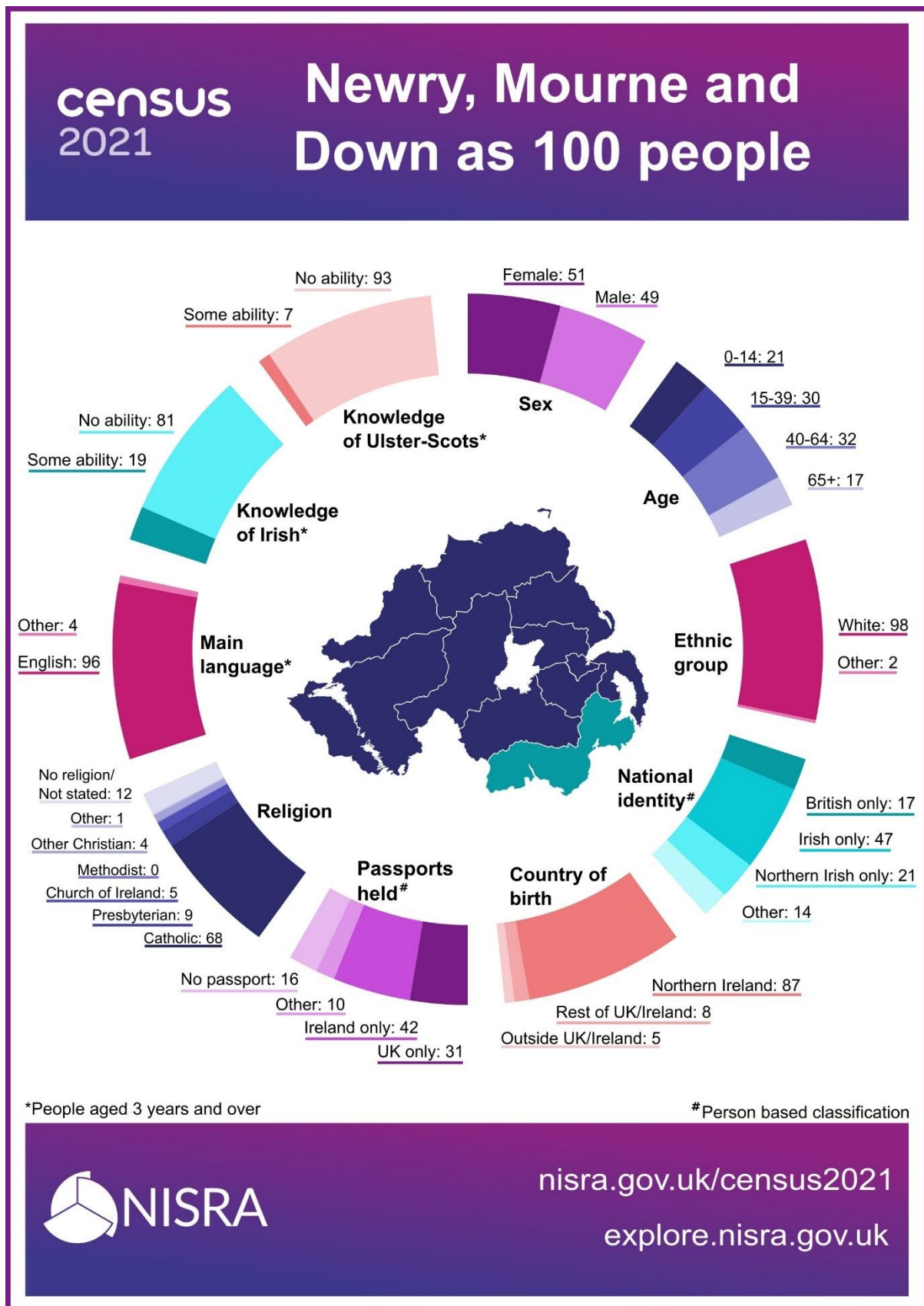
#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a breakdown of the demographics and socio-economic issues within the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District area.

**Figure 2: Summary of 2021 Census Data for Newry, Mourne and Down Council District.**



**Figure 3: 2021 Census Data showing Newry, Mourne and Down Council District as 100 people**



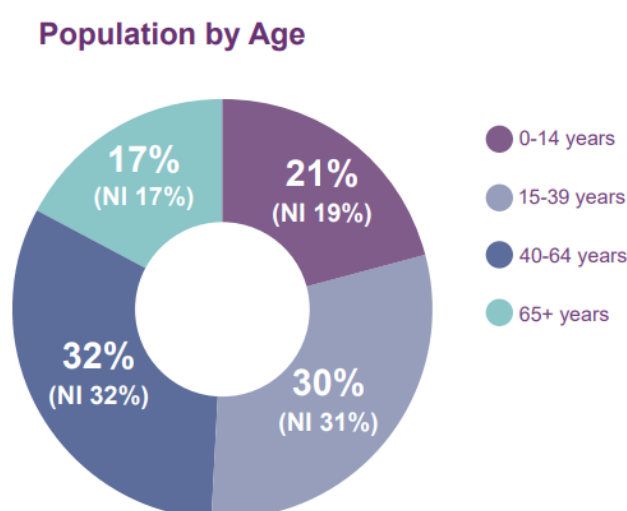
### 3.2 Population and Age within Our District

The 2021 Census data indicates that the population of Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District was around 182,074. The table below shows how this compares with the total recorded population for Northern Ireland in the 2021 Census, with a breakdown of ages within the Newry, Mourne and Down Council area population.

**Table 4: Breakdown of the 2021 Census recorded Population (All usual residents), in Newry Mourne and Down Local Government District (LGD) by Age in comparison to Northern Ireland. <sup>5</sup>**

	<b>Newry Mourne and Down LGD</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>
Total Population (2021)	182, 074	1,903,174
Children (0-14 years)	37, 824	365, 217
Young Working Age (15-39 years)	54, 787	594, 361
Older Working Age (40-64 years)	59, 134	617, 125
Older (65+ years)	30, 329	326, 477

**Figure 4: Diagram showing the percentage of population living in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District by age bracket (%).<sup>6</sup>**



<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-demography-tables-age-and-sex>

<sup>6</sup> Invest NI Newry, Mourne and Down (2022) <https://www.investni.com/sites/default/files/2022-07/investni-performance-council-area-newry-mourne-and-down-2022.pdf>

### 3.3 Ethnicity and languages spoken within our District.

**Table 5: Ethnic Makeup of Newry, Mourne and Down Area taken from the 2021 Census. <sup>7</sup>**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% Newry, Mourne and Down area</b>	<b>% NI</b>	<b>Higher or lower than the NI average</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>182,074</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>
White	179, 030	98.33	96.55	Higher
Chinese	349	0.19	0.50	Lower
Irish Traveller	342	0.19	0.14	Higher
Indian	293	0.16	0.52	Lower
Filipino	158	0.09	0.23	Lower
Roma	82	0.05	0.08	Lower
Arab	82	0.05	0.10	Lower
Pakistani	62	0.03	0.08	Lower
Other Asian	166	0.09	0.28	Lower
Black African	201	0.11	0.42	Lower
Black Other	109	0.06	0.16	Lower
Mixed	897	0.49	0.76	Lower
Other	303	0.17	0.19	Lower

**Table 6: Languages spoken within the Newry, Mourne and Down Area taken from the 2021 Census<sup>8</sup>**

<b>Main Languages spoken by all usual residents in NI ages 3 and over</b>	<b>All Usual Residents Aged 3 and over</b>	<b>% Newry, Mourne and Down area</b>	<b>% NI</b>	<b>Higher or lower than the NI average</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>175,242</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>
English	168,408	96.10	95.37	Higher

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-ethnicity-tables>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-language-tables>

<b>Main Languages spoken by all usual residents in NI ages 3 and over</b>	<b>All Usual Residents Aged 3 and over</b>	<b>% Newry, Mourne and Down area</b>	<b>% NI</b>	<b>Higher or lower than the NI average</b>
Polish	2,143	1.22	1.10	Higher
Lithuanian	1,149	0.66	0.49	Higher
Irish (Gaelic)	553	0.32	0.32	Same
Romanian	347	0.20	0.31	Lower
Portuguese	119	0.07	0.27	Lower
Arabic	170	0.10	0.20	Lower
Bulgarian	677	0.39	0.19	Higher
Slovak	98	0.06	0.13	Lower
Chinese (not otherwise specified)	70	0.04	0.18	Lower
Tagalog/Filipino	44	0.03	0.07	Lower
Latvian	279	0.16	0.09	Higher
Russian	180	0.10	0.09	Higher
Malayalam	51	0.03	0.08	Lower
Hungarian	106	0.06	0.12	Lower
Spanish	77	0.04	0.10	Lower
Tetun	22	0.01	0.09	Lower
Cantonese	38	0.02	0.07	Lower
Other	711	0.41	0.74	Lower

On Census Day 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021, in Newry, Mourne and Down Area, considering the population aged 3 years old and over:

- ✚ 19% had some knowledge of Irish – an increase from 16.05% recorded in the 2011 Census.
- ✚ 7% had some knowledge of Ulster-Scots – an increase from 4.45% recorded in the 2011 Census.

- ✚ 4% did not have English as their main language – an increase from 3.03% who did not have English as their main language recorded in the 2011 Census.

From the perspective of the main languages spoken by people over the age of 3, the following was found in the 2021 Census:

- ✚ 96.10% of people spoke English as their first language, slightly higher than the rest of NI at 95.37%
- ✚ 2.60% of households in Newry, Mourne and Down have no people (aged 3+) who speak English as their main language. This equates to 1776 households in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District.
- ✚ The most popular languages in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District, according to the 2021 Census are English, Polish, and Lithuanian.

### **3.4 Religion within our District**

From a religious perspective, the following provides a summary of the religious background in which people belong to or were brought up in Newry, Mourne and Down as per the 2021 census. \*

- ✚ 68.19% belong to or were brought up in the Catholic religion compared to an average of 42.31% in Northern Ireland
- ✚ 19.03% belong to or were brought up in a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' religion compared to an average of 37.36% in Northern Ireland
- ✚ 0.66% were brought up in other religions (NI average 1.34%) while 10.79% were brought up in no religion (NI average 17.39%)

\*NB: 1.32% in Newry, Mourne and Down did not state their religion - NI average (1.60%)<sup>9</sup>

From a national identity perspective, the 2021 Census indicates for the Newry Mourne and Down population:

- ✚ 17% identify as having British only identity.
- ✚ 47% identify as having Irish only identity.
- ✚ 21% identify as having Northern Irish only national identity whilst 6% indicated they had an 'other' identity. <sup>10</sup>

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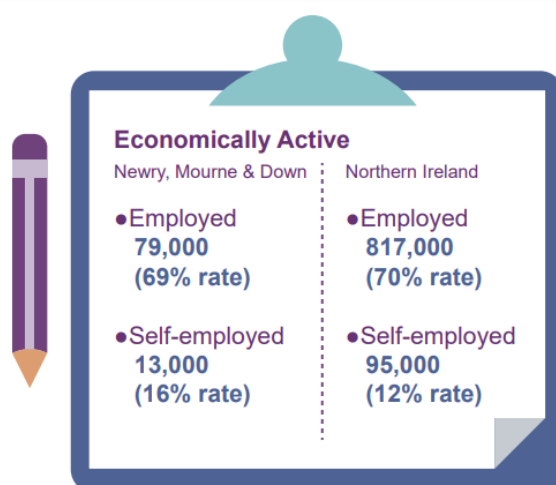
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-religion-tables>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-identity-tables>

### 3.5 Education and Work within our District

- In 2021, for persons aged 16 and over in the Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District 56.3% were employed, 41% were economically inactive and 2.7% were unemployed.
- In 2021, for persons aged 16 and over in the Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District 31.79% were qualified to level 4 or above (NI Average: 32.11%), whilst 23.13% had 'no qualifications' (NI Average: 23.81%).<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 4: Diagram showing the total number of people employed in 2021 within the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District in comparison with the Northern Ireland employment rate.** <sup>12</sup>



In 2019, the Newry, Mourne and Down average for GCSE achievement was above the Northern Ireland average for GCSE achievement with English and Maths (81.3% (NI 84.6%)) and without English and Maths (69.8% (NI 70.3%)).<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 5 provides the 2019 breakdown of Education in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District by percentage.**



<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-main-statistics-qualifications-tables>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.investni.com/sites/default/files/2022-07/investni-performance-council-area-newry-mourne-and-down-2022.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Education Authority Area Plan 2018/2020 Newry, Mourne and Down.

## 4. Northern Ireland Policy and Context of Good Relations

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the wider operational and policy context within which Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Good Relations Strategy will operate.

### 4.2 Northern Ireland Legislative Context

In the absence of a legal, commonly agreed definition for "good relations" several public authorities have developed their own vision or definition. The Equality Commission, drawing on the knowledge and experience it has gained in overseeing the implementation of Section 75 (2) across the three equality grounds, has developed a working definition of good relations, as follows:

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***"The growth of relationships and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms."***

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Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that:

**(1)** A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity-

(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;

(b) between men and women generally;

(c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and

(d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

**(2)** Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The relevant categories of people for which regard must be paid to the desirability of promoting good relations, according to Section 75 (2), are:

- between persons of different religious belief;
- persons of different political opinion; and
- persons of different racial group.

Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 therefore places a statutory duty on public bodies to pro-actively address Good Relations. It means a public authority must consider how the policies it makes and implements affect relationships amongst the people it serves and employs. The purpose of the duty, like the equality of opportunity duty, is to mainstream good relations by placing it at the heart of public policy.

#### **4.3 Together Building a United Community (T: BUC) (2013)**

The 'Together: Building a United Community' Strategy published on 23 May 2013 reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society.





Its vision is:

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***"A united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation - one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance."***

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The Department proposes to work with Councils based on their current Good Relations audits and to focus on delivering Good Relations outcomes under four key themes:

-  Our Children and Young People
-  Our Shared Community
-  Our Safe Community
-  Our Cultural Expression

#### **4.4 The Delivering Social Change Framework (2013)**

In 2013, the Delivering Social Change Framework was established by the Executive Branch to tackle poverty and social exclusion through the combined efforts of several government departments to deliver cross-cutting outcomes. For the first time, this offered an overarching policy mechanism to work across government. Building upon this approach the draft Programme for Government (PFG) Framework (2016-21) has a core outcome-based quality of life focus and its stated purpose is to:

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***"Improve wellbeing for all, by tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth."***

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#### **4.5 The Fresh Start Stormont Agreement (2015)**

In mid-November 2015 Northern Ireland's political parties developed an agreement with the UK and Irish governments to restart devolved government following 10 weeks of talks. The Fresh Start Agreement gives the Executive additional financial support of around £500m over five years to help it tackle "issues unique to Northern Ireland." The Fresh Start Stormont Agreement provides a set of inter-related and high-level proposals which seek to overcome some of the most challenging and intractable issues within Northern Ireland such as Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition. The Plan cements its role as co-designing solutions to address the divisive nature of displays and expression of identity, and in some cases sovereignty, national identity and allegiance which compound the reality of living in a contested society.

#### **4.6 The Peace Monitoring Report (2017/18)**

The Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report is independently funded and supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It is published by the Community Relations Council and seeks to provide "A dispassionate analysis of the trends in Northern Ireland politics and society" to "look not only at the phenomena that break out on the surface but also at the less visible stresses within the society, the forces that drive politics on to the streets. It is the force field created by these competing pressures that permits or inhibits the emergence of a peaceful society."

The Peace Monitoring Report (2017/18), highlights 10 key points:

- ✚ The absence of a functioning devolved government in Northern Ireland (NI) between January 2017 and March 2020 which resulted in legislative and political paralysis.
- ✚ The uncertainty surrounding the implications of the impact of Brexit on the Northern Ireland peace process.
- ✚ The weakening of inter-governmental relations, which have been crucial to the peace process.
- ✚ The lack of progress on everyday social policy issues and how this is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable people in Northern Ireland.
- ✚ The Economy: stronger performance but significant challenges persist.
- ✚ How Northern Ireland is increasingly out of step with other parts of the islands on key equality issues.
- ✚ The culture war continues as the issues of contention evolve and mutate and are exploited for political purposes.
- ✚ The patterns of educational under-achievement within specific sections of Northern Ireland remain unchanged.

- ✚ Catholic recruitment to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has levelled out following the ending of the 50:50 recruitment process. Catholic Police Officers currently represent 32 per cent of the total workforce.
- ✚ Twenty years on from the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland appears no closer to finding an acceptable way of dealing with the past.

#### **4.7 Programme For Government (PFG) Framework (2016-21)**

The Programme for Government is the highest-level strategic document of the Northern Ireland Executive, setting out the priorities that will be pursued by the Assembly and identifying the most significant actions it will take to address them. The draft Framework contains 14 strategic outcomes which touch on every aspect of Government, including the attainment of good health and education, economic success and establishing confident and peaceful communities. The 14 outcomes are supported by 42 indicators which are clear statements for change and each indicator is accompanied by a measure largely derived from existing statistics.

The draft Programme for Government will require a significant change in approach from that used by previous administrations and a key feature is its dependence on collaborative working between organisations and groups, whether in the public, voluntary or private sectors. Delivery of the Programme for Government encourages working across boundaries and focusing on the outcomes rather than traditional departmental lines.

## **5. Our current policy approach to Good Relations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Good Relations Programme seeks to encourage and support activity that promotes Good Relations between people from different backgrounds to help improve people's quality of life.

The Council's current Good Relations Programme supports activities to foster Good Relations throughout the Council area and includes providing financial support for:

- District Electoral Area (DEA) Fora
- Council's Good Relations Small Grants Scheme
- Council's Ethnic Minority Support Centre
- The PCSP's Bonfire Sub Group
- Local Fora including Newcomer Stakeholder Forums held in Newry and Newcastle.

## 5.2 Newry, Mourne and Down PEACEPLUS Action Plan

The PEACEPLUS Programme is designed to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, building upon the work of the previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes. The new Programme will continue the commitments made by the Commission, the UK Government, and the Irish Government to support peace and reconciliation.

The programme has been divided into six themes. Each new programme aims to address longstanding social and economic challenges which have and continue to impact our communities. Within each theme there are several investment areas - these will have a more specific focus and target specific organisations such as local authorities or community groups.

A PEACEPLUS Partnership has been established for the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area to develop priority actions for the local area and collectively address these in a manner which will make a significant and lasting contribution to peace and reconciliation.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is responsible for delivering the PEACEPLUS Action Plan for the District through its Partnership. This Partnership consists of 25 members made up of nine Newry, Mourne and Down District Councillors, five Statutory Representatives and eleven Social Partners. The Action Plan focuses on three key themes:

- ✚ Local Community Regeneration and Transformation
- ✚ Thriving and Peaceful Communities
- ✚ Building Respect for all Cultural Identities

The plan, informed by inclusive engagement with the local community, will enable and empower the PEACEPLUS partnership to self-determine and deliver priority projects and programmes on a cross community basis. It is hoped this will result in improved, shared, and inclusive local services, facilities and spaces which will make a significant and lasting contribution to peace and reconciliation.

## 5.3 Newry, Mourne and Down's Community Plan 2020 - Living Well Together

This plan sets out the long-term outcomes for change in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council area until 2030. Its vision is:

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***"Newry, Mourne and Down is a place with strong, safe and vibrant communities where everyone has a good quality of life and access to opportunities, choices and high-quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people's needs."***

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Community planning is about everyone working together to make life better for local people. It means planning to improve the big issues that matter to people like health, education, employment, safety and the environment. Continued community participation is an essential part of Community Planning. The plan sets out the following outcomes which it wishes to see in the community:

### **All people in Newry, Mourne and Down...**

...get a good start in life and fulfil their lifelong potential.





...enjoy good health and wellbeing.

...benefit from prosperous communities.

...benefit from a clean, quality, and sustainable environment.

...live in respectful, safe, and vibrant communities.

Through its cross-cutting themes and indicators the Community Plan will deliver on its outcomes across four thematic groups. These include:

-  Economic Development, Regeneration and Tourism
-  Environment and Spatial Development
-  Health and Wellbeing
-  Safety and Good Relations

### **5.4 Policing and Community Safety Partnership Action Plan**




The Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) Action Plan empowers communities to work in partnership to develop solutions that will help tackle crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. In adhering to the PCSP Action Plan, PCSP Staff, Elected Members, Independent Members, and partners from designated statutory agencies help make communities safer and ensure that the voices of local people are heard on policing and community safety issues in the Newry, Mourne and Down area.

The remit of the PCSP is to work in partnership to identify and co-ordinate the delivery of community safety projects that are innovative, reflect good practices and involve participation from voluntary/community groups and partner agencies. The PCSP's alignment to the Fresh Start Implementation and Local Policing Plans means that its portfolio of activity includes initiatives such as youth engagement, alcohol and drug awareness and prevention of hate crime.

## **5.5 PCSP Bonfire Sub Group**

The PCSP's Bonfire Sub Group is a facilitated discussion space. The Sub Group is a good relations vehicle for considering and discussing politically sensitive and contentious issues, including those relating to events, policy and procedure, and guidance on the review of the Council's Bonfire Management Policy with a view of reaching a common understanding, agreement, and actions. The Sub Group continues to be an excellent resource for addressing sensitive issues and promoting Good Relations and Community Safety in Newry, Mourne and Down.

Current key objectives include:

-  To hold at least four meetings of the Bonfire Sub Group per annum.
-  To support at least 4 community diversionary activities at specific locations where there are negative issues associated with bonfires.
-  To assist in the review of the Council's Bonfire Policy and contribute to the development of a new Bonfire Management Framework.

## **5.6 Good Relations Financial Assistance Programme**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Good Relations has a Financial Assistance Programme which promotes Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations across the District. In 2023/24 the Council awarded a total of £58,570 Good Relations funding to 41 groups– beneficiaries included projects supporting youth engagement, older people, disability groups and ethnic minority associations. The amount of funding awarded to local community and voluntary groups via our Good Relations Financial Assistance has increased by 100% since 2020/21 (when the amount awarded was £27,000). This demonstrates our commitment to supporting grassroots Good Relations projects, the increasing capacity & strength of local groups and a growing awareness of the DCGRP across our District.

## **5.7 Equality and Good Relations Reference Group**

The Council has an Elected Members Equality & Good Relations Reference Group which meets bi-monthly and is independently facilitated. The Reference Group operates under Chatham House Rules and is a space for discussion on sensitive and contentious issues that are best discussed in this small group setting instead of a public arena such as Council meetings. Discussions within the reference group can influence Council policy. The Elected Members nominated to represent their political party, or attending as Independent Councillors, will feedback to their respective political party and/or constituency, as appropriate, thus influencing a wider political forum than the limited number of Elected Members that are permitted to attend the Reference Group meetings. The meetings are also attended by the Council's Chief Executive.

Examples of the sensitive or contentious issues/matters the Reference Group has recently considered, discussed, and actioned (some of which are on-going) include:

- ✚ Irish Language Bursary Scheme
- ✚ Raymond McCreech Park Judicial Review / Council Play Strategy implementation
- ✚ Minority Languages
- ✚ Minority Communities
- ✚ Councillor Stationery
- ✚ Centenary Programmes

## **6. Our recent Good Relations Successes**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Within the Active & Healthy Communities Directorate, Officers work collaboratively to progress the promotion of Equality and Good Relations. Over the last three years, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has achieved various Good Relations successes within Council, and in partnership with the community and statutory sectors. This chapter highlights some key examples of projects which have successfully promoted Good Relations within our District.

### **6.2 Ethnic Minority Support Centre**

Newry, Mourne and Down Ethnic Minority Support Centre is based in Newry Town Hall and opened in 2007 as Newry and Mourne Council's response to the changing demographics in the area and to meet the needs of the new migrant communities. The Centre is mainstreamed within core Council services and is staffed by the Council's Ethnic Minority Support Officer. The Centre works in partnership with a range of community, voluntary and statutory organisations in the delivery of its services (for NIHE, Community Advice Newry, Mourne & Down, NMD Intercultural Forum, Newry Muslim Association, Simon Community).

The aim of the Ethnic Minority Support Centre is to provide free and confidential advice to minority ethnic communities living in our District in their own languages. It offers support and information on issues such as rights, access to services, education, benefits, housing, and signposting to relevant agencies. The Centre's overall aim is to facilitate active participation of minority ethnic communities in the District's civic, cultural, and political life and to increase community cohesion.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council is also a member of the Newry, Mourne & Down Intercultural Forum, which is an inter-agency group committed to working together towards an inclusive community to create opportunities that embrace the diversity of the BME community. The Forum currently meets quarterly.

### **6.3 PCSP Bonfire Sub Group**

The Newry, Mourne and Down Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) manages a Bonfire Sub Group on behalf of Council. The purpose of the Sub Group is to act as a forum for the consideration and dealing of matters and issues concerning 11<sup>th</sup> Night, August, and Halloween bonfires to try to promote safety and well-being, build trust, reduce tension/ill feeling/sectarianism, and promote Good Relations. The Sub Group consists of Officers from across Council departments, several Elected Members, PCSP Independent Members and representatives from relevant statutory organisations (PSNI, NIHE, Education Authority and the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service). The Sub Group also links with key individuals and community organisations as appropriate and meets bi-monthly, or more often if required.

In recent years, the Bonfire Sub Group has coordinated bespoke youth diversionary activities, specifically for young people identified as being at risk of being / becoming involved in bonfire building. This has been through a collaborative approach with the Education Authority (Youth Service) to reduce the risk of harm or involvement in criminal activity for young people and improve the safety of residents within the Newry area.

In addition, the Bonfire Sub Group have carried out extensive liaison with local community representatives and bonfire builders involved with the 11<sup>th</sup> of July bonfires, specifically in the legacy Down part of the Newry, Mourne and Down District. In recent years, Bonfires in these areas are now safer, smaller, and less contentious than in previous years and the Bonfire Sub Group continue to keep dialogue open and work with the communities to ensure they can celebrate their culture whilst keeping the wider community as safe as practically possible.

Bonfire management and intervention programmes will continue be a key priority in 2024 following the success of local programming in 2021, 2022 and 2023 which saw no bonfires or serious incidents in Newry City, and a significantly reduced level of activity elsewhere in the district.

Newry, Mourne and Down Council's Safer Communities & Good Relations Officer was appointed in April 2021, and continues to have a key role in co-ordinating work within the wider field of bonfire management and intervention work.

Approval of the Bonfire Policy in 2023 for Council was a significant outcome given the dedicated focus on this to date. This is a positive outcome and will provide direction for the Sub Group.

### **6.4 Newry, Mourne and Down Newcomer Stakeholder Forums**

In 2023, two Newcomer Stakeholder Forums were created in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District. These two groups are held in Newry and Newcastle and are coordinated by Council's Projects Coordinator for Diversity and Inclusion. The purpose of the forums is to meet the needs of asylum seekers who have been or are due to be accommodated in the Council area. The forums meet every month and include

representatives from health, education, Sure Start, Home Start, PSNI, PCSP, community/voluntary sector, YMCA, Mears Housing, and other Council staff.

## **6.5 Cultural Events**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in partnership with a range of community, voluntary, business, and statutory organisations organise two cross community annual St Patrick's Festivals in March each year (one in Downpatrick and the other in Newry). The purpose of the festival is to encourage and assist a cross community celebration of St Patrick, with his life and achievements being the central inspiration for the week-long festival.






The St Patrick's Day celebration encourages participation in the events from all sections of our community - for example, there is often representation in the parades from all ethnicities including Bulgarian, Chinese, and Polish communities. Newry, Mourne and Down Council Staff also work with PUL communities to ensure that they participate in the St Patrick's Day celebrations in a manner sensitive and appropriate to their own community. The myths and legends theme, which is the focus of the festival, enables all sections of the community to have their culture represented within the St Patrick's Day celebrations, thus encouraging cross community participation.

## **6.6 Age**

Newry, Mourne and Down is an 'Age Friendly' District and has achieved Age Friendly status from the World Health Organisation - the Newry, Mourne and Down Strategic Alliance has been working actively with a wide range of partners on initiatives to understand and improve the health, well-being, and quality of life of older people.

## **6.7 Newry, Mourne and Down Youth Voice Programme**

Newry, Mourne and Down Council, in partnership with the Education Authority Youth Service, also manage a 'Youth Voice,' programme. Young People aged 16 to 21 years who live in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area can now take a full and active role in building good relations at a local level. Youth Voice involves young people across the entire District from all backgrounds and allows them to be the voice of the young people within the area. The Youth Council meets on a weekly basis and provides a forum for young people to:

-  Engage with key decision makers.
-  Have their say on local issues.
-  Meet new friends.
-  Be a representative voice for young people in their area.
-  Be involved and pro-actively engaged with local decision-making processes.

## 6.8 Disability

Newry, Mourne & Down Council has already taken a number of measures to promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and encourage their participation in public life. These are summarised below: -

- ✚ All meetings of Newry, Mourne & Down District Council are held in venues with disability access.
- ✚ Newry, Mourne & Down Council have actively invited representative groups for those with disabilities to public meetings and events.
- ✚ All Newry, Mourne & Down District Council policies are screened to ensure that they comply with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998.

The Council has also funded various disability groups through the Good Relations Small Grant Scheme.

## 7. Challenges to Good Relations within our District

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights some of the key challenges to Good Relations in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District identified by the audit and survey undertaken in early 2024.

### 7.2 Education and Young People

A study by the Education Authority Northern Ireland<sup>14</sup>, notes that the Newry, Mourne and Down average participation rates for Youth Services are below average at 22.9% (Northern Ireland average is 27.8%), indicating there is a need to increase the involvement of young people in Youth Service provision in our area. This is key, as studies and experience show youth work can help young people succeed in education and allow them to continue to participate in learning in a non-formal education setting. Success for many vulnerable young people in Newry, Mourne and Down may not be through the traditional formal school system but instead within a youth work setting which provides both academic and vocational opportunities.

Changes in the demography of the population of Northern Ireland has also resulted in a more diverse school population. Given the numbers of newcomer pupils and Travellers in Newry, Mourne and Down, there is a need for Good Relations work around cultural awareness and diversity. We must also support young people in relation to community relations, equality, and diversity, taking account of different faiths, cultures, ethnicities, disabilities, and sexual orientations in delivery. This can be done through engagement with young people in local schools, church groups, sports groups, community groups and youth clubs.

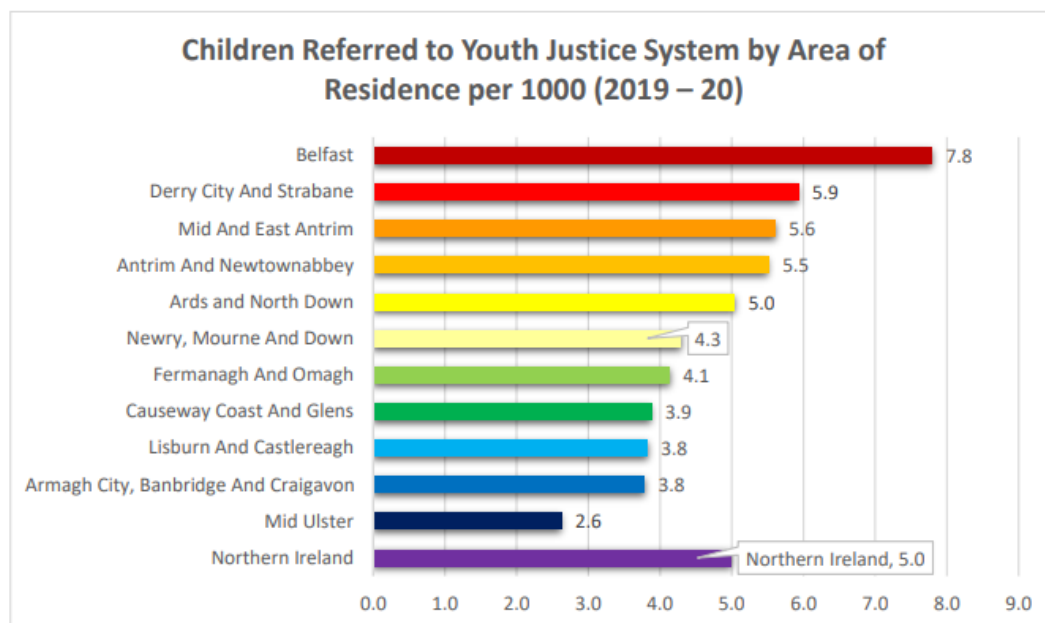
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<sup>14</sup> Education Authority Area Plan 2018/2020 Newry, Mourne and Down

Another prominent issue within education in Newry, Mourne and Down is the fact that children and young people are still educated separately. This results in fewer opportunities for young people to meet naturally and for Good Relations work to take place. Offering more opportunities for young people to meet outside of their normal school and social environment is an important element in building relationships at local level, as in the past, shared education initiatives have assisted with this.

The Education Authority has also indicated that the Newry, Mourne and Down area shows above average numbers of young people referred to the Youth Justice Agency. There is also concern about perceived dissident activity in some parts of the Council District. The presence of prominent dissident groups, along with a decline in uptake for youth services in the area, has the potential to lure vulnerable young people into anti-social / anti-community behaviour which may potentially lead to involvement in criminal activity.

**Figure 6: Diagram Showing the Number of Young People Referred to the Youth Justice Agency in Local Government Districts across NI per 1000 in the year 2019/2020<sup>15</sup>**



### 7.3 Deprivation

The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure was published in November 2017, identifying small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Northern Ireland. The results are presented by small areas known as Super Output Areas (SOAs). Northern Ireland is divided into 890 of these SOAs which are ranked according to deprivation using seven domains, or distinct types which in composite form is known as the Multiple Deprivation Measure. <sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://eanifunding.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Area-Profile-Newry-Mourne-and-Down.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/nimdm17-results>

These are:

- ✚ Income Domain
- ✚ Employment Domain
- ✚ Health Deprivation and Disability Domain
- ✚ Education, Skills, and Training Domain
- ✚ Access to Services Domain
- ✚ Living Environment Domain
- ✚ Crime and Disorder Domain

Table 7 highlights NISRA statistics for Newry, Mourne and Down. It reveals in 2019 there were 14 Super Output Areas in Newry, Mourne and Down in the 25% most deprived (shaded red) and 41 in the 50% most deprived (shaded green).

SOA	MDM Rank	SOA	MDM Rank	SOA	MDM Rank
Crossmaglen	57	Forkhill_1	249	Castlewellan_2	455
Drumgullion_1	70	Kilkeel Central_2	258	Derryboy_2	464
Creggan	72	Camlough	260	Burren and Kilbroney_1	473
Daisy Hill_2	75	Killough_2	261	Strangford	474
Murlough	89	Drumalane_2	279	Ballymaglave_2	475
Ballybot	93	Ballynahinch East	283	Kilkeel South_1	500
Silver Bridge_1	94	Spelga	284	Donaghmore_2	504
Forkhill_2	100	Shimna	295	Kilkeel Central_1	540
Cathedral_2	106	Ardglass_2	305	Drumgullion_2	551
Newtownhamilton	111	Dundrum	321	Derryleckagh_2	557
Kilkeel South_2	113	Tullyhappy	322	Mayobridge_2	587
Ballymote	115	Drumalane_1	326	Audley's Acre	599
St Patrick's_2	126	Donaghmore_1	334	Clonallan_2	619
Bessbrook	132	Binnian	335	Seaview_1	620
Clonallan_1	133	Lisnacree	336	Drumaness_2	629
Derrymore_1	147	Cathedral_1	352	Crossgar_2	660
Daisy Hill_1	171	Annalong_1	363	Burren and Kilbroney_2	663
Ardglass_1	176	Drumaness_1	364	Dunmore	666
Quoile_1	186	Windsor Hill_2	370	Crossgar_1	669
Annalong_2	187	Tollymore_2	372	Donard_2	671
St Mary's	207	Tollymore_1	375	Derryleckagh_1	686
Killough_1	217	Mayobridge_1	378	Kilmore_2	693
Silver Bridge_2	220	Killyleagh	381	Windsor Hill_1	710
Ballyward	233	Rostrevor	385	Derryboy_1	716
Castlewellan_1	235	Ballymaglave_1	396	Kilmore_1	735
Derrymore_2	237	St Patrick's_1	400	Quoile_2	761
Fathom	243	Seaforde	429	Saintfield_1	771
Seaview_2	244	Donard_1	442	Saintfield_2	781

Studies have demonstrated that we are influenced by the people and places where we live. Residents who live in these deprived areas are more likely to have little or no qualifications, experience unemployment or income deprivation and have poorer

health outcomes than those living in more affluent areas. Social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, anti-social behaviour and crime are more common, and this can sometimes intermingle with paramilitary related activity. These factors are also likely to influence and impact upon the attitudes and outcomes of people within our District.

Under the Government's People and Place strategy, 36 urban neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland have been designated as Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs). These communities are experiencing the highest levels of deprivation and are the focus of urban regeneration programmes. There are two NRAs within the Newry, Mourne and Down Council area which are:

- Newry, which covers 9 areas - Three Ways, Ballybot, Barcroft, Carnagat, Derrybeg, Drumalane and Quayside Close, Greater Linenhall, Martin's Lane and Meadow and Armagh Road.
- Downpatrick, covering the Flying Horse, Model Farm and new Model Farm estates, Kennedy Square, Marian Park, Meadowlands, and a substantial part of the Town Centre including the Bridge Street / Mount Crescent area.

## 7.4 Rural Access to Services

In Newry, Mourne and Down more than half of all people live in areas that have been defined as rural. For many people, living in a rural community presents many challenges. There can be a lack of facilities, such as cinemas or clubs, which people in urban areas can take for granted. This isolation from services is often exacerbated by a lack of transport options and hidden poverty. Rural deprivation is scattered and can be masked by living alongside relative affluence. People from rural communities face differing levels of social exclusion and marginalisation. Rural isolation also presents challenges for the provision of adequate public transport and the viability and accessibility of services.

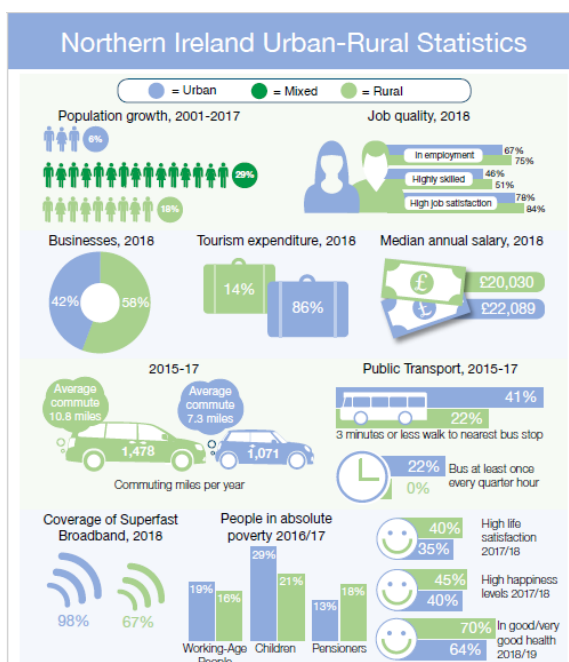


Figure 8: Infographic from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs showing Northern Ireland Urban-Rural Statistics published in 2018.<sup>1</sup>

## **7.5 Segregation**

In Northern Ireland there is a tendency to perceive areas as religiously segregated which can influence housing choice. Arguably the greatest challenge for Councils and responsible agencies is to address residential segregation. This is because where people live greatly impacts upon where they socialise, where they educate their children and their wider friendship circles. This housing segregation stems from instinctive feelings of difference between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland which is maintained through various forms of structural segregation. This segregation provides reduced opportunities for mixing, getting to know each other and developing friendships.

For example, in education, many villages within Newry, Mourne and Down have either a maintained or controlled educational facility depending on the community background of the majority population<sup>17</sup>. As well as contributing to the branding of the area, this significantly impacts upon future demographics. If residents do not wish to use the existing school, they have a choice to travel out of the area, or to move to a new area. Perceived lack of accessible education provision may act as a barrier to new families moving into the area. Hence the status quo is maintained, or single identity areas continue to develop.

Being educated separately also leads to more difficulty in engaging with young people in shared settings. Educational and residential separation, coupled with the location of youth and community facilities in segregated areas means that without targeted intervention young people will not usually develop cross-community friendships until their late teens when they enter college, training, or employment. More shared spaces create opportunities for young people to meet and engage with each other, therefore forming friendships and eliminating negative perceptions of "difference" between young people from different religions or communities.

There is therefore a need to ensure that both shared and consensual spaces are developed as part of the Good Relations plan, ensuring that people feel welcome in single identity areas immaterial of their background and that public space and buildings all feel welcome and create a sense of belonging. This requires recognition of what makes a space not feel shared and working with communities and others to build more shared and consensual (welcoming) spaces within local areas. This will in turn improve the likely community and commercial vitality of our area.

## **7.6 Regional Policing**

Within many Republican and Nationalist areas (and some Loyalist) in Northern Ireland, The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) legitimacy is still contested.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Education Authority Area Plan 2018/2020 Newry, Mourne and Down

<sup>18</sup> John R. Topping - Community policing in Northern Ireland: a resistance narrative p.377-396

In a study undertaken by the Northern Ireland Policing Board on community confidence in policing<sup>19</sup>, there was an indication that public confidence in PSNI is taken from narrow (often negative) contexts. Research suggests that the PSNI need to be more proactive in broadening out positive public knowledge of policing. The South Armagh Policing Review involved consultation and engagement with local Officers, elected representatives and community organisations from across the District Electoral Area of Slieve Gullion. This review has been motivated by the desire to ensure the PSNI are delivering a high-quality service which is responsive to the local community, and to help build better public perceptions of the PSNI in general. Good Relations staff in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council should continue to work in partnership with the PSNI and PCSP staff to further develop and consolidate Good Relations activity between local communities and Police.

Much progress has been made in relation to the PSNI and their contact with schools, youth clubs and other community-based organisations. This work should continue to be a priority for Good Relations staff across Council and Neighbourhood Policing Teams and should be encouraged and supported on a multi/inter-agency basis.

Recent budget cuts have had a significant impact on the PSNI. As a result, the numbers of officers will decrease to the lowest number since the PSNI was formed. It is expected that there will be a real and noticeable impact across the following areas:

- Non-emergency calls to the Police Service may take longer to answer and at times the public may have to wait longer for officers to attend non-emergency incidents.
- PSNI capacity to investigate crime may be reduced and slowed. Fewer officers investigating a rising number of crimes may mean slower investigations and in some cases a less satisfactory service to victims.
- PSNI will have to prioritise investigations. There will be knock on delays for the criminal justice system.
- PSNI Neighbourhood Policing function is shrinking.
- There will be a reduced proactive presence on roads despite rising road deaths.
- PSNI will actively review access to, and closure of, police stations across Northern Ireland.
- Ability to respond to sustained protest and public disorder may be reduced.
- The public sector in Northern Ireland is under huge pressure and in order to protect PSNI core functions, the ability to support other public sector colleagues may also reduce.

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<sup>19</sup> Northern Ireland Policing Board: Confidence in policing Research (2014).

## **7.7 Suicide and Mental Health**

In 2022, The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), have recorded 17 deaths in Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District as a suicide. This has decreased from 2021, which seen 27 suicides recorded by NISRA for Newry, Mourne and Down.<sup>20</sup>

In Northern Ireland overall, 203 suicides were recorded in 2022 by the Samaritans. This was an overall decrease for Northern Ireland of 34 from 237 recorded in 2021.<sup>21</sup> The Samaritans also state that the percentage of suicides in 2022 from Northern Ireland's most deprived areas (31%) was over three times that of the least deprived areas (9.4%).

Evidence from several studies have identified mental illness, trauma, exposure to the conflict/legacy of the Troubles, deprivation, relationship problems, employment difficulties, financial difficulties, being LGBTQ+, adversities and alcohol or drug use as key risk factors contributing to these high suicide rates.

In February 2020, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council announced their aspiration to bring 'Suicide Down to Zero' within the District. It is hoped that this goal can continue to be supported within our Good Relations activity by promoting programmes which address suicide and mental health initiatives.

## **7.8 Sectarianism and Cultural Expression**

In Newry, Mourne and Down there is evidence to suggest that there are some tensions surrounding flags in some towns and villages across the District. Many believe that small estates with flags and buntings illustrate a need to mark territory and require ongoing work to address the underlying social and economic issues that exist in these areas. Cultural symbols are sometimes perceived as a mechanism used by a single identity community to keep others out. This is a legacy from the conflict situation when residents felt safer surrounded by familiar faces. It is extremely effective in maintaining housing segregation and single identity use of facilities within a location through intimidation. Therefore, for many people the lines between aggressive and positive use of cultural symbolism are now blurred.

Tensions around parades, bonfires, murals, flags, memorials and commemorations are best understood upon examining demographic shifts within neighbourhoods. Territorial marking is becoming more apparent within our District's rural areas, where the status quo is being disrupted with new populations settling into rapidly expanding villages. Creating welcoming environments, which are not intimidating, and which feel shared, is crucial to creating a vibrant and thriving Newry, Mourne and Down. Encouraging the promotion and celebration of culture in a way that does not appear

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/suicide-statistics-2022>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/latest-suicide-data/>

triumphalist and engenders respect among others, as well as promoting understanding of the different cultures that exist in the area is a key priority for Good Relations in Newry, Mourne and Down.

## **7.9 Brexit**

The political sensitivities of Brexit which led to Northern Ireland leaving the European Union on the 1 January 2021 are considerable. In Northern Ireland, most nationalists voted to remain within the EU, as they see themselves as Irish citizens, i.e. members of the EU, and wish to retain that status. A majority (but a far from overwhelming one) of unionists voted to leave. Whilst risks to the current relative peace are minimal, the extent of continuing intercommunal polarity provides potential to effect good relations within Northern Ireland.

Further issues to consider are the bordering towns to the Irish border which lie within the Newry, Mourne and Down Council area. Many local companies operate on a cross border basis. Any disruption to trading modalities and especially freedom of movement of goods and people will badly affect these vital companies. There are also contentious issues rising with the UK Government's proposal of an Irish Sea border, those who identify as British or loyalist feel this will impact on their connection with the United Kingdom, and fear this may bring a United Ireland.

European Funding has been essential in developing our local communities with approximately €3.4bn in Peace and Interreg monies up to 2020 invested in NI<sup>22</sup> and ROI Border Counties. This is only the start of a process where much more is needed in the community and voluntary sectors to ensure a continuation of growth. There is fear within local community and voluntary groups within our district that Brexit will mean loss of funding, which many of these groups cannot afford.

In addition, the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area has the third highest proportion of people born in the EU accession countries (2.5%) in NI. Brexit has meant that EU citizens, resident in the UK by 31 December 2020, and their family members (including non-EU citizens) need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue to live, work and study in Northern Ireland since 30 June 2021. Our Good Relations Staff, with help from the Council's Ethnic Minority Support Officer, must continue to work with those affected by this new policy.

## **7.10 Political Environment**

As witnessed throughout the various ebbs and flows of political progress in Northern Ireland, the ability of politicians and community leaders to influence 'their' communities and 'bring them onboard' has been paramount to achieving political and community stability and progressing Good Relations activity. It is key that Good

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<sup>22</sup> Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade – Impact of Brexit on a Border City (2017).

Relations staff in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council continue to work with all politicians and community leaders to continue the promotion of Good Relations activity across our District.

The absence of a functioning Executive has had a significant impact on the ability to deliver Good Relations projects in the Newry, Mourne and Down District. The Good Relations budget in 2023/24 was reduced by 47% in comparison to the previous financial year. The uncertainty around the budget continues to be a challenge in delivering the Good Relations Action Plan.

## 8. Our Good Relation Priorities

### 8.1 Introduction

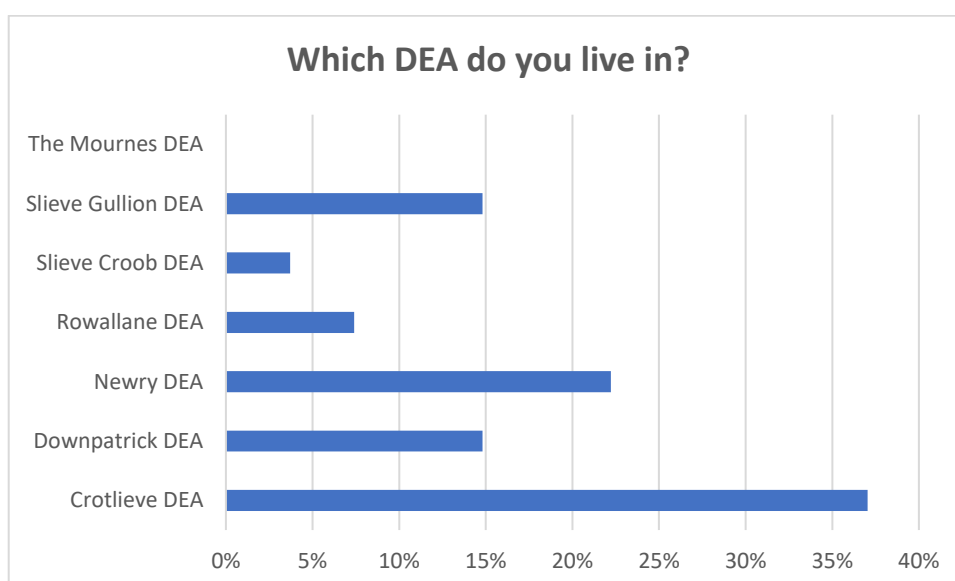
This chapter highlights the main priorities for good relations in the Newry, Mourne and Down Council District identified by the audit and survey which was undertaken in January 2024. The key priority areas remain largely unchanged since the last audit in 2021.

### 8.2 Survey findings

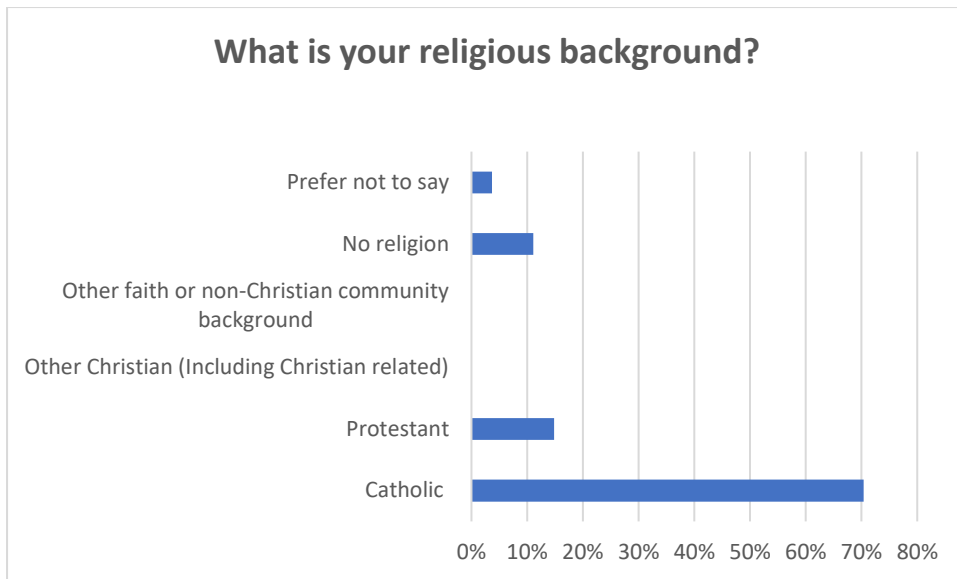
This section of the report presents the findings of a Good Relations survey that was conducted online in January 2024.

#### 8.2.1 General Demographic Information

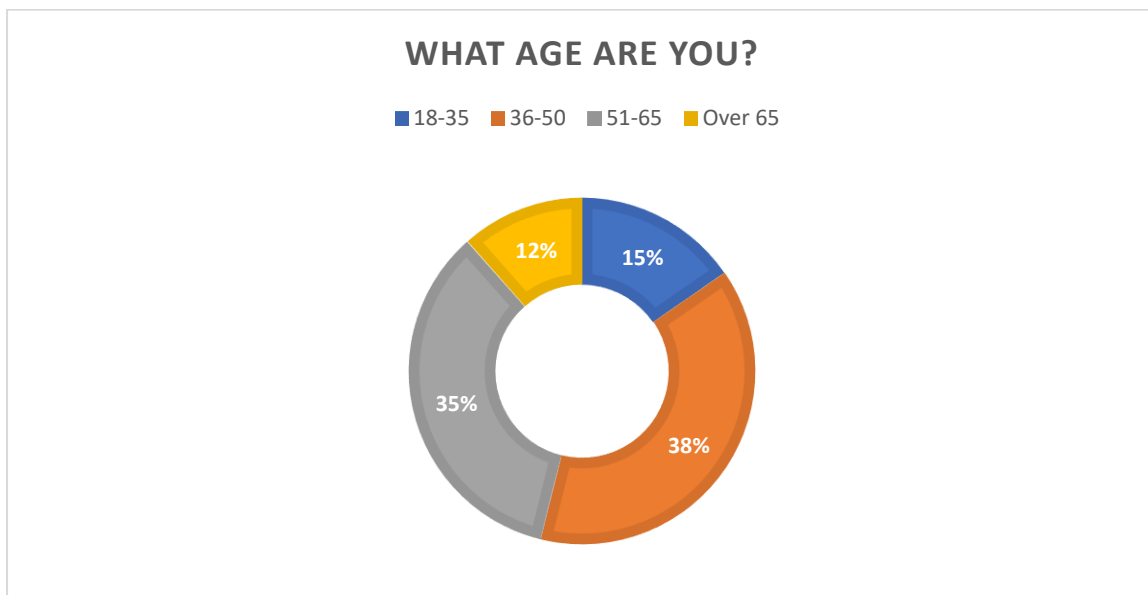
Survey responses were received from six of the seven District Electoral Areas (DEAs) across the District. The highest number of responses came from the Crotlieve DEA with no responses received from The Mournes DEA.



The Gender balance of respondents was 68% Female and 32% Male.



The religious background of the respondents is shown in the figure above. 70% of respondents were from a Catholic background, 15% from a Protestant background, 11% had no religion and 4% preferred not to say. The ethnicity of respondents was 100% White Caucasian.



The highest proportion of respondents were aged between 36-50 (38%), followed by 51-65 (35%) and 18-35 (15%). Respondents over the age of 65 were the lowest proportion (12%).

### **8.2.2 Good Relations work throughout the District**

Participants were asked on a scale of 1-10 how important is Good Relations to your community, the average rating was 8.86%. Participants were also asked on a scale of 1-10 how much they know about Good Relations activities in the Newry, Mourne

and Down Area with the average rating being 6.86 which suggests a reasonable understanding of Good Relations amongst participants.

96% of participants feel that there is a need for Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to provide ongoing support for Good Relations activity.

The survey asked respondents what they believe makes the most difference in your area to Good Relations issues. This was a multiple-choice question which allowed respondents to select all options. The results are outlined as follows:

**Dialogue** - Events that bring people together to discuss relevant issues such as bonfires, flags/ emblems etc. – 50%

**Multi-Cultural activity** - where people from different cultures and traditions come together to learn about other cultures and traditions – 71%

**Sporting activity** - bringing people from different backgrounds together through sport – 61%

**Shared events** - where people from different backgrounds come together to participate in one off events – 68%

**Positive civic and political leadership** - more positive demonstrations of good relations – 50%

**Integrated Education** – 61%

**Developing Shared Spaces** - creating spaces where people from different backgrounds can come together – 79%

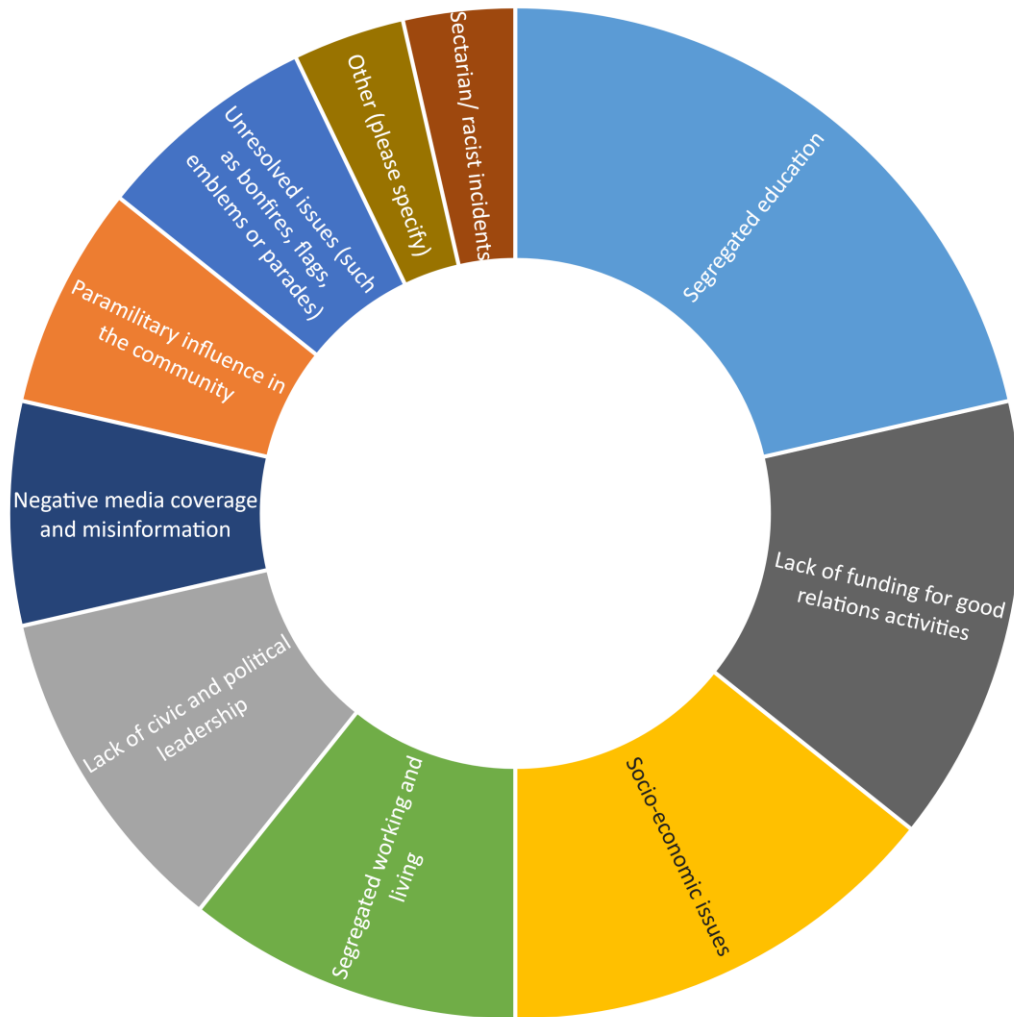
**Addressing socio-economic issues** - 68%

**Other** – 7%

### **8.2.3 Barriers to Good Relations in the Newry, Mourne and Down District**

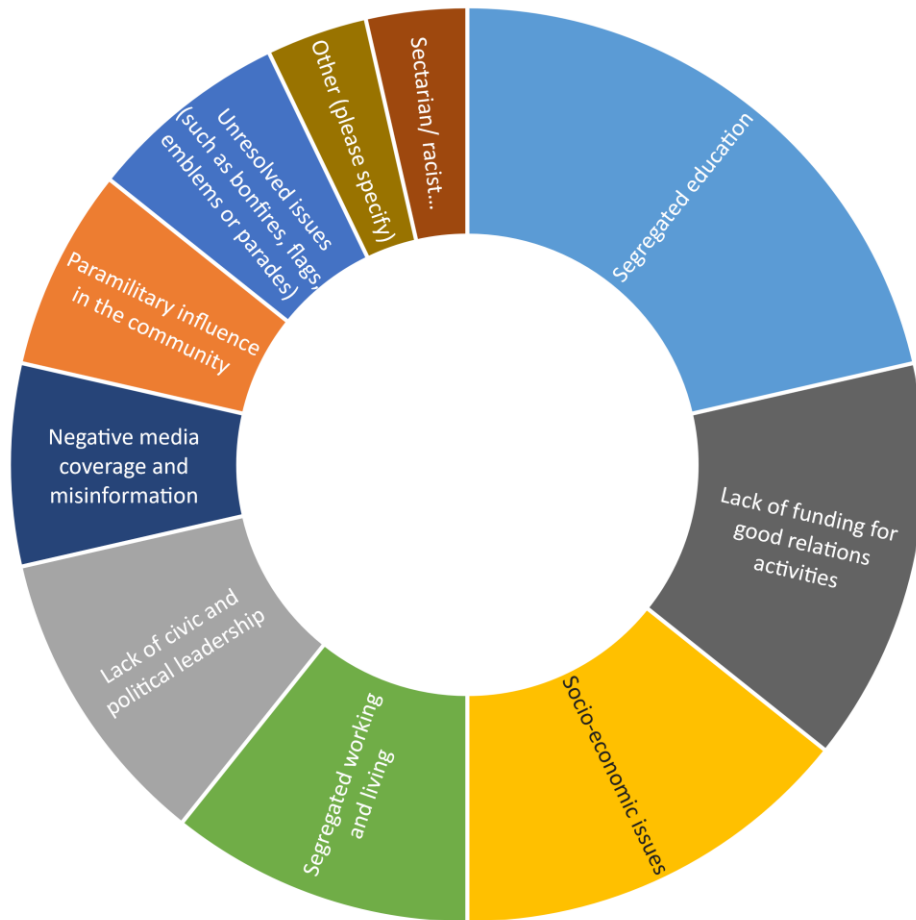
Participants were asked to identify the top three barriers to developing Good Relations in the Newry, Mourne and Down District.

What do you believe is the most prominent barrier to developing good relations in the NMD&D area?



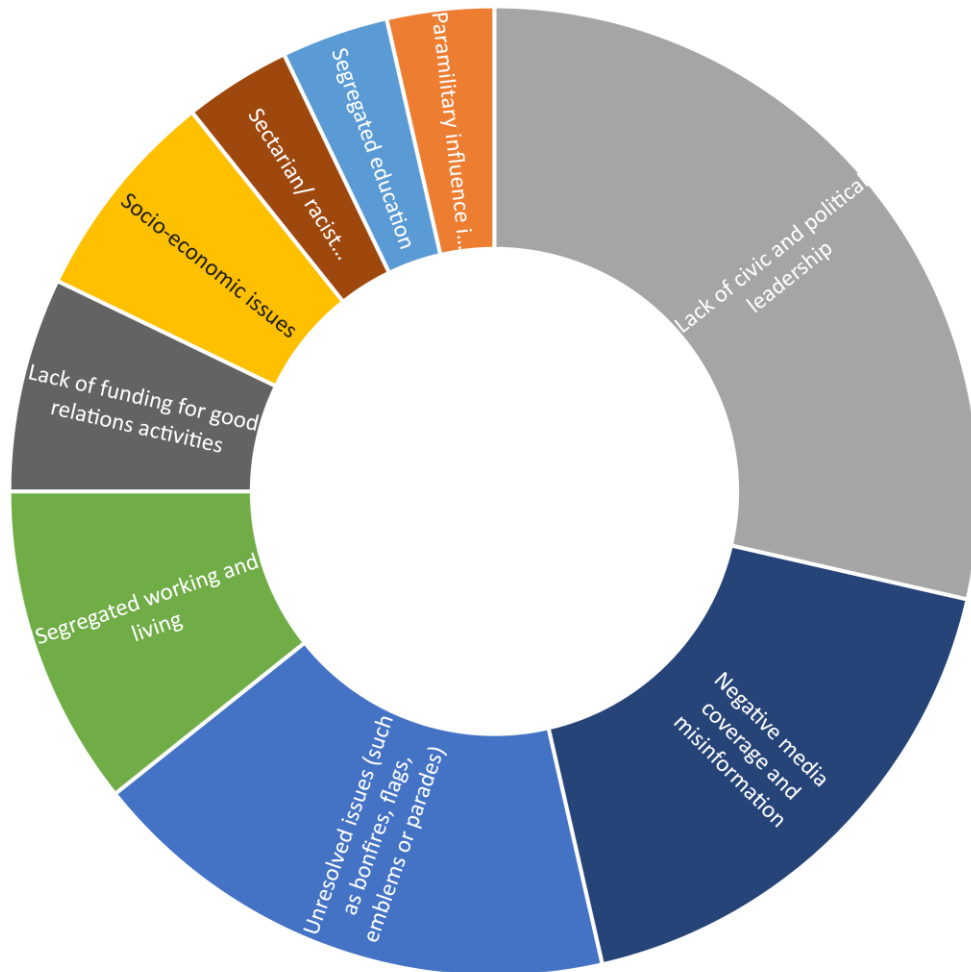
The most prominent barrier identified was segregated education followed by socio economic issues and lack of funding for Good Relations activities.

What do you believe is the second most prominent barrier to developing good relations in the NMD&D area?



The second most prominent barrier was identified as socio- economic issues followed by segregated education. These responses were followed by unresolved issues such as (bonfires, flags or parades), sectarian/ racist incidents and lack of funding for Good relations.

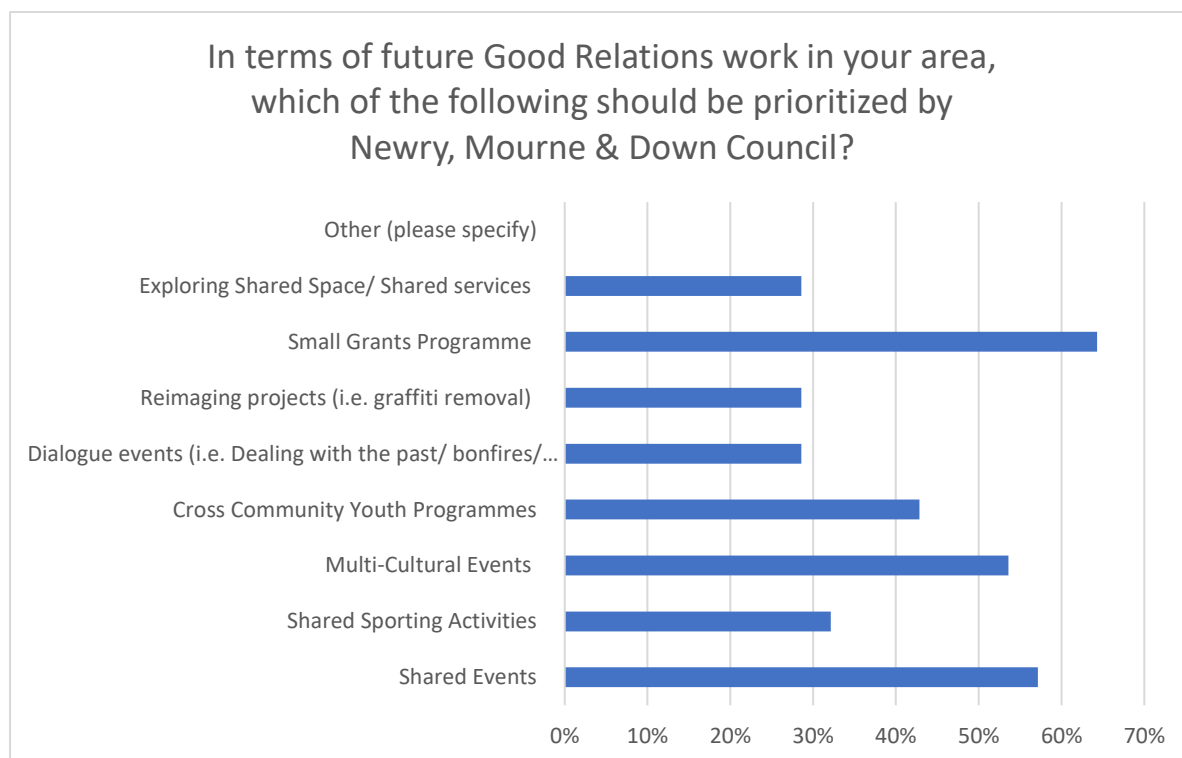
What do you believe is the third most prominent barrier to developing good relations in the NMD&D area?



The third most prominent barrier was identified as a lack of civic and political leadership followed by unresolved issues such as (bonfires, flags or parades) and negative media coverage and misinformation.

### 8.2.4 Future priorities for Good Relations in the Newry, Mourne and Down District

The survey asked respondents what future Good Relations work in your area should be prioritized by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. This was a multiple-choice question which allowed respondents to choose all options. The results are outlined as follows:



The Small Grants Programme was identified as a top priority by 64% of respondents. This was followed by shared events, multi-cultural events and cross community youth programmes.

### 8.3 Priorities

**Table 8: Main priorities from Audit per T:BUC Themes.**

<b>Together – Building a United Community theme</b>	<b>Main Priorities</b>
<b>T:BUC 1: Our Children and Young People</b>	<p><b>Shared education opportunities</b></p> <p>✚ Being educated separately leads to greater difficulty in engaging with young people in shared settings. Shared spaces create opportunities for young people to meet and engage with each other, encouraging cross community relations.</p> <p><b>The influence of others and wider influences</b></p>

<b>Together – Building a United Community theme</b>	<b>Main Priorities</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Employment opportunities, economic decline, child poverty, youth unemployment and living in a segregated community have the potential to exacerbate issues around sectarianism and racism locally. Therefore, anti-social behaviour among young people may be a symptom of wider societal issues that are connected to economic and social issues.</li> </ul> <p><b>Education and awareness is power</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Primary School education programmes have created a sense of place and belonging. Shared history needs to be a core part of good relations and cooperation between primary and secondary schools is required to achieve this.</li> </ul> <p><b>Articulating the voice and building the leadership skills of young people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ The voice of young people is well supported in Newry, Mourne and Down but still needs to be heard even more strongly than it is currently – widening out the Youth Forums and Youth Council concept has assisted with this and has ensured that this is connected to Council’s community planning infrastructure.</li> <li>✚ Developing leadership skills for young people at different levels is a way of building resilience – emerging leadership and leadership programmes are required to help build good relations in our area.</li> </ul> <p><b>Supporting less connected young people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ There are a range of youth programmes locally who are not connected to the Education Authority or to each other. Greater connections need to be made between them to allow for a greater focus on delivery that promotes shared learning and integration opportunities for young people.</li> <li>✚ The role of institutions, sporting organisations, bands and churches in working with young people towards a more shared society needs to be supported.</li> <li>✚ Detached youth work is still important locally as a way of reaching out to disengaged or at-risk youth. Protecting vulnerable and impressionable young people from the lure of criminality or other activity is a priority.</li> <li>✚ There is a need for more Traveller &amp; BME youth initiative work.</li> <li>✚ Addressing transport issues is still an ongoing issue as will be the availability of shared spaces and support resources for young people.</li> </ul>
<b>T:BUC 2: Our Shared Community</b>	<p><b>The need to recognise and embrace our inter-cultural society</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ There should be continued acknowledgement of the diverse community who live in our District and the important role that they play in the building of wealth, prosperity, stability, cohesion and attractiveness of the area as a place to live, learn, work, visit and play.</li> <li>✚ There are many differences in culture and community right across the Newry, Mourne and Down District and this needs to be celebrated and used as a way of building cohesion rather than as a divisive issue.</li> </ul>

Together – Building a United Community theme	Main Priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ While there is a majority Catholic community in the area, greater emphasis needs to be given to the value of different communities that exist locally and we must recognise that their views need to be actively sought and considered.</li> <li>✚ The sizeable BME community in the local area should continue to be recognised and programmes developed to encourage integration locally.</li> <li>✚ The needs of the local Traveller community should be recognised in the creation of a shared society, and through the development of programmes which create a sense of belonging to local areas.</li> <li>✚ Ensure all people in the area feel they can access the same opportunities as others in improving their quality of life.</li> <li>✚ Invest in shared spaces that encourage integration and promote community cohesion.</li> </ul> <p><b>Tackling silent and covert sectarianism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Silent, polite and covert sectarianism and racism needs to be tackled.</li> </ul> <p><b>Addressing hard issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ We must continue to address hard issues like murals, flags, emblems, memorials; the effects of paramilitarism on the community and the impact of certain parades and bonfires (positive or negative) or/and protest to parades (positive or negative). This can continue to take place through facilitated safe discussions.</li> <li>✚ Continue to support dialogue around difficult issues as those mentioned above and ensure that these conversations feed into wider District Electoral Area Fora discussions.</li> <li>✚ Increase understanding and awareness of different cultures by engaging with key stakeholders in different communities.</li> <li>✚ Break down negative perceptions that people have about certain local areas - using an inside out approach that challenges norms and builds ownership and responsibility for welcoming others.</li> <li>✚ Single identity work still needs to be promoted and delivered.</li> <li>✚ The role of the churches, schools and other institutions in building understanding should be enhanced.</li> <li>✚ Using sports, arts and museums as tools to facilitate discussion and engagement in the delivery of good relations projects should be encouraged.</li> </ul> <p><b>Influencing the influencers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Parental influence continues to be a factor in addressing sectarianism.</li> <li>✚ Insular views among many communities requires challenge.</li> <li>✚ Building resilience and capacity in single identity communities to address hard issues that bind people to the past is required.</li> <li>✚ We must address the influence of gatekeepers.</li> <li>✚ Recognising the impact of economic decline on sectarianism and racism.</li> </ul>

Together – Building a United Community theme	Main Priorities
	<p><b>Building a sense of belonging and place for all</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ There is still a need to build a sense of belonging and place for all in the Newry, Mourne and Down area so that regardless of a person’s religious, political or racial background, people feel a connection to the area as well as have pride and sense of loyalty to the area.</li> <li>✚ Continue to support festivals and events as a means of building a sense of belonging, highlighting cultural expression and encouraging community cohesion.</li> <li>✚ Investment in the environment and in economic regeneration projects is important but there is a need for greater focus on the value of Good Relations in this area.</li> </ul> <p><b>The need to recognise the impact that good relations has on social and economic issues that fuel discontent in local areas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Ensure a continued focus on the needs of young people.</li> <li>✚ In some areas there is a deprivation of opportunity and aspiration. This needs to be addressed.</li> <li>✚ Engaging the business community in Good Relations activity needs to be encouraged.</li> </ul> <p><b>The need to develop consensual as well as shared spaces</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ There continues to be single identity areas across Newry, Mourne and Down. Helping communities to build consensual spaces as well as shared spaces is a priority for the plan where the public feels comfortable in the use and engagement within these spaces.</li> <li>✚ We need to build “emotional intelligence” within communities and groups around the importance of addressing the sensitivity of others outside their community.</li> <li>✚ Programmes that promote sharing at community level in sports, arts and museum type activities should continue to be encouraged.</li> </ul>
<p><b>T:BUC 3: Our Safe Community</b></p>	<p><b>Impact of crime and societal issues on civic pride</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ By engaging in Good Relations projects, we must ensure that our District feels like a much safer place than in it did in the past.</li> <li>✚ Silent sectarianism and racism still exist and still need to be tackled.</li> <li>✚ Gatekeepers still exert control and impact on local communities.</li> <li>✚ Drugs, alcohol and legal highs are the most prevalent issues discussed and of worry in local communities – much of this is linked to night time economy safety issues.</li> <li>✚ We must continue to address the fear of crime among local people especially older and vulnerable people.</li> <li>✚ We must continue to combat any negative public perceptions of the PSNI.</li> </ul>

Together – Building a United Community theme	Main Priorities
	<p><b>Addressing suicide and mental health and well-being issues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ There is evidence of significant mental health and wellbeing issues across the Council District - some of these can be linked back to the legacy of the Troubles and the past, and some are being experienced by other communities of interest, including minority groups from a range of backgrounds – Travellers, BME community, LGBT community, those with a disability, or those suffering the effects of the economic downturn after Covid-19 and more recently the cost of living crisis. We must address these issues and work with partner agencies to combat suicide, isolation and loneliness, and vulnerability and mental health in our area.</li> <li>✚ Anti-social behaviour in single identity areas has the potential to escalate into other types of crime if the causes are not addressed using a multi-disciplinary / agency approach.</li> </ul> <p><b>Dissident activity is still a worry</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Dissident activity remains a concern in some areas. We must ensure we are trying to keep young people away from harmful influences that could lead to criminal activity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Dissenting voices need to be heard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Dissenting voices are not the same as dissident activity and perceptions that others hold about people with dissenting voices need to be challenged and spaces offered to hear these views in a wider debate around the peace process locally.</li> </ul> <p><b>Prejudice still exists in parts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Some racist crimes are unreported; the Social Inclusion Support Officer in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council continues to address this issue.</li> <li>✚ Homophobic bullying is still a concern. This can be combated by continued support of the LGBT organisations who can address a range of LGBT issues in a safe and supportive environment.</li> <li>✚ Supporting the Traveller community in addressing issues that are linked to harassment and bullying needs to be considered.</li> <li>✚ The PUL community should continue to be supported to promote its culture locally.</li> <li>✚ Continued support is required for victims and others with a disability who have been affected by the Troubles.</li> </ul>
<b>T:BUC 4: Our Cultural Expression</b>	<p><b>The need to address hard issues in a safe manner</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ There is a need to continue to deal with sensitive local issues around parades, flags, emblems, memorials, bonfires and beacons and offer opportunities for safe dialogue and local accommodations that work.</li> </ul>

<b>Together – Building a United Community theme</b>	<b>Main Priorities</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ There needs to be a move beyond what might be a polite acceptance of each other’s cultures to a deeper and wider understanding of each other from the perspective of the two main indigenous communities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recognising and celebrating all cultures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ The Irish Language and Ulster Scots need to be supported locally.</li> <li>✚ Cohesion and integration encourages the promotion of the culture of all the various communities that exist in the area - Travellers, BME communities, and the PUL and CNR communities. This Strategy needs to continue to promote this approach to cultural expression, encouraging more dialogue around shared histories and identity.</li> <li>✚ Assisting single identity communities to express their culture in a way that supports and increases local understanding is important.</li> <li>✚ Assisting local communities to take time out to think about the effects of the display of their identity on others is also important.</li> <li>✚ Utilising museums and arts organisations in building a shared community is important.</li> </ul> <p><b>Building the capacity of the PUL community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Providing support to the PUL community so they can continue to have strength in their position as a significant minority community.</li> <li>✚ Breaking down barriers and encouraging dialogue locally.</li> <li>✚ Increasing awareness of the cultures of the PUL and CNR communities in local areas.</li> </ul> <p><b>Listening to dissenting voices and acknowledging the past</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Giving space to hearing dissenting voices on all sides and not assuming a dissident link.</li> <li>✚ Exploring the past as a way to shape the future in a positive manner.</li> </ul> <p><b>Acknowledging the dissident threat</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Acknowledging the potential dissident threat locally.</li> </ul> <p><b>Hearing the views of the BME and Traveller community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Promoting even greater integration of the BME community and building on the success of local programmes and initiatives.</li> <li>✚ Promoting opportunities for understanding and integration of the local Traveller community who often feel significant discrimination, prejudice and negativity towards them.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership, the Media and Good Relations</b>	<p><b>Leading by example</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Assisting Elected Members of Council to deliver their civic leadership role.</li> <li>✚ Leadership by Elected Members needs to continue to be accompanied by a thorough understanding that other statutory leaders also need to work in</li> </ul>

<b>Together – Building a United Community theme</b>	<b>Main Priorities</b>
	<p>partnership with them. A unified and integrated approach to hard issues is required and is linked to the Community Planning agenda – Good Relations should continue to be embedded at the heart of Community Planning.</p> <p><b>Safe spaces for facilitated dialogue among elected members</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Elected Members need safe spaces in which to engage with each other on hard issues (as with the Councillors Equality &amp; Good Relations Reference Group).</li> </ul> <p><b>Connecting and engaging with local people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Connecting and engaging with the local residents and communities is key in moving forward.</li> <li>✚ Parties need to access the voices of those with dissenting voices.</li> <li>✚ Parties need to have more public debates with local people on hard issues – building greater citizenship and wider involvement of local people.</li> </ul> <p><b>Using the media as way of increasing the visibility of civic leaders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Continue to use the local media as an advocate in the Good Relations process.</li> <li>✚ Ensure a mix of different communication methods and channels to access people from all backgrounds and all relevant Section 75 groupings.</li> </ul>

## 9. Delivery Mechanisms

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter provides detail on the suggested operational approach, staffing, management, and resource allocation to fulfil the good relations priorities which were outlined in Chapter 8.

### 9.2 Staff Structure

Good Relations staff from across Council will work in collaboration with all relevant external and community stakeholders, and specialist services will be procured as and when required. Staff will continue to work alongside colleagues from Community Services, PCSP, Neighbourhood Renewal, Sports & Leisure, Museum Services and Economic Development and Regeneration to build on local knowledge, opportunities, and expertise within Council.

Council’s Safer Communities & Good Relations Officer (appointed in April 2021) plays a key role in supporting delivery of the annual Good Relations Action Plan and achieving the objectives laid out in this Strategy.

### **9.3 Delivering in Partnership**

Good Relations staff will work in partnership with other Council staff and a wide range of external agencies to deliver programmes and meet the Good Relations priorities outlined in Chapter 8.

Staff will also continue to work collaboratively with an extensive range of community and voluntary organisations from across the Council District.

### **9.4 Accountability**

Newry, Mourne and Down Good Relations staff report to the Director of Active & Healthy Communities and inform Elected Members of activity via regular written and verbal reports against key actions of the Strategy. An Annual Overview will be developed, and the associated yearly Action Plan will be revised to reflect progress and on-going business needs.

### **9.5 Resource Allocation**

Council's 2023/2024 Good Relations Action Plan was supported by grant of approximately £165,436.83 (75%) from The Executive Office with match funding of £55,145.61 (25%) from Council. This brings the total amount to £220,582.44. This was a significantly reduced allocation in comparison to previous years and had a substantial impact on the ability to deliver the Good Relations Action Plan.

To meet the priorities outlined in Chapter 8 under the four T: BUC Themes, programmes, and funding for the 2024/2025 financial year will be broken down as follows:

**Table 8 T: BUC Strategic Outcome funding 2024/2025 financial year**

	<b>Children &amp; Young People</b>	<b>Shared community</b>	<b>Safe community</b>	<b>Cultural Expression</b>	<b>District Council Good Relation Programme Total</b>
<b>Total no. of programmes</b>	1	5	1	1	8
<b>Total no. of direct participants</b>	500	8,514	5,000	2,000	16,014
<b>Unit cost of programme activity</b>	15.80	14.90	18.00	4.50	14.35
<b>Total cost of programmes</b>	£7,900.00	£126,858.28	£90,000.00	£5,000.00	£229,758.28