NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 28 September 2026 at 6.00pm in Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

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In the Chair: Councillor G Hanna

In attendance in Chamber:
Councillor T Andrews
Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor P Campbell
Councillor L Devlin
Councillor G Galbraith
Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor A King
Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor A Lewis
Councillor D McAteer

In attendance via Teams:
Councillor C Enright
Councillor R Howell
Councillor G Kearns
Councillor M Larkin
Councillor N Lawlor
Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Rice
Councillor M Ruane
Councillor J Truesdale
Councillor H Young

In attendance in Chamber: (Officials)
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance in Chamber:
DFI Roads
Ms C Noble – Divisional Roads Manager
Ms B Gillespie – Section Engineer (NMD West)
Mr H Morgan – Section Engineer (NMD East)

SC/008/2026 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Byrne, Finn, Harte, Howie, Magennis and S Murphy.

SC/009/2025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/010/2025 DFI ROADS

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation and invited them to present.

Ms Noble introduced herself and her team and thanked Members for the opportunity to present the DfI Roads Annual Report. She advised that Northern Ireland's road network, valued at approximately £37 billion, remained the region's largest public infrastructure asset and highlighted the publication of a new road maintenance strategy aimed at improving maintenance standards, targeting resources more effectively and delivering longer-lasting repairs.

She advised that, although a formal Executive Budget had not yet been agreed, an indicative allocation of approximately £98 million had been identified for structural maintenance, including £12.5 million for the Roads Recovery Fund. She noted that the programmes outlined in the report remained subject to change pending the final budget settlement.

Ms Noble reported that resurfacing schemes had been completed on the B7 Ballynahinch Road, Crossgar, and the B30 Cullaville Road, Crossmaglen, with further schemes planned at Clanrye Avenue, Newry, and Bryansford Village. She advised that the Department continued to prioritise public safety, network resilience and regional balance, with additional investment directed towards road signs, road markings, patching and drainage maintenance.
She noted that resource constraints remained and, consequently, the limited service policy continued for routine maintenance activities. Defect repairs, grass cutting and gully emptying would continue to be prioritised on a risk basis, with grass cutting focused on safety-critical locations and visibility splays.

Looking ahead, she advised that the Department was developing Transport Strategy 2035 and Local Transport Plans in partnership with councils to support economic growth, improve connectivity and encourage sustainable travel. She also highlighted continued investment in walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure through the forthcoming Everyday Active Travel Urban Delivery Plan.

Ms Noble stated that road safety remained a key priority. She noted that five additional schools within the district had received part-time 20mph school safety zones during the previous year, bringing the total delivered since 2021 to 273 schools. She further advised that the Department's speed limit review consultation responses were being assessed and that the Local Transport and Safety Measures Programme continued to deliver road safety improvements, including planned schemes at Downshire Road, Newry, and Irish Street/St Patrick's Avenue, Downpatrick.

In relation to major projects, she advised that the Department remained committed to the Newry Southern Relief Road, the A1 Junctions Phase 2 project and the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass. She also noted continued collaboration with Louth County Council on the Narrow Water Bridge connection to the Warrenpoint Road, with completion remaining on track for 2027.

In conclusion, Ms Noble reaffirmed the Department's commitment to engagement with elected representatives and local communities. While staffing pressures remained, public safety continued to be the Department's overriding priority. She encouraged Councillors and members of the public to utilise the online reporting system to support the efficient resolution of issues.

Following the presentation, Councillor Hanna invited comments and questions from Members, reminding them to focus on strategic issues rather than local matters.

Comments and questions from members were as follows:

- Thanks were expressed to the delegation for their informative presentation.
- Concern was raised regarding the need for resurfacing works in Bryansford Village, and clarification was sought on whether the scheme would proceed and whether a commencement date had been confirmed.
- It was queried whether the drainage improvement scheme on the Castlewellan to Newcastle Road would extend to the Burren Meadows area.
- Concerns were raised regarding communication with DfI, including the reliability of the online portal and delays in responding to email correspondence. It was also highlighted that DfI was the only statutory body without a dedicated telephone line or alternative communication channel for elected representatives to contact the Department directly.
- An update on the Ballynahinch Bypass was sought and it was queried whether, in light of legal challenges affecting the A5 project, DfI would commit to developing more sustainable bypass proposals should the current scheme not proceed, or whether the proposal would ultimately be abandoned.
- Support was expressed for the provision of a footpath between Saintfield and Crossgar and for the resurfacing of Main Street, Saintfield.
- Concern was raised that the footpath between Killyleagh and Shrigley had become overgrown and was causing difficulties for pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities.
- The planned signal upgrade for Downpatrick Town Centre was welcomed and clarification on the anticipated implementation date was sought.
- Complaints from residents regarding the condition of the road surface in the Knocknashinna area following works undertaken by NI Water were highlighted. Concerns were also raised regarding the adjacent park footway, which had deteriorated, and an assessment of the area was requested.
- It was queried whether a strategy or framework existed for prioritising greenway development projects.
- An update was requested on the timeframe for footway resurfacing works in the Ardfern area of Downpatrick.
- Disappointment was expressed that there were no plans to repair the Damolly Road in Newry despite its importance as a heavily trafficked route.
- The positive work completed on the Old Warrenpoint Road was acknowledged.
- Concern was raised that surface water remained a significant issue on many roads, particularly rural roads, and it was suggested that greater emphasis on drainage improvements during resurfacing schemes could provide a more cost-effective approach to maintaining the road network.
- Clarification was sought on the Department's protocol for repainting road markings.
- Concern was raised regarding the level of engagement by DfI in relation to the Narrow Water Bridge project, with reference made to concerns reported at the Joint Council Committee.
- Referring to Table 28 of the report, it was queried whether there were any plans to increase inspections of street works completed by utility companies, noting a public perception that sufficient checks were not being carried out.
- Disappointment was expressed at the absence of planned works on the A2 road despite its continued deterioration. The lack of progress on proposals to create a safer junction at Ballyardle Crossroads was also highlighted, despite previous indications that funding had been allocated.

- Concerns were raised regarding a perceived imbalance in planned resurfacing works, with projects concentrated in Newry while the Mournes and Kilkeel areas appeared to be overlooked.
- The need for robust scrutiny and follow-up of work undertaken by contractors responsible for verge maintenance was emphasised.
- Concern was raised regarding road conditions on the route between St Louis Grammar School and Kilkeel, as well as on the Blackrock Road.
- An update was requested on the resurfacing of the Bann Road in Castlewellan and the associated drainage works.
- An update on Redmond's Bridge in Leitrim was sought, noting that it had been struck by a vehicle several months previously, concerns had been raised regarding its stability, and it did not appear to have been included within the Department's maintenance programme.
- An update was requested on delays to patching works on the Moyad Road, including the cost implications of those delays and any plans for further works.
- In relation to gully maintenance, clarification was sought as to whether the Call-Out Section was understaffed.
- It was queried why recent road relining works on the Ballynahatton Road/Cranfield Road had resulted in one side of the road being approximately two feet narrower than the other.
- Concerns were raised regarding the proposed Narrow Water Bridge road layout, particularly the potential impact on traffic congestion arising from the reduction to two traffic lanes and the inclusion of a greenway. It was also queried how bus stops would be incorporated into the revised layout.
- The need for improved partnership working and communication between the Council and DfI regarding verge-cutting operations, particularly to ensure that litter exposed during verge cutting was removed promptly, was emphasised.
- It was queried whether statistics were available to demonstrate whether the introduction of 20mph speed limits at schools within the district had resulted in a reduction in traffic collisions.
- A request was made for the provision of a new pedestrian crossing in Ballymartin near the recently opened shop.

The delegation responded as follows:

- DfI remained committed to the Bryansford Village resurfacing scheme, which was included within the indicative budget and for which funding had been identified. A commencement date could not be confirmed until the contract award process had been completed.
- It was confirmed that the drainage improvement scheme between Castlewellan and Newcastle would extend to include the Burren Meadows area.
- Continued use of the online portal was encouraged as it enabled queries to be directed to the appropriate contractor. The portal remained under development and suggestions for improvement were welcomed. All correspondence received by email was triaged, with urgent matters referred to the relevant staff. It was also noted that departmental contact details were included within the annual report.
- In relation to the Ballynahinch Bypass, the Department was awaiting the outcome of the A5 appeal process. Consideration would also be given to decarbonisation measures, construction materials and design standards, together with any implications arising from the legal proceedings. No timescale could be provided at that stage.

- The resurfacing of Main Street, Saintfield remained within the Department's programme of works.
- A detailed response regarding the proposed footway between Crossgar and Saintfield would be provided in due course. It was noted that the proposal could potentially form part of the Active Travel programme.
- The footway in the Knocknashinna area could not be repaired until the local schools had closed.
- Greenway developments were progressed in partnership with Councils and, where Councils wished to prioritise a particular scheme, they could engage with the DfI Active Travel Headquarters Team to explore opportunities for progression.
- No timescale was available for footway resurfacing works in Ardfern, Downpatrick, although footways would be reviewed following completion of road recovery works.
- In relation to the Damolly Road, Newry, the existing road width was not suitable for the volume and type of traffic using the route. Works to widen sections of the carriageway and re-establish verges had been commissioned to facilitate a more effective resurfacing programme.
- The importance of drainage infrastructure was acknowledged. It was explained that much of the current drainage replacement programme related to ageing infrastructure and that additional funding for drainage improvements had been provided by the Minister.
- Road markings were renewed in accordance with established criteria. Inspectors identified markings requiring replacement, which were then prioritised as part of the maintenance programme.
- Regarding the Narrow Water Bridge project, surprise was expressed at suggestions of poor engagement, noting that DfI officials were represented on the Project Board and continued to work to ensure all necessary arrangements were in place for the bridge opening.
- In relation to street works, DfI continued to implement the recommendations of the 2024 NIAO Report and remained focused on achieving inspection targets. While the target inspection rate was 30%, inspection levels were approximately 20-25% due to staffing and resource pressures. Recruitment efforts remained ongoing.
- The importance of enforcement was acknowledged, and it was noted that a dedicated officer was responsible for overseeing inspections and liaising with utility companies regarding reinstatement works. Consideration was also being given to extending the current 52-week warranty period for utility company reinstatements, although this would require legislative change.
- In response to concerns regarding the level of investment in the Kilkeel and Mournes areas, it was highlighted that several kilometres of resurfacing works had been completed in Kilkeel approximately one year previously. A number of additional schemes, including works outside St Louis Grammar School and between Glassdrumman and Annalong, were included within the longer-term programme. While these schemes were not funded within current indicative budgets, additional funding allocations would continue to be sought.
- The need to ensure contractors completed verge cutting and maintenance works to the required standard was acknowledged, and inspections of workmanship were undertaken.
- An update on the Ballyardle Crossroads scheme would be sought from the relevant network development team.
- Road classification formed only one element of the resurfacing prioritisation process. Other factors considered included road condition, defect levels, public liability claims, traffic volumes and overall network need. Given the volume of competing demands,

programmes were continually reviewed in line with available funding and any additional allocations received.

- In relation to the Bann Road, Castlewellan, footway works could be completed during the Halloween school holiday period when St Malachy's High School was closed. Road resurfacing works were expected to follow within the coming months.
- Redmond's Bridge would be investigated by the Department's Structural Maintenance Team and an update would be provided.
- Delays to works on the Moyad Road had arisen because the route had been required as a diversion during works on the Kilkeel Road and in Hilltown. As those works had concluded, it was anticipated that a programme agreement would be finalised within the following weeks, allowing works to commence.
- In relation to gully maintenance, resource pressures within the Call-Out Section were acknowledged. It was noted that different contractors undertook the work and that delivery depended on the resources available at any given time.
- Concerns regarding road relining on the Ballynahatton Road/Cranfield Road were acknowledged and it was confirmed that one side of the road should not be narrower than the other. The matter would be investigated further.
- An Active Travel scheme associated with the Narrow Water Bridge project would provide a continuous shared walking and cycling route. Following public consultation and engagement during July, a preferred route had been identified and discussions with the Project Board remained ongoing. The scheme would retain a right-turn facility into the port.
- Traffic modelling relating to the proposed reduction in traffic lanes in Warrenpoint had been shared with Warrenpoint Harbour and did not indicate that significant congestion issues would arise. It was also noted that buses would stop on the carriageway rather than within lay-bys.
- Verge cutting was undertaken primarily for road safety purposes. Engagement with Council on the strategic road network was ongoing and opportunities for further partnership working continued to be explored.
- Positive feedback had been received regarding the introduction of 20mph speed limits around schools, with parents reporting that school environments felt safer. It was hoped that additional schools would participate in the scheme in future.
- The request for a pedestrian crossing in Ballymartin would be assessed against the Department's established suitability criteria.

Councillors Quinn, Bowsie and Andrews left the meeting during the above discussion at 6.42pm, 6.45pm and 6.46pm respectively.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and time.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.00pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 2 November 2026.

Signed: _____

Chairperson

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Director