

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 29 September 2025 at 6.00pm in Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor P Campbell

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor J Brennan
Councillor O Hanlon	Councillor J Jackson
Councillor A King	Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Rice	

**In attendance
via Teams:**

Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor W Clarke	Councillor L Devlin
Councillor K Feehan	Councillor D Finn
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor V Harte
Councillor M Hearty	Councillor R Howell
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor A Lewis	Councillor O Magennis
Councillor K Murphy	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor D Taylor	Councillor J Truesdale
Councillor H Young	

**In attendance in Chamber:
(Officials)**

Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, 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/017/2025

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Galbraith, Howie, C King, Mathers, Ruane and Tinnelly. Apologies were also received from the Chief Executive.

SC/018/2025

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation and invited them to present.

Ms Noble introduced herself and her team and thanked Members for the opportunity to attend. She noted that a significant volume of work had been completed over the past year, as detailed in the annual report circulated to Members, which also included proposals for the coming year.

She stated that infrastructure played a vital role in daily life and that the road network represented the largest and most strategic public asset, confirming that the Department's proposals aimed to protect and improve this network while maximising limited resources to deliver positive outcomes.

Ms Noble advised that the 2024/25 Resource Budget allocation remained challenging despite an increase of £77.6m, which required difficult prioritisation decisions. This had resulted in the continued implementation of a limited-service policy for essential maintenance such as defect repair, grass cutting, and gully emptying. She confirmed that the opening Capital Budget also fell short of requirements, which meant that only high-priority resurfacing, road stability, and drainage projects could be delivered. She noted that some funding had been ringfenced for local transport safety measures, which allowed for targeted improvements such as collision remedial works, traffic calming, and pedestrian crossings. She highlighted internal capacity issues which had constrained delivery and confirmed that programmes had been prioritised according to greatest need.

Ms Noble outlined the introduction of 20mph speed limits around schools, describing this as a significant intervention to improve road safety for pupils and parents. She confirmed that an additional 40 schools across Northern Ireland would benefit from this programme, including five within the District.

She also referenced progress on the Newry Southern Relief Road, advising that the public consultation had closed in March 2025 and that responses were under review.

Ms Noble further noted the recent announcement from Minister Kimmons on the Ballynahinch Bypass and confirmed that preparatory steps were underway. She referenced ongoing work on the Transport Strategy 2035, which would guide infrastructure planning for the next decade, highlighting that transport decarbonisation would be a key focus in promoting walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure.

Ms Noble concluded by outlining winter service preparations, confirming that a fleet of 12 gritters would salt 833km of roads as and when required. She reiterated that, given staffing pressures, public safety remained the Department's priority and encouraged Members to report road defects using the online portal to ensure timely triage and response.

Following the presentation, Councillor Campbell 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, and for their ongoing hard work and dedication in difficult circumstances.
- Concern was raised that road gullies and verges in the Mournes area had remained blocked for nearly two years, increasing flood risk.
- Members asked whether the criteria for speed and safety assessments be shared, as some roads locally considered dangerous did not meet current thresholds.

- Members expressed frustration that the Kilkeel Road into Hilltown had remained closed for almost three years despite previous assurances it would reopen.
- Questions were raised about reliance on PSNI reports for prioritising works, as not all incidents were formally reported.
- The announcement of progress on the Ballynahinch Bypass was welcomed.
- What was the expected timeline for addressing congestion at Edward Street, Downpatrick.
- What was the expected timeline for implementing the 20mph limits around schools.
- Clarification was requested on whether updated legislation for street adoption would apply retrospectively or only to new developments.
- Concern was raised about delays in completing smaller works and maintenance tasks, and how this could have a larger financial impact as defects worsened.
- It was noted that gullies were not always inspected after cleaning as they were often not fully cleared of blockages which resulted in further flood risks.
- Could private landowners still assist with flooding mitigation, as had happened in previous years.
- What was the budget for minor repairs, such as potholes and other minor defects.
- A request was made for improved street lighting around Loughinisland.
- Concerns were expressed regarding dangerous junctions and poor sightlines.
- A review of DFI policies was requested, in light of ongoing public safety risks.
- The slow updating of the online reporting portal and delay in completing repairs were criticised.
- Could additional schools could be added to the 20mph list, and what were the requirements for this.
- What progress had been made on implementing the NIAO recommendation to extend utility company street works warranties from two to six years.

The delegation responded as follows:

- The maintenance of roads and gullies was essential to road longevity, however, limited resources restricted delivery. Members were asked to highlight priority areas for triage.
- Road safety remained a priority, but decisions were guided by established departmental policies, which were available on the DFI website. These policies were influenced by PSNI personal injury accident data.
- While acknowledging known hotspots that were not always reported, Ms Noble confirmed that prioritisation depended on PSNI statistics and DFI engineer assessments and asked for Members to encourage reporting accidents to the PSNI.
- The Kilkeel Road, Hilltown issue was described as technically complex, but the Department was confident a solution would be found within the financial year.
- Improvements were planned for Edward Street, Downpatrick, with a new crossing to be installed before year end. Consultation was also ongoing on measures near the primary school.
- Implementation of 20mph zones around schools was subject to legislative and contractor coordination requirements; completion was expected before the end of the financial year. The inclusion of new schools was also a legislative matter.
- The Department welcomed the new street adoption procedures, confirming they would apply to new developments, with historic cases reviewed in line with existing bonding issues.
- The Department continued to prioritise resurfacing based on road classification, traffic volume, and defect severity, to be progressed as funding allowed.
- Work with landowners continued through regulatory channels to address recurring flooding issues.

- Only issues reported through official channels could be included in prioritisation lists due to budget constraints, with Members and the public encouraged to use the available tools at their disposal.
- Dangerous junctions should be reported via the appropriate system for assessment against current design standards.
- The Department was considering NIAO recommendations regarding utility company works, with a progress update due in the next quarter.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and time.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at **6.47pm**

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 3 November 2025.

Signed:

Chairperson

Director