

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 24 November 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 C Bowsie
Councillor O Hanlon Councillor J Jackson
Councillor A King Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Councillor S O'Hare Councillor H Reilly

In attendance via Teams: Councillor P Byrne Councillor W Clarke
Councillor L Devlin Councillor K Feehan
Councillor D Finn Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor M Gibbons Councillor V Harte
Councillor R Howell Councillor G Kearns
Councillor M Larkin Councillor A Lewis
Councillor O Magennis Councillor D Murphy
Councillor K Murphy Councillor S Murphy
Councillor D Taylor Councillor J Truesdale

In attendance in Chamber:
(Officials) Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance in Chamber: **NI Water**
Dr S Blockwell – Head of Investment Management
Ms V Crozier – Stakeholder Manager

SC/020/2025 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Brennan, Hearty, Howie, Mathers and Young. Apologies were also received from the Chief Executive, Mrs Ward.

SC/021/2025 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/022/2025 NI WATER

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation and invited them to make their presentation.

Dr Blockwell, accompanied by Ms Valerie Crozier, delivered a presentation outlining NI Water's regulatory framework, funding position, operational challenges, and investment plans within the District. (Copy attached)

Dr Blockwell explained that NI Water was independently regulated, operated under UK corporate governance standards, and relied on the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) to provide funding for both capital and operational needs. The current investment period (PC21, 2021–27) was significantly underfunded, and preparations were underway for the next period, PC28 (2028–33). He provided an overview of the scale of NI Water's operations, delivering 605 million litres of drinking water daily and treating 360 million litres of wastewater through extensive ageing infrastructure. Much of the system was operating at or beyond capacity, which contributed to environmental pressures, reliance on storm overflows, and restrictions on new housing and business connections.

Within the Newry, Mourne and Down area, NI Water operated major drinking water assets, 34 wastewater treatment works, and 285 storm overflows, 41 of which were classified as unsatisfactory. He outlined scheduled investment for 2025–26 across drinking water resilience, drought mitigation and wastewater upgrades, including major projects in Newry, Drumanness, Dundrum, and a phased upgrade of the Annsborough Wastewater Treatment Works. However, he noted that DFI's indicative funding limit of £321m per year fell far short of the £500–600m per year required, leaving limited capacity for critical wastewater improvements.

On PC28, Dr Blockwell advised that NI Water was required to prepare a business plan focused only on essential statutory obligations and efficient delivery. Without increased long-term funding, NI Water would struggle to meet environmental standards, support economic growth or deliver the infrastructure required for the Council's Local Development Plan. He provided an example of work in Newry, where NI Water was exploring lower-cost alternatives to unlock limited capacity, though longer-term major investment would still be needed.

Dr Blockwell concluded by stating that a permanent funding solution was required to address the scale of infrastructure need, reduce pollution, and support future development. He thanked Members for the opportunity to present and invited questions.

Following the presentation, Councillor Campbell invited comments and questions from Members.

Comments and questions from Members were as follows:

- Thanks were expressed to the delegation and to the NI Water Customer Service Team for their prompt responses to Member queries.
- Members noted the lack of investment as projected within PC21 and expressed frustration on behalf of developers where projects were delayed or halted due to insufficient wastewater capacity.
- Members highlighted the impact of delays on housing costs and sought assurances that investment would be prioritised in the Mournes area to increase available capacity.
- Clarification was sought regarding NI Water's role as a statutory consultee and whether improvements could be made to response times, given developer concerns about delays.
- Members requested clarification on NI Water's position where a developer proposed installing their own wastewater treatment plant as part of a development.

- Members asked what plans were in place to address capacity issues and any potential upgrade of facilities in the Rowallane area, particularly in relation to pollution concerns.
- Recognition was noted for future investment planned in Killyleagh; however, concerns were expressed that the reclassification of the village to a town could place additional pressure on wastewater treatment capacity and storm overflow systems.
- Members requested information on discharge levels in Killyleagh following severe storms, and what additional steps could be taken to address the issue.
- A request was made for consideration of relocating the storm overflow at Killyleagh Harbour further up the lough to support safe swimming conditions for the Killyleagh Dippers group.
- Clarification was sought on why a recently completed development in Saintfield had not yet been connected to NI Water infrastructure, despite the developer having installed a wastewater treatment facility.
- Members asked for further detail on the Ballynahinch Drainage Plan and its potential impact on system capacity.
- Clarification was sought on how many additional housing units could be accommodated once the Dundrum and Drumaness upgrades were completed, and whether these upgrades would alleviate current restrictions on new builds.
- Members queried whether tightening of NIEA discharge consents over the past decade had contributed to perceived constraints on the system, and whether the system was at full capacity or merely operating under regulatory restriction.
- Members sought a timeframe for critical investment upgrades in Newcastle, noting that residents in the Marguerite area continued to experience flooding risks. A timeframe was also requested for the assessment of the local pumping station and flood mitigation measures.
- Members asked why the assessment date for the Marguerite area had been delayed and whether any information could be shared with affected residents.
- Concerns were raised regarding open-water swimmers near the discharge pipe on the front shore, Warrenpoint. Members asked for clarification on the nature of the discharge, whether it was safe for people and wildlife, and whether the delegation would be comfortable swimming in the area themselves.

The delegation responded as follows:

- Dr Blockwell acknowledged the capacity issues as detailed in his presentation. He advised that, moving forward under the PC28 Business Plan, projects would be prioritised subject to funding availability.
- He reported that DFI had indicated a likely cap of £321m per year, which would leave limited scope for wastewater upgrades and would continue to present difficulties for developers.
- He confirmed that NI Water had been exploring alternative approaches to create capacity however, these were small operational adjustments rather than significant system changes and were not considered viable long-term solutions.
- NI Water was reviewing consultation turnaround times on planning applications however, many responses required Wastewater Impact Assessments (WWIAs) which involved detailed modelling and consideration of site-specific factors. He cautioned that certain areas of the network had no viable solution at present.
- It was confirmed that the NI Environment Agency (NIEA) regulated wastewater treatment plants. NI Water, as a finite resource, required funding and staffing to maintain any additional asset adopted into its system. Dr Blockwell emphasised that investment should be focused on larger, centralised works rather than small, standalone treatment plants.

NIEA also discouraged smaller systems (pop-ups) as they did not align with NI Water's wastewater treatment model.

- PC21 remained ongoing, and any works not completed would be incorporated into PC28. Projects would be prioritised against base maintenance requirements while maintaining the delivery of clean, safe drinking water.
- Regarding Killyleagh's reclassification under the Council's Local Development Plan (LDP), he confirmed that the phasing of any development was key. He reassured Members that infrastructure would be required to be in place before any connections were permitted, and NI Water would not knowingly connect a development that did not meet required standards.
- NI Water was aware of the storm overflow pipe in Killyleagh and acknowledged it as an ongoing issue.
- For NI Water to adopt a wastewater treatment facility, the developer must formally request adoption. Adoption would proceed only if the asset met NI Water standards. NI Water asked that details of the Saintfield development be shared to allow investigation.
- Details of the Ballynahinch Drainage Plan were not immediately available, and NI Water undertook to revert to Members with the information.
- As part of operational procedures during severe storm events, treated overflow and discharge were permitted to maintain system capacity. Any concerns regarding discharges should be reported to NIEA, who would carry out sampling and regulatory follow-up.
- NIEA and NI Water were working closely on the Dundrum upgrades, which required integrated modelling and consideration of various local site constraints. DAERA, Marine Division, and water regulation teams were also involved. Detailed designs for pumping stations were currently being agreed with NIEA.
- NI Water was aware of the issues around the Marguerite area and was actively pursuing outputs from consultants and modellers to progress potential solutions. Dr Blockwell noted that flooding issues took time to resolve and confirmed that the location was on NI Water's Internal Flooding Register, which served as an investment driver within the PC28 Business Plan.
- A meeting had been scheduled with consultants the following day in an effort to expedite the modelling work relating to the Marguerite area.
- All discharges were treated to NIEA-consented levels and were safe for release into the environment.
- While the treated discharge complied with regulatory standards, it was not advisable to swim in a discharge area. He noted that several designated swimming areas existed within the District and that swimming in a discharge area remained a personal choice.

Councillors Harte and K Murphy left during the above discussions – 6.38pm and 6.39pm respectively.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and time.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 6.49pm

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 12 January 2026.

Signed:

Chairperson

Director

niwater
Delivering what matters

Newry, Mourne & Down District Council Meeting

24th November 2025

Dr Stephen Blockwell, Head of Investment Management, Engineering & Sustainability Directorate

Valerie Crozier, Stakeholder Manager, Engineering & Sustainability Directorate

Contacting NI Water:
Elected Representative Direct Line – 0345 3006461
Waterline – 03457 440088 or waterline@niwater.com

1

NI Water Governance Model

- Formed in 2007 and independently regulated and bound by Companies Act 2006
- Government (DfI) is our sole shareholder with duty to ensure the Company is properly funded
- Utility Regulator determines the funding that is necessary to deliver required business plan
- Our efficiency and performance is independently benchmarked against GB peers
- DfI duty to provide CDEL budget for all capital and RDEL budget for running the business
- 'PC21' Price Control period runs from 2021-2027
- 'PC28' Price Control Business Plan is in development

niwater
Delivering what matters

2

About NI Water

It costs around €680m each year to deliver water services in Northern Ireland. Thousands of assets at a value of around £4bn, are operated and maintained to provide these services. This includes over 43,000km of water mains and sewers - one and a half times longer than Northern Ireland's entire road network and long enough to circle planet earth.

Households and businesses Our customers rely on the services we provide	920k	Households and businesses We collect wastewater from our customers	750k
Water treatment works We clean the water, making it safe to drink	24	Length of sewers We collect wastewater from our customers using a network of sewers	16,500 km
Water mains length We distribute the drinking water to our customers through water mains	27,000 km	Pumping stations We use pumping stations to get the wastewater to our treatment works	1,356
Pumping stations We use pumping stations to get the drinking water to our customers	355	Wastewater treatment works We treat wastewater and return it safely to the environment	1,027
Service reservoirs We store the drinking water in service reservoirs	287	Sludge management centres Sludge is re-used before being incinerated	66

*Number of service reservoirs in service and scheduled for regular cleaning in line with the drinking water regulations.

niwater
Delivering what matters

3

Water & Wastewater Assets in Newry, Mourne & Down

Impounding & Service Reservoirs

Legend: Service Reservoirs = 44, Impounding Reservoirs = 6

Wastewater Treatment Works > 250 Population Equivalent

Legend: Wastewater Treatment Works > 250PE = 34

niwater
Delivering what matters

4

NI's Wastewater System is at Breaking Point

- System can't cope during heavy rainfall so spills to the environment.
- 40% (c.950) of all storm overflows already failing the standard with 1,200 still to be assessed.
- The wastewater system is contributing to poor quality of watercourses and requires several billion to fix.
- Newry, Mourne & Down District has 285 Storm overflows and 41 are Unsatisfactory Intermittent Discharges (UIDs)

2007 environmental dispensation to operate at lesser standards only meant to be short-term pending investment

niwater
Delivering what matters

5

Newry, Mourne & Down District Council – Connection Issues

Specific areas affected within your Council area will be impacted that are outside of developer funded solutions.

This may be for one or more of the following reasons:

- An area within the wastewater network that is 'closed' to any further connections due to high polluting assets.
- The Wastewater Treatment Works within the catchment is operating at or over its design capacity.
- The availability of funding to undertake the required capital upgrades to existing assets.
- In addition, some areas of the following 9 towns are affected by network constraints: Annsborough, Ballynahinch, Cranfield, Downpatrick, Dundrum, Kilkeel, Maghera (Down), Newry & Saintfield.

WwTW currently at Capacity
Annalong, Clough East, Cranfield, Drumaness, Glassdrumman, Hilltown, Lurganare, Maghera, Meigh, Mountnorris.

* Areas closed to development due to significant network issues

niwater
Delivering what matters

6

A Permanent Funding Solution is Required

Long-term sustainable funding required.

Short-term injections of surplus funds help....

but are not a sustainable solution for critical infrastructure.



NI Audit Office Report - Funding water infrastructure in NI.pdf



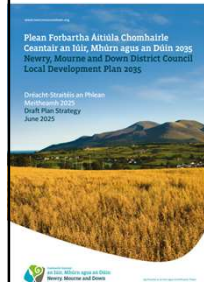
WEB VERSION Water 18.06.2020.pdf



NI-Water-Summary-Position-Paper_Final-Draft.pdf



Newry, Mourne & Down District Council Local Development Plan 2035



Settlement Classifications within the District –

- City/Main Town: Newry: Downpatrick
- Local and Small Town: Newcastle, Warrenpoint/Burren, Kilkeel, Ballynahinch, Saintfield, Killyleagh, Castlewellsan, Crossmaglen.
- Villages: 23 /Small Settlements: 51

Social Development Objectives, Accommodating People and Facilitating Communities

- The Council has identified a requirement for 11,000 new homes over the LDP period 2020-2035.

Economic Development, Objectives Creating Jobs & Promoting Prosperity

- To facilitate the creation of approximately 7740 new jobs by 2035



7

8

2025/26 Planned PC21 Key Capital Investments in Water & Wastewater

PC21 Key Investment Newry Mourne & Down Water & Wastewater

Project Name	2025/26 (£m)
Fofanny to Alt Trunk Main Phase 2	4.88
New Aughnagun Drought Alleviation Pumping Station*	1.36
Drummaroad Strangford Watermains Workpackage*	0.50
Drummaroad Water Treatment Works PC21 Improvements Phase 2	0.30
Silent Valley Pipework diversion to bypass Microtrainer buildings	0.36
Newry Wastewater Treatment Works Essential Base Maintenance & Optimisation Yr 5	5.27
Annsborough Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW)	3.22
Annsborough Drainage Area Networks	1.21
Drumness Wastewater Treatment Works	1.96
Rathfriland Drumlough Sleepy Valley Rathfriland Wastewater Pumping Station	1.41
Dundrum Wastewater Treatment Works Phase 2	1.19
South Area Essential Base Maintenance and Optimisation Year 5 and 6*	0.85
Kilkeel Aughrim River Ingress Sewer Remediation	0.48
Ballynahinch Drainage Area Plan	0.16
	23.14

*Part of a larger project spread across other Council areas



9

Annsborough WwTW – Phase 1 (£8 million)

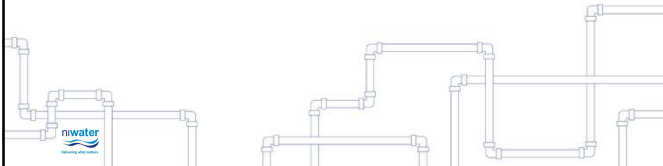


- £8m investment to improve efficiency of works & ensure compliance with NIEA Water Order Consent
- Upgrade parts of the sewer network
- Storm separation providing limited additional capacity
- Phase 2 works will upgrade the WwTW providing additional capacity for future development in the area
- Phase 2 - subject to an additional £12m CDEL funding



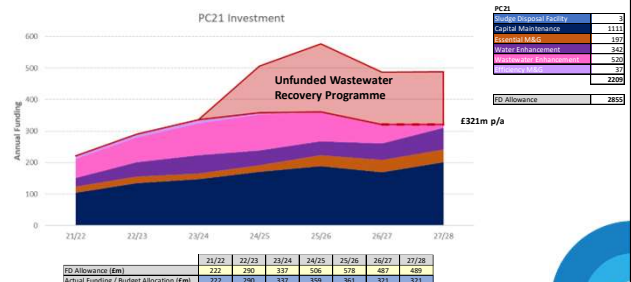
10

PC21 & PC28 Price Controls

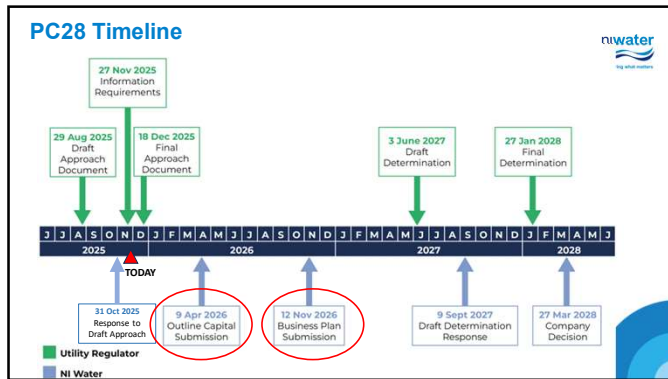


11

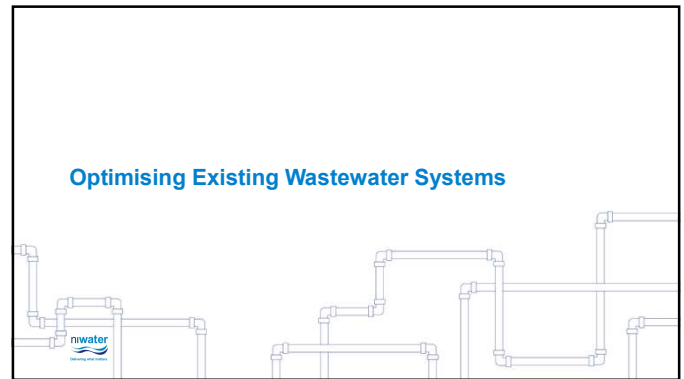
PC21 – Planned Investment



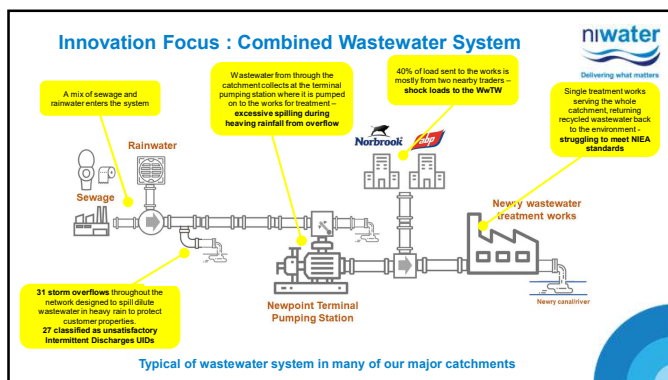
12



13



14



15

We have been exploring alternative ways to connect new properties in Newry faster and for less money

Internal teams and sought specialist external advice to review the entire wastewater system:

- Detailed **assessment of the works** to see where targeted interventions might extend life and boost capacity
- Identified and engaged with the **local trader** (ABP meats) who was routinely sending high-strength trade effluent to our works.
- Using advanced monitoring technology and ground surveys to pinpointed where **rain, river, and sea water infiltrate** the local sewer network, using up valuable capacity.

***£26m investment to reopen Newry for new development quickly and for less than the six year £110m traditional WwTW build solution.**
*Full funding will still be required over the longer period.

16

Summary

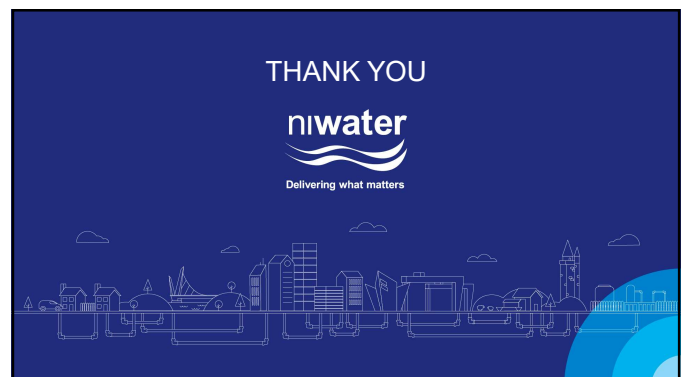
A permanent funding solution is required.

Short-term injections of surplus funds help but...
are not a sustainable solution for critical infrastructure.

Without urgent change to the wastewater system, Northern Ireland faces:

- Persistent and worsening pollution
- Severe restrictions on new housing development
- Deterrence of new investment and stagnation of business growth

17



18