

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Special Strategy Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Monday 26 February 2024 at 5.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre and remotely via Microsoft Teams

In the Chair:	Councillor S O'Hare	
In Attendance in Chamber:	Councillor C Enright Councillor D McAteer Councillor G Sharvin	Councillor O Hanlon Councillor A Mathers
In Attendance via Teams:	Councillor P Byrne Councillor A Lewis Councillor H Reilly Councillor D Taylor	Councillor R Howell Councillor A Quinn Councillor M Rice
Non-Committee Members in Attendance in Chamber:	Councillor T Andrews Councillor G Kearns Councillor A McMurray	Councillor C Bowsie Councillor D Lee-Surginor
Non-Committee Members in Attendance via Teams:	Councillor P Campbell Councillor V Harte Councillor J Truesdale	Councillor D Finn Councillor M Ruane
Officials in Attendance in Chamber:	Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy Regeneration and Tourism Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer	
Officials in Attendance via Teams:	Mr A Patterson, Director of Active and Healthy Communities	

SPR/032/2024: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Kelly and McEvoy.

The Chairperson noted that Ms Ward, Chief Executive, had reviewed the paper and advised that the meeting was to be held in open session.

SPR/033/2024: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

FOR DECISION

SPR/034/2024:

FLOOD RELIEF SCHEME

Read:

Report dated 26 February 2024 from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism, regarding Flood Relief Scheme. **(Copy circulated)**

It was noted that the special meeting held been called due to the receipt of a Letter of Offer for the Enhanced Flood Support Scheme from the Department of the Economy.

Councillor Lewis welcomed the report and proposed the officer's recommendations, thanking Council officers for their hard work during the flooding. He noted that traders would welcome this financial package, and queried when payments could be expected to reach them. He further queried if any funding would be made available to sports clubs and other community groups that weren't eligible for support to date.

Councillor Hanlon, in seconding the proposal, noted her thanks to Council officials and commended the resilience of the communities affected by the flooding. She called on Council to be diligent and proactive in processing the applications as efficiently as possible. She reiterated Councillor Lewis' query regarding support for sports clubs as well as for residents that were affected. She further called on Council to ensure that relevant information regarding the package was easily available and wrap around support be made available.

In response to the Members queries, Mr Mallon confirmed that the scheme was going live at midday on Tuesday 27 February 2024 and would remain open until the 22 March 2024. He advised that Council had raised queries with the Department for Communities in relation to the needs of sports clubs and community groups.

In relation to communication about the scheme, Mr Mallon noted that a press release will issue imminently with all the relevant details as provided by the Department. He further advised that information regarding workshops would be available in the coming days.

Councillor Sharvin stressed that clarity within the guidance notes was vitally important, particularly in relation to insurance payments. He further queried what supports would be made available to sports clubs and community groups, such as churches.

Ms Ward advised Members that Council would be unable to comment on specific cases as each application would need to be considered individually.

Mr Mallon confirmed that this financial package was provided by the Department for Economy and Council were administering it. He confirmed that guidance notes would be released when the scheme opened and that application forms for the hardship schemes were being developed, along with accompanying guidance notes.

Councillor McAteer noted his reservations in relation to the amount of funding available. He advised that it would be a welcome boost for some and simply not enough for others. He criticised the delay of 4 months since the flooding and the further delay of 12 weeks procurement for the appointment of a loss adjuster.

In response to Councillor McAteer's query regarding prioritisation of applications, Mr Mallon

confirmed that applications would be processed as they were received. He advised that the procurement stage was only determined when the funding package had been confirmed by the Department and would hope to have a loss adjuster in place by the time the scheme closed.

Councillor McAteer proposed that Council write to the Minister of Economy concerning the level of funding made available through the enhanced scheme, as there were significant numbers of businesses affected by the flooding that had costs exceeding the £100,000 being made available. He stated this should happen concurrently with the scheme opening. This was seconded by Councillor Sharvin.

Councillor Reilly queried the appointment process for the loss adjuster and whether Council had an estimate in relation to the amount of grant aid that would be distributed. He also requested clarity on the geographical spread in relation to the eligibility criteria, as he noted there was a number of individuals impacted within his DEA and whether there would be an appeal mechanism established.

Mr Mallon confirmed that there were no geographical limits on the eligibility criteria and each application would be reviewed as per the guidelines. He also confirmed that the procurement would follow the Crown Commercial Services framework with the Department and Council working on the specifications in relation to the tender. He confirmed that there would be an appeal process in place, and discussions were ongoing with the Department as to how this would be managed and also advised that Council could not anticipate the number of applicants at this time.

Councillor Taylor queried whether Council had engaged with other Departments such as DAERA and the Department for Communities in relation to any support forthcoming for community organisations and sporting groups that had been affected by flooding.

Mr Mallon confirmed that Council was engaging across various Departments to advise of the issues that were being raised by Members.

Councillor Bowsie requested clarity on the eligibility of applicants who had been ineligible for the first wave of funding support and asked for confirmation that those outside of Downpatrick and Newry could apply for this enhanced scheme. He also queried the definition of "non-domestic premises".

Mr Mallon confirmed that the hardship scheme was developed to try and consider those that had been ineligible for the enhanced scheme and advised Members to refer to the guidance notes as provided by the Department.

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the following was agreed

- **NMDDC accept the letter of offer from DfE to administer the Enhanced Flood Support Scheme.**
- **NMDDC accept the letter of offer from DfE to administer the 2 Hardship Schemes**
- **NMDDC Act as the lead Local Authority for the procurement and appointment of the Loss Assessor on behalf of impacted Councils as per the Business Case at Appendix 1**

- **Officers proceed with the launch of the application process on the 27 February 2024.**

It was further agreed on the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, to write to the Minister of Economy concerning the level of funding made available through the enhanced scheme, as there were significant numbers of businesses affected by the flooding had costs exceeding the £100,000 being made available.

SPR/035/2024:

FOREST PARK CAR PARKING CHARGES

Councillor Hanlon advised that Sinn Féin had requested the item be added to the agenda due to the feedback following a press release from Council around forest park charging. She expressed her confusion as to how the information was released and criticised the lack of clarity around the proposed charges and the use of the free pass. She proposed that the forest park car parking charges roll out was extended April to allow residents to avail of the free pass and that Council messaging was clear with any queries being addressed.

She advised that this would allow time for the collection of a free pass for a chosen park, allow time for the introduction of the changes, and for clarity to be provided by Council to the public. This was seconded by Councillor Mathers.

Councillors Ruane, McAteer and Byrne supported the proposal stating the misinformation could cause difficulty to frontline staff, better communication around the implementation of the charges was required along with the erection of the agreed signage at the parks to assist in the discharge of information to members of the public.

Councillor Sharvin requested clarity on the delay, and whether charges would be cancelled across all parks or remain as was until such time as the changes were made.

Following a lengthy discussion around the issue, Mr Mallon suggested a compromise whereby charges would not be introduced in Kilbroney or Slieve Gullion until an agreed date, but existing charges into Delamont and Castlewellan would remain. In conjunction with this delay, should a member of the public chose Delamont or Castlewellan as their park of choice, they could collect their free pass and make use of it immediately.

Councillor McAteer requested that the Frequently Asked Questions document be updated following the recent feedback.

Following a query from Councillor Lee-Surginor, Mr Mallon confirmed that the free passes would be available from the on-site offices at each park, and the delay in implementation of charges would allow time for users to collect their free passes.

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Mathers, the following was agreed:

- **Council will delay the implementation of charges at all forest parks until 22 April 2024.**

- **Council will erect signage at all forest parks detailing the charging changes, when they will be implemented and how the public can collect their free pass.**
- **Council will develop further FAQ based on feedback that had been received.**

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 6.05pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 4 March 2024.

Signed: Councillor Siobhan O'Hare
Chairperson

Signed: Josephine Kelly
Director of Corporate Services