

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 17 September 2026 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre

In the Chair: Councillor C Bowsie

**In Attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor O Hanlon	Councillor C King
Councillor A Mathers	Councillor D McAteer
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor M Rice

**Committee Members in
Attendance via Teams:**

Councillor P Byrne	Councillor R Howell
Councillor T Howie	Councillor A King
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor D Taylor
Councillor J Truesdale	

**Officials in Attendance
in Chamber:**

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities
Ms A Jones, Director of Corporate Services
Ms V Keegan, Assistant Director of Digital and Communications
Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director Legal & People
Ms J Tierney, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance
Mrs A McAlarney, Development Manager - Planning
Ms M Hughes, HR & OD Manager
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

SPR/139/2026: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSONS REMARKS

An apology was received from Councillor Hearty.

SPR/140/2026: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

**SPR/141/2026: ACTION SHEET OF STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES
MEETING HELD ON 13 AND 27 AUGUST 2026**

Read: Action Sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting held 13 and 27 August 2026. (Copy circulated)

SPR/130/2026 – Local Authority Deeds

Councillor Bowsie requested an update on the information that was to be brought back to Committee, to which Mrs Murphy advised that the information had been provided to Councillor Reilly directly.

SPR/071/2026 – LDP Revised Timetable

Councillor McAteer queried whether any progress had been made on the request for reducing the timeline regarding the LDP completion.

Mr McGilly advised that an additional examiner had been appointed by the Department which would potentially speed up the independent examination process, however it would still require legislative change.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor C King, it was agreed to note the action sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 13 and 27 August 2026.**

ITEMS RESTRICTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on the following matters which related to exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the Council or a government department and employees of, or office holders under, the Council and information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.**

The Chairperson advised the following had been agreed whilst in closed session:

SPR/142/2026: DOWNPATRICK CHURCH STREET PUBLIC REALM SCHEME

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director: Regeneration, regarding Downpatrick Church Street Public Realm Scheme. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the allocation of project risk allowance as detailed in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 4.1 of the officer's report.**

SPR/143/2026: **KILKEEL LOWER SQUARE AND RIVER WALK EI SCHEME**

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director: Regeneration, regarding Kilkeel Lower Square and River Walk EI Scheme. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the allocation of project risk allowance as detailed in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 4.1 of the officer's report.**

SPR/144/2026: **FACILITY REFURBISHMENT PROJECT**

Read: Report from Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities, regarding Facility Refurbishment Project. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve the final project costs and payment to the contractor as detailed within the officer's report.**

SPR/145/2026: **HR STRUCTURE**

Read: Report from Ms M Hughes, HR & OD Manager, regarding HR Structure. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to approve the proposed HR & OD structure and associated additional payroll costs as detailed in the officer's report.**

SPR/146/2026: **LICENCE RE HYDROMETRIC UNITS AT VICTORIA LOCKS, NEWRY, AND CANAL BANK 1 CAR PARK, MILL STREET, NEWRY**

Read: Report from Ms E kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Licence re Hydrometric Units at Victoria Locks, Newry and Canal Bank 1 Car Park, Mill Street. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to grant licences to the Department for Infrastructure – Rivers Agency in respect of Hydrometric Units for measuring water levels at Victoria Locks and Canal Bank 1 car park for a term of 10 years subject to a peppercorn licence fee.**

SPR/147/2026: **PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY BETWEEN RINGHADDY ROAD AND QUARTERLAND ROAD**

Read: Report from Ms E kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Public Right of Way between Ringhaddy Road and Quarterland Road. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Howie, it was agreed to approve the Heads of Terms as detailed at section 2.2 of the officer's report. It was also agreed that officers will engage with the residents' group and two other landowners that have an interest in the Public Right of Way.**

SPR/148/2026: **CORPORATE WEBSITE HOSTING AND WEB SERVICES CONTRACT**

Read: Report from Mrs V Keegan, Assistant Director: Digital & Communication, regarding Corporate Website Hosting and Web Services Contract. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the establishment of a formal contract with the current supplier for the provision of website hosting and associated web services for an initial period of three years, with the option for Council to extend for up to two further periods of one year each, subject to satisfactory performance, continued business need, budget availability and compliance with the terms of the contract.**

FOR NOTING - ITEMS RESTRICTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

SPR/149/2026: MINUTES OF STRATEGIC FINANCE WORKING GROUP MEETING OF 4 AUGUST 2026

Read: Minutes of Strategic Finance Working Group Meeting held 4 August 2026. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the minutes.

SPR/150/2026: MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS UPDATE – QUARTER 1 2026/27

Read: Report from Ms A Jones, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Management Accounts Update – Quarter 1 2026/27. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the quarter 1 2026/27 Management Accounts.

FOR NOTING

SPR/151/2026: MINISTERS MEMO AND CO-CHAIRS LETTER

Read: Report from Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive, regarding Ministers Memo and Co-Chairs Letter. (Copy circulated)

Mrs Ward advised that the correspondence had been copied to all Ministers and relevant Departments to advise that SOLACE and the Department for Communities were working collaboratively to establish a Collaboration and Delivery Agreement regarding financial arrangements between central and local government and Ministers.

Councillor McAteer welcomed a close working relationship between central and local government.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the correspondence.

SPR/152/2026: PLANNING UPDATE REPORT

Read: Report from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director: Regeneration, regarding Planning Department Update. (Copy circulated)

Mr McGilly advised that the report had been presented for noting and provided a detailed breakdown of planning performance across Development Management, Enforcement and the Local Development Plan. He explained that it reflected ongoing monitoring of the service relating to the 2025/26 financial year and represented the most up-to-date performance data available at local level.

Councillor Hanlon welcomed the detailed planning performance report, stating that it would assist Members in responding to queries from applicants and agents, acknowledged the ongoing pressures facing the Planning Department and commended staff for their work. She sought clarification on how applications were allocated across the district, including whether allocations were made in date order and whether certain application types, such as changes of use, could be processed more quickly.

Mr McGilly advised that applications were prioritised based on a range of factors and were therefore not always allocated strictly in date order across the district. He stated that staffing levels and resource availability could vary between areas, impacting allocation times and confirmed that work had recently been undertaken to address backlogs in certain areas by redistributing applications where possible.

Mrs McAlarney advised that a number of categories of development were prioritised within the planning process, noting that planning services operated through three teams across the district, each dealing with differing application volumes and staffing levels, resulting in variations in allocation times.

Councillor Hanlon queried whether change of use applications could be considered under economic development and potentially be prioritised, to which Mrs McAlarney advised that it could be, and advised applicants to highlight these during the application process.

Councillor McAteer welcomed the report and noted the improvements in planning performance, commented on the difficulties faced by Members in explaining delays to applicants and queried whether planning staffing levels from the comparable Council noted within the report could help shape any plans for improvement.

Councillor McAteer also raised concerns regarding seasonal survey requirements, particularly bat surveys, which could result in significant delays to applications and queried whether there was a more flexible approach that could be adopted to allow applications to progress while still ensuring the necessary survey requirements were met.

Mr McGilly advised that comparative information on planning staff structures in other Councils could be provided at a future meeting. He explained that the validation checklist had been introduced to identify all necessary survey requirements at the outset and to ensure applications were only validated once the required information had been submitted. He added that biodiversity checklists assisted in identifying survey requirements and emphasised that agents and applicants should be aware of these requirements prior to submission, thereby helping to ensure that additional survey requirements did not arise unexpectedly during the application process.

Mrs McAlarney advised that the validation checklist had only been in place since 1 June and was ensuring that applications were submitted with all necessary information at the outset, which helped to reduce any potential additions to the backlog. She explained that, previously, requests for surveys had often arisen during the processing stage, resulting in delays due to the seasonal nature of some survey requirements. Mrs McAlarney stated that the validation checklist should largely eliminate these issues by identifying survey requirements before applications were validated.

Councillor McAteer sought clarification on whether the validation checklist comprehensively identified all potential survey and assessment requirements at the outset of the application process. Referring to a previous case involving hedgerow removal and a subsequent requirement for additional environmental assessment, he queried whether the checklist was sufficiently detailed to ensure applicants were made aware of all likely requirements in advance and to minimise unforeseen requests arising later in the process.

Mr McGilly advised that processing applications without the necessary surveys could create difficulties later in the process, as consultation responses might identify additional issues. He stated that the validation checklist remained the key mechanism for addressing these matters and was proving effective in ensuring applications were submitted with the required information.

Councillor Rice referred to the report's indication that the Council had the second highest number of planning applications in Northern Ireland and sought information on how the Council's staffing resources compared with those of other Councils and queried whether additional resources could be secured to help manage the high volume of applications received within the district.

Mr McGilly advised that he could provide comparative analysis on staffing levels and structures across other councils at a future meeting. He noted that different councils operated varying planning structures and processes and that the Council continually reviewed its own arrangements to identify improvements. He further advised that a review of current processes was ongoing and that an update on this work would be brought to a future Committee meeting.

Mr Mallon advised that the Council had been engaging with the Department at a senior level as part of its planning improvement programme. He stated that feedback from the Department indicated that the Planning Department had an adequate staffing structure and resource level relative to its workload. Mr Mallon noted, however, that the key challenge facing the service related to the existing backlog of applications rather than staffing resources.

Councillor Rice expressed the view that, given the significant backlog of planning applications, additional resources should be considered to help address the issue. He commented that if the primary challenge facing the service was the backlog rather than staffing levels, further support or resources should be provided to assist in reducing it.

Mr Mallon advised that Planning officers had recently engaged with the Department as part of the Planning Improvement Process to explore additional approaches to managing both new

planning applications and the existing backlog. He stated that proposals arising from this work were currently being developed and that a report outlining the intended actions would be brought to the Committee at its next meeting.

Councillor McAteer queried whether there were any updates regarding the involvement of the external consultant, to which Mr Mallon advised that it was still early in the process, and a report would be brought back to Committee in due course.

Councillor Hanlon queried when a follow up report would be tabled for Members consideration, to which Mr McGilly advised that a report could be tabled quarterly, to reflect the availability of NISRA planning statistics.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to note the content of the report.**

SPR/153/2026: **ANNUAL REGISTRATION SERVICES REPORT 2025/26**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Annual Registration Services Report 2025/26. (Copy circulated)

Ms Kirk advised that the report set out the first annual registration report for 2025/26.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to note the report.**

SPR/154/2026: **MINUTES OF NEWRY CITY CENTRE REGENERATION PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING OF 30 JUNE 2026**

Read: Minutes of Newry City Centre Regeneration Programme Board Meeting of 30 June 2026. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to note the minutes.**

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 6.55pm

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 5 October 2026.

Signed: _____
Councillor Callum Bowsie
Chairperson

Signed:

Marie Ward
Chief Executive