NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 15 October 2026 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre

In the Chair: Councillor C Bowsie

Committee Members in Attendance in Chamber:
Councillor O Hanlon, Councillor A King, Councillor C King, Councillor A Mathers, Councillor D McAteer, Councillor M Rice

Committee Members in Attendance via Teams:
Councillor P Byrne, Councillor M Hearty, Councillor S O'Hare, Councillor H Reilly, Councillor D Taylor, Councillor J Truesdale

Non-Committee Members in Attendance in Chamber: Councillor J Jackson

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
Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director Healthy Living
Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director Legal & People
Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director Regeneration
Mr C Sage, Assistant Director Sustainability
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

Officials in attendance via Teams: Ms J Tierney, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance

SPR/155/2026: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSONS REMARKS

An apology was received from Councillor Howie.

SPR/156/2026: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SPR/157/2026: **ACTION SHEET OF STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES MEETING HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2026**

Read: Action Sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting held 17 September 2026. (Copy circulated)

SPR/071/2026 – Castlewellan Forest Park NLHF Funding
Councillor Truesdale requested an update on the Compensation Events (CEs) to date, to which Mr Mallon confirmed that a paper was being prepared for Members consideration.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the action sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 17 September 2026.**

SPR/158/2026: **OFFICER REPORT ON NOTICE OF MOTION – SUPREME COURT RULING**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of People & Legal, regarding Officer Report on Notice of Motion – Supreme Court Ruling. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Jackson stated that the DUP viewed the ruling as a positive outcome for the rights of women and girls, noting that women's rights had been hard fought for and said the ruling provided clarity on sex-based protections by affirming that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex. He further stated that the judgment clarified that individuals born male who identify as women do not have a right to access women-only spaces or services.

Ms Kirk advised that the recommendation was to note the Notice of Motion relating to the Supreme Court ruling, explaining that the matter had been considered by the Council's Equality and Good Relations Reference Group on 30 September 2026, and that the consensus of those present was to recommend that Council await the outcome of the High Court action being taken by the Equality Commission before considering any further action. She noted that a decision in the case was expected around December 2026.

Councillor Reilly expressed support for Councillor Jackson's comments, stating that it was important to uphold and respect the rights of women, particularly in relation to the use of private spaces and facilities. He criticised the actions of the Equality Commission in this matter and said that, regardless of the outcome of the High Court case, it was common sense to respect and protect women's use of such facilities.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, it was agreed to note the Notice of Motion: Supreme Court Ruling was discussed at the Councillor's Equality and Good Relations Reference Group on 30 September 2026 and the consensus of those present was to recommend**

Council await the outcome of the High Court and direction from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in relation to the Supreme Court Ruling.

SPR/159/2026: **NEWRY CANAL LOCK 6 RESTORATION WORKS, LOCK 7 SURVEY**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding Lock 6 Newry Canal Restoration Works & Lock 7 survey. (Copy circulated)

Mr Mallon outlined the report, noting that approvals had previously been obtained in June 2025. He advised that design work for Lock 6 had since been completed, and an updated quotation had also been received from the framework contractor, and that additional budget was being sought to enable the works at Lock 6 to proceed. He noted that visual condition surveys had been undertaken on a number of locks, with Lock 7 identified for more detailed survey work.

Councillor Mathers welcomed the proposed canal improvement works but questioned whether it would have been more efficient to assess and address all locks as part of a single programme, noting concerns that a phased, lock-by-lock approach could significantly delay completion of the overall repairs.

Councillor McAteer seconded Councillor Mathers' proposal echoing his sentiments.

Mr Mallon advised that works to Lock 5 had already been completed and that the current report related to proposed works at Lock 6. He noted that visual surveys had been undertaken on Locks 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8, with Lock 7 identified as the next priority for detailed survey work. He added that, should Members wish, officers could bring forward a programme of detailed inspections and design work for the remaining locks to develop a comprehensive project covering the canal's lock infrastructure as a whole.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor McAteer, the following was agreed:**

- **To procure and appoint a contractor and additional consultancy services as required to deliver the Lock No. 6 project as outlined in section 2.1 of the officer's report.**
- **To procure a detailed survey and restoration plan for Lock No. 7.**
- **To update the capital plan with the budget required to progress the project.**

SPR/160/2026: **PURCHASE OF SAINTFIELD DEPOT**

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding the Purchase of Saintfield Depot. (Copy circulated)

Councillor Bowsie noted that the wording of his original Notice of Motion had not been included within the report and proceeded to read it out for the Committee. He thanked officers for preparing the report within the limited timescales available, however he stated that he did not support the officer recommendation not to purchase the site, arguing that the cost estimates were excessive and that the wider economic impact of ongoing parking issues in Saintfield should be taken into account. He emphasised the need to address parking capacity across the district and questioned why the higher land values in Saintfield should prevent investment in parking provision for local ratepayers. He also queried why planning and development constraints appeared to make the proposal unviable when similar challenges had been overcome on other Council projects.

Councillor Bowsie proposed that Council proceed with the purchase of the site. This was seconded by Councillor Reilly.

Mr Sage advised that the report had been prepared following discussions at the Strategic Finance Working Group (SFWG) in August 2026, explaining that a site visit with Translink had not alleviated previously identified concerns relating to land contamination, the presence of asbestos-containing materials and the associated remediation costs. He further advised that an initial planning assessment indicated significant challenges, including the site's location within a predominantly residential area and its frontage onto a protected route, which would require consultation with DFI Roads. He advised that discussions with DFI Roads had highlighted concerns regarding access arrangements, traffic movements and the proposed bus stop and lay-by.

Mr Sage confirmed that taking all the issues into consideration, the recommendation was that the site should not be purchased and that Translink should be advised accordingly so they could proceed with placing the site on the open market.

Councillor Reilly expressed concern that the report presented an overly negative assessment of the proposal, stating that he considered the site to represent a significant opportunity to support economic growth and local businesses in Saintfield and that failing to secure the site could have long-term consequences for the town.

Councillor Reilly proposed that Members should undertake a site visit before making a decision, as he did not believe the issues identified were insurmountable.

Councillor Hanlon supported the suggestion of a site visit, stating that Members needed to view the site to fully understand the proposal and the challenges involved. She stressed the importance of considering the officer’s report, and stated that she was generally content with the officer recommendations.

Councillor Truesdale echoed the comments regarding the value of a site visit and stressed that the report represented an impartial assessment rather than an attempt to discourage the purchase. She recalled the concerns raised at SFWG regarding the significant cost per parking

space and the length of time it would take to recover the investment. She also sought an update on discussions regarding use of the Saintfield Community Centre for parking purposes. Mr Patterson advised that discussions with Saintfield Community Centre remained ongoing and that an update would be provided to Members in due course.

Councillor Taylor supported a site visit and acknowledged that, while some of the identified challenges might be overcome, the issues outlined in the report required careful consideration. He noted the planning and access concerns raised by DFI Roads and requested that Councillor Bowsie share any alternative cost information that he was in possession of as it would be useful for Members' consideration.

Mrs Ward noted that Translink was keen to progress the sale of the site and suggested that, if Members considered a site visit necessary, efforts should be made to arrange it before the matter was considered by Full Council.

Mrs Ward advised the Committee that they now had two proposals to consider, first Councillor Bowsie's regarding purchasing the site and Councillor Reilly's regarding a site visit.

Councillor Bowsie stated that he felt a site visit was akin to a "red herring" and wished to proceed with his proposal to purchase the site as he felt that Translink had been extremely patient with an original deadline of August for Council consideration and an officer had already carried out a site visit.

Councillor McAteer noted that it would be beneficial to have more information on the parking situation in Saintfield as he felt there were no issues getting parked during the week and acknowledged that weekends may be more difficult. He stated that further information regarding suitable alternatives should also be considered.

Councillor Taylor noted that he had asked Councillor Bowsie following his proposal to share any relevant information regarding costs to assist Members to make an informed decision, to which Councillor Bowsie noted that it was difficult to discuss costs in open session but stated that he had been in contact with car parking professionals who had advised that the costs were excessive. He stated that following SFWG meeting in August, a more detailed breakdown of the costs was requested and noted his disappointment that this had not happened.

Councillor Jackson noted that Saintfield had a chronic car parking issue that needed to be addressed, but also there was a lack of ground available to facilitate additional parking and that these two issues should be taken into account when considering purchasing the land.

Councillor Byrne recognised the importance of supporting the local economy and investigating any need for additional parking provision and noted that Members had been discussing the costs associated with the proposal without having all of the relevant information available and emphasised the need to make an informed decision in the best interests of ratepayers. He supported the suggestion of a site visit and suggested that the matter be deferred to allow for a site visit before a final decision was taken at Full Council.

Councillor Bowsie noted his disappointment in the delay in reaching a decision.

Mrs Ward noted that, if Members were in agreement, the item could be deferred to accommodate a site visit prior to November Council meeting should Translink be agreeable, and a decision made on the item at November Council meeting. Councillor Bowsie agreed to defer decision on his motion being made until after the site visit took place.

Mrs Ward acknowledged the work undertaken by officers to gather the information within a limited timeframe and noted that the report had been brought forward following discussions at the SFWG. She emphasised that a key issue remained establishing the nature and extent of the parking demand in Saintfield and understanding the factors contributing to the perceived shortage of parking, including whether it was related to park-and-ride or commuter usage. She recognised that Translink wished to progress the sale of the site but cautioned against making a decision without sufficient and relevant detail and stressed the importance of Members being fully informed.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to defer the item to allow for a site visit (if Translink were agreeable) prior to November Council, to allow for a decision on the item at November Council meeting.**

SPR/161/2026: **PURCHASE OF NEW PAY AND DISPLAY MACHINES**

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Purchase of New Pay and Display Machines. (Copy circulated)

Mr Sage outlined the report that sought approval to purchase 45 new pay-and-display machines for Council-operated off-street car parks. He explained that the existing machines were nearing the end of their operational life and required replacement to maintain reliable parking services and the new machines would provide improved functionality, including contactless and chip card payments, vehicle registration input, remote monitoring and enhanced reporting capabilities.

Councillor Hanlon expressed concerns about the report, noting that it did not include information on income generated from existing pay-and-display car parks or how that revenue was being used. She questioned the rationale for investing in new machines before addressing wider issues relating to Council's parking strategy and charging arrangements, highlighting the poor condition of the Irish Street car park in Downpatrick, arguing that investment in parking infrastructure should extend to resurfacing and maintenance works. She suggested the proposal appeared premature without a broader review of parking provision and associated finances and proposed to defer the item to allow for further information to be brought back to Members before a decision was taken.

Mrs Ward noted that not all Members sat on all committees but took the opportunity to note that the item had been tabled at the latest SFWG meeting, as well as at the Sustainability &

Environment Working Group for discussion but that a report could be tabled at Committee for Members consideration.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to defer the item to allow for further information to be tabled for Members consideration.**

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

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, 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 Mathers, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.**

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

SPR/162/2026: **LICENCE OF OFFICE SPACE AT CROSSMAGLEN COMMUNITY CENTRE**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director: People & Legal, regarding Licence of Office Space at Crossmaglen Community Centre. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to grant the annual licence agreement with the group identified in the report for a period of up to five years subject to the licence fee noted in the officer's report.**

SPR/163/2026: **RELEASE OF CHARGE FROM PART OF LAND AT MULLAGHBAWN**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director: People & Legal, regarding Release of Charge from Land at Mullaghbawn. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor C King, seconded by Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to release the charge over that portion of the lands as outlined in red on the map attached to the officer's report.**

SPR/164/2026: **LICENCE FOR CAR PARK AT BARNMEEN COMMUNITY CENTRE**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director: People & Legal, regarding Licence for Car Park at Barnmeen Community Centre. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed to grant a licence in respect of the car parking spaces at Barnmeen Community Centre during term time to the party named in the report for a term of 5 years at a peppercorn licence fee subject to Departmental consent.**

SPR/165/2026: **LICENCE FOR ACCESS AT MILL STREET NEWRY**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director: People & Legal, regarding Licence for Access at Mill Street Newry. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to issue a licence to the party named in the officer's report in respect of the strip of lands at Mill Street, Newry as outlined in green on the map attached for a period of 12 months, subject to the licence fee noted in the officer's report.**

SPR/166/2026: **SURRENDER OF LEASE AT LIR GROVE NEWTOWNHAMILTON**

Read: Report from Ms E kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Surrender of Lease at Lir Grove, Newtownhamilton. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Taylor, seconded by Councillor C King, it was agreed to surrender the Lease dated 21 June 1993 in respect of lands at Lir Grove, Newtownhamilton, subject to agreement from NI Housing Executive.**

SPR/167/2026: **SURRENDER OF PART OF LANDS AT DONARD PARK NEWCASTLE**

Read: Report from Ms E kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Surrender of Part of Lands at Donard Park Newcastle. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to accept a surrender of a portion of the lands leased by the party named in the report as hatched black on the map attached to the officer's report.**

SPR/168/2026: **CANAL BANK 3 EMERGENCY WORK**

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director Sustainability, regarding Canal Bank 3 Emergency Work. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the final account value as detailed in section 2.3 of the officer's report.**

SPR/169/2026: **STANDBY GENERATORS**

Read: Report from Mr C Sage, Assistant Director Sustainability, regarding Standby Generators. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the business case to progress a capital project for standby power provision at Newry Leisure Centre.**

Cllr Hearty left the meeting at this stage – 7.00pm

SPR/170/2026: **DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT REVIEW – PLANNING**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding Development Management Review - Planning. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to approve the implementation of a 12 month pilot project within Development Management to address case load allocation and processing as detailed in section 2.2 and 4.1 of the officer's report.**

SPR/171/2026: **ROWALLANE DEA MULTI-SPORT DELIVERY PROGRAMME**

Read: Report from Mr C Haughey, Assistant Director Healthy Living, regarding Rowallane DEA Multi-Sport Delivery Programme. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the following was agreed:**

- **To appoint a framework contractor for delivery of the 3G pitch as detailed within the report.**
- **To procure and appoint an Integrated Consultancy Team to progress the Langley Road Multi-Sports Hub to planning stage and subsequent delivery of the hockey pitch at the site.**
- **To continue stakeholder engagement regarding future governance management and lease arrangements of the Langley Road Multi-Sports Hub site.**

SPR/172/2026: **LEGAL ADMINISTRATION – STRUCTURE REVIEW**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Legal Administration – Structure Review. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the new Legal Administration structure, to create one additional Full-Time Equivalent Legal Advisor and one law student placement, as presented at Appendix 1 and section 2 of the officer's report.**

Cllr Rice left the meeting at this stage – 7.25pm

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

SPR/173/2026: **NCCR THEATRE CONFERENCE UPDATE REPORT**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding NCCR Theatre Conference Update Report. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed to note the update provided on progress against delivery of the NCCR Theatre and Conference Facility.**

FOR NOTING

SPR/174/2026: **NCCR PROGRAMME BOARD MINUTES**

Read: Minutes of the NCCR Programme Board Meeting held 28 September 2026. (Copy circulated)

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

SPR/175/2026: **BRCD TOURISM PROPOSITION PROJECT BOARD MINUTES**

Read: Minutes of the BRCD Tourism Proposition Project Board Meeting held 23 September 2026. (Copy circulated)

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

SPR/176/2026: **STATUTORY REPORTING: SECTION 75 POLICY SCREENING REPORT – QUARTERLY REPORT FOR PERIOD JULY – SEPTEMBER 2026**

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Statutory Reporting: Section 75 Policy Screening Report – Quarterly Report for Period July – September 2026. (Copy circulated)

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor C King, it was agreed to note Section 75 Policy Screening Report – Quarterly Report for period July – September 2026.**

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 7.32pm

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

Signed: _____

Councillor Callum Bowsie
Chairperson

Signed: _____

Marie Ward
Chief Executive