

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 15 May 2025 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre

In the Chair: Councillor T Howie

**In Attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor M Hearty	Councillor A Mathers
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor A Quinn
Councillor H Reilly	Councillor M Rice
Councillor G Sharvin	

**Committee Members in
Attendance via Teams:**

Councillor P Byrne	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor D Taylor	

**Non-Committee Members
In Attendance:**

Councillor T Andrews

**Officials in Attendance
in Chamber:**

Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance
Ms C McClean, Assistant Director of People & Legal
Mr C Moffett, Head of Corporate Policy
Mr P Rooney, Head of Legal Administration
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Mrs F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

SPR/070/2025: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSONS REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillor Enright, and Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive.

SPR/071/2025: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

**SPR/072/2025: ACTION SHEET OF STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES
MEETING HELD ON 17 APRIL 2025**

Read: Action Sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee
meeting held 17 April 2025. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by
Councillor Mathers, it was agreed to approve the**

**action sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources
Committee meeting of 17 April 2025.**

FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION

SPR/073/2025: APPROACH TO CITY, TOWN AND VILLAGE SIGNAGE

Read: Report from Mr C Moffet, Head of Corporate Policy, regarding Approach to City, Town and Village Signage. **(Copy Circulated)**

Mr Moffett outlined the Report, advising there had been numerous meetings of the Equality and Good Relations Reference Group at which the matter had been debated, without reaching consensus. He advised that purpose was to agree a corporate approach, that there was no budget agreed regarding implementing elements of this, and it was not about proceeding to action any agreements on a grand scale.

Mr Moffett detailed that the ongoing discussions at the Equality & Good Relations Reference Group were in relation to Tier 1 and 2 settlements within the District, of which there were 8, and the Report tabled for discussion today was an attempt to reach agreement for a District-wide approach, which encompassed 89 settlements.

Mr Moffett advised that the Report sought agreement on a number of issues, to include an agreed corporate:

- Branding approach to signage
- Language approach to replacement of pre-existing and erection of new signage not on Council property
- Agreement that signage on Council property be erected in line with Council's Brand Identity Guidelines i.e. bilingual

Mr Moffett advised that in relation to branding, the three options for consideration were to make full use of Council branding; to make use of Council icon; or to have no branding. He advised that in relation to replacing pre-existing signage not on Council property, Members were asked to consider either a new bilingual sign or a like for like language approach of what is currently in place. He further advised that when erecting a new sign not located on Council property, the options for consideration were either a bilingual sign or for Members to propose and agree an alternative approach.

Mr Moffett outlined the recommended options in relation to policy context, noting that Council had an active and established bilingualism policy that aimed to facilitate and promote the use of both Irish and English language within the Council area, and also brand identity guidelines that had previously been agreed by Council which outlined policy requirements for signage on Council buildings, property, boundaries and information signage. He confirmed that Council had not yet reached agreement with regard to a branding style when erecting signage that was not Council property.

Councillor Hanlon thanked Mr Moffett for the detailed Report and highlighted her Party's support for bilingual signs, reiterating that it supported Council's existing policy. She proposed that only the Council icon be used on signage, noting that the boundary sign already advised people they were entering the District area and that the use of full Council branding would be too busy. She further proposed that in relation to language option 1 be implemented i.e. Bilingual signage as this was keeping with the bilingual policy of Council. This was seconded by Councillor Hearty.

Councillor Sharvin noted his support for the proposal, stating that the use of the icon alone on signage was in keeping with the legacy Down and Newry and Mourne approach and option 1 with respect to language remained in line with existing Council policy.

Councillor Bowsie stated that he had no issue with the Irish Language, noting that languages and culture tended to move with people. He stated that while Council claimed to respect the diversity of languages and cultures within the District, he believed that it was systematically imposing Irish leading gateway signage across the District despite how the local District Electoral Area (DEA) Forums had voted on the issue.

Councillor Bowsie then outlined his concerns regarding the Officer's Report, to include the options for gateway signage on Council property that he stated was ultimately an officer's recommendation based on a bilingualism policy that referred to Council services and facilities, not gateway signage. He further stated that the options in section 2.2 of the Report had no third option for fully mono-lingual signage to reflect the longstanding position of the legacy Down District Council. He further noted that Appendix 3 was referenced within the Report but stated that this policy gave no authorisation for dual language signage.

Councillor Bowsie asked the following questions:

- In 2023, each of the 7 DEA Forums had been asked to vote on bi- or mono-lingual signage for tiers 1 and 2 settlements with Rowallane unanimously in support of monolingual signage. Why had the results of that consultation not been included within the Officer's Report?
- Slieve Gullion DEA was the only DEA to adopt dual language in 2014, while Rowallane had not yet voted for dual language signage. When did Council approve to end taking a DEA approach to dual language?
- Where within Council's bilingualism or branding policy did it specify that Irish was to be the leading language?

Councillor Sharvin requested clarity in relation to Councillor Bowsie's first question stating that it was his understanding that reference to the DEA Forums was relating to tier 1 and 2 settlements, while he believed that this Report had been tabled to reach an agreement for a whole District approach.

Mr Moffett advised that as outlined in section 1.3 and 1.4 of his Report, a myriad of proposed actions and responses that could be taken forward were discussed at the Equality and Good Relations Reference Group, confirming that one such action had been for officers to meet with DEA Forums to discuss signage options in relation to tier 1 and 2 settlements. He noted that there was only one settlement in the Rowallane area with regard to this action, which was Ballynahinch. He confirmed that no consensus had been reached in relation to any of the approaches discussed at the Equality and Good Relations Reference Group, reiterating again that the Report tabled was to agree a way forward with regard to all 89 settlements within the District, not just tier 1 and 2 settlements.

Councillor Bowsie interjected stating that a senior Council official had met with the Rowallane DEA and a show of hands vote had taken place with regard to preference on signage, with Ballynahinch unanimously voting against bilingual signage. He stated that he believed this vote was not referenced within the Report as the reporting officer did not like the outcome, arguing that all the information needed to be presented to Members to enable them to make an informed decision.

Councillor Howie stated that she did not recall a show of hands vote in Ballynahinch.

Mr Moffett stated that the discussion with the DEA Forum was only relating to tier 1 and 2 settlements in order to help inform further discussion at the Equality & Good Relations Reference Group and was not a confirmatory vote. He further advised that officers only engaged 6 of the 7 DEAs as Slieve Croob did not have a tier 1 or 2 settlement.

Mr Moffett advised that signage requirements were set out in either the guidelines for employees or the procedures with regard to implementation, noting it was ultimately custom and practice as to how the legacy Councils implemented their bilingualism policy in each area.

Councillor Reilly noted that he did not believe Councillor Bowsie received an answer to his first question, questioning what was to be the foremost language, not just policy. He noted that the Irish language seemed to create division as there was no consensus with regard to implementation, further expressing his disappointment that despite being discussed for over a year no agreement had been reached, stating it had been tabled at Committee where he believed that Sinn Féin could force it through with a majority.

Councillor Howie reiterated Mr Moffett's statement that nothing would be implemented immediately and en-masse, but rather as and when needed.

Councillor Reilly noted that despite Unionist objections, he believed that Sinn Féin and SDLP would push the agreement through, which further cemented his view of the second-class position of Unionists within the Community.

Councillor Taylor noted for accuracy that Slieve Gullion had adopted bilingual signage as a majority view, not unanimously. He stated that the Reference Group provided an opportunity to have frank discussions relating to sensitive issues where, on many occasions, agreements could be reached to benefit the whole community. He stated his belief that this did not appear to be the case during discussions relating to the Irish language, stating that Unionists did try and come forward with a positive and constructive approach, but he felt that the republican mindset would not compromise to recommendations that everyone would agree with.

Councillor Taylor stated that he believed should the majority agree the Report it would not lend itself to community relations by imposing one viewpoint on everyone, especially in areas that had no affinity with the Irish language.

Councillor Hanlon reminded Members that Council already had a bilingualism policy in place and a natural progression of this was gateway signage. She noted her disappointment that while reference had been made to respecting diversity, other Members had referenced areas that they believed would not welcome bilingual signage. She made her own observations at some of those areas offering Irish language classes or choosing to send their children to Irish Medium Schools and stated that those Members were not speaking for the whole community.

Councillor Sharvin raised his concern at Councillor Bowsie's accusation that a Council officer disregarded information and expressed his disbelief that the statement had not been challenged. He noted that the officer in question had stated that the information had been considered as a tier 1 and 2 debate, but the Report tabled referred to the District as a whole. He asked Councillor Bowsie to withdraw the comment.

Councillor McAteer echoed Councillor Sharvin's statements, further noting his disappointment that the issue could not have been resolved at the Equality & Good Relations Reference

Group and expressed his hope for more maturity within the Chamber. He also asked Councillor Bowsie to withdraw his statement regarding the Council officer.

Councillor Howie expressed her disappointment that the Irish language had become such a divisive topic, expressing her belief that it was for all communities to speak and use the language.

Councillor Howie advised that Councillor Reilly had requested a recorded vote on Councillor Hanlon's proposal, a copy of which is appended to the minutes.

The results of the vote were as follows:

FOR	10
AGAINST	3
ABSTENTIONS	0

Mrs Kelly stated that officers had spent considerable time preparing the Report and acted in a fair and respectful manner.

AGREED:

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

- **That Option 3 was the preferred option when erecting signage that was not located on Council property, as outlined at section 2.1 of the Officer's Report i.e. the sole use of Council logo on signage.**
- **That Option 1 was the preferred option when replacing existing or erecting new signage not on Council property as outlined at section 2.2 of the Officer's Report i.e. bilingual signage be used.**
- **That signage on Council property be erected in line with Council's Brand Identity Guidelines, i.e. bilingual.**

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 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 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor Hearty, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.

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

SPR/074/2025:

RENEWAL OF LEASE AT MARTIN'S LANE, NEWRY

Read:

Report from Ms C McClean, Assistant Director of Legal and People, and Mr P Rooney, Head of Legal administration, regarding Renewal of Lease at Martin's Lane, Newry. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Quinn, it was agreed to lease the New Lands at Martin's Lane as outlined in red on Map 2 attached for a term of 25 years from 25th March 2017 subject to the premium as outlined within the Officer's Report

SPR/075/2025:

LICENCE OF THE MONUMENT BUILDING AND YARD, CASTLEWELLAN FOREST PARK

Read:

Report from Mr P Rooney, Head of Legal Administration, regarding Licence of the Monument Building and Yard, Castlewellan Forest Park. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to grant the company named in the Officer's Report a short term licence of the Monument Building and Yard as outlined in red and hatched orange on Map 2 attached hereto for a period of 2 months and thereafter from month to month until the proposed lease is signed subject to a market value licence fee.

SPR/076/2025:

TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTS

Read:

Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Treasury Management and Accounts. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to approve the Direct Award Contract for the Treasury Management and Accounts Closedown advisors for a period of 12 months.

SPR/077/2025:

DIRECT AWARD CONTRACTS

Read:

Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Direct Award Contracts. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Quinn, it was agreed to approve the Direct Award Contracts as noted in Appendix 1 of the Officer's Report until 30 June 2026.

SPR/078/2025: **DUBLIN BELFAST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (DBEC) SUMMIT 2025**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) Summit 2025. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to accept the Officer's Recommendations.

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

SPR/079/2025: **PORT HEALTH RESOURCES**

Read: Report from Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment, regarding Port Health Resources. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the contents of the report and the preferred operating model as set out in sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the Officer's Report.

FOR NOTING

SPR/080/2025: **STATUTORY REPORTING – RURAL NEEDS ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT FOR PERIOD 1 APRIL 2024 – 31 MARCH 2025**

Read: Report from Ms C McClean, Assistant Director of Legal & People, regarding Statutory Reporting – Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report for period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Quinn, it was agreed to note the completed Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report for period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 (Appendix 1) and submit to DAERA to meet their requested deadline of 20 June 2025.

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 6.58pm

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 2 June 2025.

Signed: **Councillor Tierna Howie**
 Chairperson

Signed: **Josephine Kelly**
 Director of Corporate Services

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 15/05/2025 VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: SPR Committee

SUBJECT OF VOTE: Item 4 – Approach to City, Town & Village Signage

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
C Bowsie		1		
P Byrne	1			
C Enright				1
O Hanlon	2			
M Hearty	3			
T Howie	4			
A Mathers	5			
D McAteer	6			
S O'Hare	7			
A Quinn	8			
H Reilly		2		
M Rice	9			
G Sharvin	10			
D Taylor		3		
TOTALS	10	3		1