

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 12 February 2026 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre

In the Chair: Councillor O Hanlon

**In Attendance in
Chamber:**

Councillor M Hearty	Councillor R Howell
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 A Lewis
Councillor H Reilly	

Non-Committee Members

In Attendance: Councillor T Andrews

Non-Committee Members

In Attendance via Teams: Councillor J Truesdale Councillor A Quinn

**Officials in Attendance
in Chamber:**

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism
Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director of People & Legal
Mr C Sage, Assistant Director Sustainability
Ms C Hughes, Head of People & Performance (Acting)
Ms M Hughes, HR & OD Manager
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

SPR/022/2026: APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSONS REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Howie, O'Hare and Taylor, and from Mr Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities and Mrs Murphy, Director of Environment and Sustainability.

SPR/023/2026: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Andrews declared an interest in item 8 – Council Contributions to the LGSC 26/27.

**SPR/024/2026: ACTION SHEET OF STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES
MEETING HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2026**

Read: Action Sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting held 22 January 2026. **(Copy circulated)**

SPR/005/2026 – DFI Greenways Offer of Funding

Councillor Reilly queried the process relating to the funding, to which Mr Mallon confirmed that the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) had issued calls for funding following which Council had considered its current strategies and active travel plans, identified suitable routes already in development, and submitted an application for funding accordingly.

Councillor Reilly queried whether the Annalong Coastal Path could be considered as a potential development opportunity.

Mr Mallon advised that, subject to funding availability, there would be an opportunity to arrange workshops with Members on Greenways and Active Travel development.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Howell, it was agreed to note the action sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 22 December 2026.**

FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION

SPR/025/2026: **DRAFT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES 2026-27**

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance and Performance, presented by Ms C Hughes, Acting Head of Performance and Improvement, regarding Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2026-27. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Hughes outlined the report, confirming that Council was required to set annual performance improvement objectives under Part 12 of the Local Government Act. She advised that four of the five existing objectives had been carried forward into the new year, while Objective 2, relating to economic development, had been amended to better reflect ongoing work in relation to the economy. She further noted that, if approved at Committee, public consultation would commence on 13 March, prior to ratification by Council.

Councillor Mathers welcomed the commitment to improving the cleanliness of the District but noted that his Party had raised significant concerns regarding cleanliness on roads leading into Newry. He questioned that, although procurement for staff training was underway, why it was only taking place at this stage, stating that a multi-year plan should already have been in place.

Mrs Ward advised that Council had a duty to comply with health and safety regulations and confirmed that Council had been in contact with the Department For Infrastructure (DFI), confirming that both organisations aimed to work more closely together in future to enable cleaning works to coincide with road closures.

Councillor Mathers requested clarification on why the training was not already in place, stating that the matter was not a new issue.

Mrs Ward advised that Mrs Murphy had previously requested that the training be implemented and that the reasons why this had not occurred were currently being addressed.

Councillor C King highlighted the work his Party had undertaken to address fly tipping and illegal dumping, noting his recent Notice of Motion that had been referred to the Sustainability

& Environment Committee, commended staff for the clean-up work carried out to date and stressed that enforcement should remain central to future action plans.

Mrs Ward confirmed that a successful recruitment drive had been completed for an Enforcement Manager and stated that while the role would focus on enforcement, it was also important for Council to address the underlying cause of the litter issue, namely the inappropriate disposal of litter by members of the public and reminded people that they should take their litter home and dispose of it appropriately.

The Chairperson endorsed this statement, expressing her frustration at the large amount of public littering on Downpatrick roads. She also queried whether any aspect of the Planning Service Improvement Programme, specifically regarding statutory consultee engagement, would address delays in the processing of planning applications.

CLlr Hearty joined the meeting at this stage – 6.12pm

Mr Mallon confirmed that Council maintained regular engagement with statutory consultees, central planning, and other stakeholders. He noted that delays had been widely discussed and assured Members that Council would continue to engage with the Department to address any outstanding issues.

Councillor McAteer noted that efforts had been made to improve the Planning Department's performance statistics but queried what further measures could be taken. He cited a recent issue in which a bat survey was not considered until it had become out of date, emphasising that applicants should not be penalised for delays beyond their control.

Councillor McAteer stressed the importance of improving relationships with applicants and engaging with both the NI Executive and Planning Departments in the South, where planning processes had been streamlined, backlogs were minimal, and staff resources were focused on current applications, acknowledging that some issues related to legislation while others required changes to DFI protocols. He expressed concern that DFI appeared to be "happily retired" from taking an active interest in the current planning process, which he considered detrimental for Councils.

Councillor McAteer stressed that dog fouling required strict enforcement, potentially including the introduction of stricter by-laws, to ensure that individuals responsible for damaging public areas were appropriately penalised.

Mrs Ward reiterated that the new Enforcement Manager would be considering enforcement across the District.

The Chairperson noted her agreement with potentially engaging with planning processes in the South, where, if objectors did not engage within a specified timeframe, the planning process proceeded without their input. She added that to suggest that DFI had effectively taken a step back, implying that all officials were not performing their duties, was unfair.

Councillor McAteer disagreed with the Chairperson, emphasising that he believed the issue lay with the system itself, stating that he believed that planning authority had been delegated to Council under-resourced and had not been actively reviewed or addressed since.

Mrs Ward stated that Council maintained a positive working relationship with DFI and central planning, noting successful collaboration in establishing the new arrangements for the Higher-Level Apprenticeship within Planning. She confirmed that Council was engaging with the new

Head of Planning in Central Government, describing this as a positive engagement, and emphasised that DFI were working with Council to address ongoing concerns.

Councillor Reilly referred to the cleanliness objective, noting that Council had previously engaged with community groups on litter-picking initiatives, supported by small grants to encourage participation. He added that he had raised the issue previously but had not received any response.

Mrs Ward confirmed that Council continued to promote clean-up days and planned to develop the annual spring/summer clean-up drive. She thanked the communities who participated in these initiatives, commending them for taking pride in their local areas, and reiterated that the responsibility for proper litter disposal rested with the public.

Councillor Truesdale queried why no targets had been included in the *Live Here, Love Here* section for 2026/27.

Ms Hughes explained that, although funding for *Live Here, Love Here* remained unchanged, the number of projects would vary depending on the funding required for each. She noted that while there may be fewer projects than in previous years, the overall benefit to the community could be greater, and therefore it had been decided not to set a specific target for the year.

AGREED:

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

- **The five draft performance improvement objectives 2026-27, as outlined in Appendix 1.**
- **The proposed approach and timetable for publishing the Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27, as outlined in Appendix 2, including approval to commence the consultation and engagement process on 13 February 2026.**

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

AGREED:

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

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

SPR/026/2026: INCREASE TO EV CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE CAPITAL BUDGET

Read: Report from Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment, presented by Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Increase to EV Charging Infrastructure Capital Budget. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hearty, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to increase the capital funding as detailed within the officer's report.**

SPR/027/2026: SLA BELFAST LEGAL SERVICES

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director People & Legal, regarding SLA Belfast Legal Services. **(Copy circulated)**

As there was dissent within the chamber the proposal to accept the officer's recommendations was put to a show of hands vote, with the results as follows:

FOR	8
AGAINST	2
ABSTENTIONS	0

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Rice, it was agreed that Council enter into a one year SLA with Belfast City Council Legal Services Department from 1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027 on a non-profit / cost recovery basis by virtue of the provisions of section 105 of the Local Government (NI) Act 1972 in relation to legal services as indicated at section 1.4 of the officer's report.**

Cllr Byrne had left the meeting prior to the vote

SPR/028/2026: PROPOSED LEASE OF LANDS AT MARTINS LANE, NEWRY

Read: Report from Ms E Kirk, Assistant Director Legal & People, regarding Proposed Lease of Lands of Lands at Martins Lane, Newry. **(Copy circulated)**

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

- To formalise the lease in respect of the Original Lands (which includes the New Lands) at Martins Lane from 2017 – 2025 subject to the premium detailed within the report.**

- **To enter into a lease in respect of the New Lands at Martins Lane for a term of 25 years from 2025, subject to the premium as detailed within the report.**

Having previously declared an interest, Councillor Andrews left the meeting before this item was discussed – 6.30pm

SPR/029/2026: COUNCIL CONTRIBUTION TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STAFF COMMISSION 2026-27

Read: Report from Ms M Hughes, HR & OD Manager, regarding Council Contribution to the LGSC 2026-27. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor A King, it was agreed to approve the payment to the Local Government Staff Commission for the period April 2026 – March 2027.**

SPR/030/2026: INSURANCE PREMIUMS 2026-27

Read: Report from Mrs S Trainor, Assistant Director of Environment, presented by Mr C Sage, Assistant Director of Sustainability, regarding Insurance Premiums. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor C King, it was agreed to approve the payment of the insurance premiums for 2026/27 and the proposed Long Term Agreements as detailed within the officer's report.**

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

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

Signed: _____
Councillor Oonagh Hanlon
Chairperson

Signed: _____
Marie Ward
Chief Executive