

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 16 November 2023 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre and remotely via Microsoft Teams

In the Chair: Councillor L McEvoy (Chamber)

In Attendance in Chamber: Councillor J Brennan Councillor C Enright
Councillor O Hanlon Councillor R Howell
Councillor T Kelly Councillor A Lewis
Councillor S O'Hare Councillor H Reilly
Councillor G Sharvin

In Attendance via Teams: Councillor P Byrne Councillor A Quinn
Councillor D Taylor

**Non-Committee Members
in Attendance in Chamber:** Councillor T Andrews Councillor J Jackson

**Non-Committee Members
in Attendance via Teams:** Councillor C Bowsie

**Officials in Attendance
In Chamber:** Mrs J Kelly, Director: Corporate Services
Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director: Capital and Procurement
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance
Ms E Cosgrove, Assistant Director: Administration (Acting)
Mr C Moffett, Assistant Director: Corporate Planning and
Policy (Acting)
Mr A Patterson, Assistant Director: Economy, Growth &
Tourism
Ms V Keegan, Head of Communications and Marketing
Ms M Hughes, HR & OD Manager
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Mr M McKibbin, PA: Corporate Services

**Officials in Attendance
Via Teams:** Mr A Cassells, Director: Sustainability & Environment
Mr C Mallon, Director: Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mr P Tamati, Assistant Director: Leisure & Sport
Ms G Kane, Assistant Director: Facilities Management &
Maintenance (Acting)
Ms A Smyth, Programme Manager, DBEC

SPR/152/2023: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors McAteer and Mathers.

considered as part of the 2024/25 rates estimates process.

CORPORATE PLANNING AND POLICY

SPR/156/2023: IRISH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2024-2027

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Mr C Moffett, Head of Corporate Policy, regarding Irish Language Strategy 2024 – 2027. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Moffett advised the report had been brought back following a meeting of the Irish Language Working Group whereby additional feedback was added and the Strategy was amended. The Strategy sets out two strategic objectives to develop the Irish Language in the Council area and also to build capacity within the Irish Language community.

Councillor Reilly stated his Party had concerns regarding the Strategy and although while not having an issue with Irish Language, he said out of 220,000 who had a knowledge of Irish, only 90 in the District had used Irish to fill in their census return. He stated there should be resources made available to the Ulster Scots Society to ensure equality with other cultures in the District.

Councillor Reilly stated there would be concerns with regard equality and good relations outcomes for Council staff and members of the public who don't have a fluent use in Irish. He asked whether there would be a further 12-week consultation under section 75.

Mr Moffett advised the original draft strategy was brought last December to the SPR Committee, and had gone to a further consultation, therefore the analysis tabled was the result of that consultation. He went on to say the demand was in place for the bursary scheme with expansion each year and there were no actions within the strategy deemed to be discriminatory.

With regard to Ulster Scots, Mr Moffett advised this was one of the languages that our website would not be able to be translated into however perhaps this could be raised through the Equality and Good Relations Working Group.

Councillor Hanlon stated there were still some concerns that the Strategy remained quite aspirational however welcomed the continued efforts by Council to enable support on the development of the language. She suggested that monitoring reports from the cross-party working group could be made publicly available online to relay concerns by Irish Language groups regarding the lack of accountability.

Councillor Hanlon also suggested that members of DUP would be very welcome to come along and sit on the Irish Language Working Group as there were positions available to them to do so which would enable them to give their views on the Strategy.

Councillor Taylor raised concerns regarding the cost of the Strategy as well as the implementation of the Strategy that may impact upon employees.

Councillor Enright, as an Irish speaker, stated it was disappointing that the Irish Language had once again become a political football.

Councillor Sharvin advised that an event was being held next Wednesday by Council in partnership with the Ulster Scots Agency to celebrate Ulster Scots Language week therefore the Council was embracing both sides of the argument.

Councillor Reilly requested a recorded vote on the proposal, and although he was voting against, he wanted to clearly state that he was not opposed to the Irish Language, the people who enjoy it and want to learn it, however it was about equality. The results of the recorded vote were as follows (copy appended to the minute):

FOR: 10
AGAINST: 3
ABSTENTIONS: 0

The proposal was carried.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Howell, that Committee members approve the Irish Language Strategy 2024-2027.

SPR/157/2023: UPDATED TERMS OF REFERENCE – IRISH LANGUAGE STRATEGY CROSS PARTY WORKING GROUP

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Mr C Moffett, Head of Corporate Policy, regarding updated Terms of Reference – Irish Language Strategy Cross Party Working Group. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Quinn, that members consider and approve the updated Irish Language Strategy Cross Party Working Group Terms of Reference.

SPR/158/2023: STATUTORY REPORTING – SECTION 75 POLICY SCREENING REPORT – QUARTERLY REPORT FOR JULY – SEPTEMBER 2023

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Mr C Moffett, Head of Corporate Policy, regarding Statutory Reporting – Section 75 Policy Screening report for July – September 2023. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor McEvoy, seconded by Councillor Howell, to note the Section 75 Policy Screening Report – Quarterly Report for period July – September 2023.

CORPORATE SERVICES

SPR/159/2023:

MID YEAR ASSESSMENT – PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2023/24

Read:

Report dated 16 November 2023 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Mid-Year assessment relating to the Performance Improvement Plan 2023/24. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Byrne asked how the average time for a major planning application to go through all the processes can jump by 209 weeks from last year. Mr Byrne advised that he would clarify this figure and respond to Councillor Byrne.

In relation to Performance objective 2, Councillor Enright was concerned that the Management team have not met with the National Grid Operator, given that this Council was the only one not to have the National Grid in our area. He stated this was a huge obstacle to job creation as many large companies need to generate their own electricity rather than using diesel generators. In relation to Performance objective 4, Councillor Enright felt targets were underwhelming and advised that he had proposed 2 years ago that income streams could be created through sustainability.

Councillor Sharvin advised that there was no update on Planning performance at ERT Committee meetings and asked whether the Director could give an update on how Council were addressing this. Mrs Kelly advised that she would ask to have this raised at the next ERT Committee meeting.

Councillor Hanlon concurred with Councillor Sharvin's comments and while recognising the staffing issues there had been, updates were required to give assurance that Council was doing all it could to progress planning applications.

In responding to a query from Councillor Lewis regarding the level of applications decreasing but the time taken to respond was increasing, Mr Mallon advised the income from planning applications had decreased, it wasn't the number of applications being received.

Agreed:

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, to consider and agree the Mid-Yea Assessment of the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.

SPR/160/2023:

IMPACT OF FLOODING ON COUNCIL ESTATE

Read:

Report dated 16 November 2023 from Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director, Corporate Services, regarding an update on the impact of Council Estate due to recent flooding **(Copy circulated)**.

Mrs Kelly provided an update on the impact of flooding on the Council estate and insurers had been informed there was some damage to some Council buildings. She stated this was an initial report and would remain to be updated over the next number of months.

Councillor Sharvin asked whether there was a timeline for the assessments of Downpatrick Leisure Centre following the flooding.

Mr Boyd advised that an assessment had been undertaken and there were hairline cracks in the concrete, which would be monitored over a 6-month period. In a follow-up question, Councillor Sharvin asked whether there had been any concern when building the leisure centre about flood water getting into the building. Mr Boyd advised that there had been a problem with the initial design, however an engineering solution was found and works undertaken.

Councillor O'Hare advised that there has been a history of flooding at Leitrim play park and that DFI and Council need to work with each other regarding a more suitable surface being put in place.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Enright, it was agreed to note the contents of the report.**

SPR/161/2023: **NMD FLOODS COMMUNICATION PERFORMANCE**

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Veronica Keegan, Head of Communications and Marketing regarding NMD Floods communication 30 October to 2 November 2023(**Copy circulated**).

Ms Keegan provided an update on the Floods Communication activities as well as providing context on the Communications Activities during emergency situations.

Councillor Hanlon welcomed the paper which gave a sense of the amount of work undertaken in the background by Council in terms of the response to the emergency and she wished to place on record again her thanks to staff across the directorates. She stated the party reps briefings were very useful to ensure communication was flowing and that it was the correct information. Councillor Hanlon stated it may be prudent to introduce a flood alert scheme which would be beneficial to businesses and homeowners alike.

Councillor Byrne emphasised the need to get information to businesses as soon as possible, rather than just relying on social media and proposed that this be included within communication plans going forward. This was seconded by Councillor Enright. Councillor Byrne also queried where the 9 community resilience groups were situated and whether they were contacted directly.

Mrs Kelly advised it had been a multi-agency response to the flooding and that there would be a review in due course. She stated she would try to establish whether contact was made by the relevant agencies and bring back an updated report regarding working in partnership with statutory agencies to outline ways in which businesses could be contacted directly in emergency situations.

Mrs Keegan advised that the broad range of media was used including newspapers, online, tv and radio along with the Council's own website.

Councillor Enright advised that Rivers Agency should have information on when floods were likely to happen and that resilience groups should be in direct contact the agency. Mrs Kelly advised that she would try to find information from Rivers Agency as to who was contacted in relation to the flooding and bring a report back on this.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Enright, it was agreed to note the contents of**

the report and that officials would bring a report back with regard community resilience groups.

SPR/162/2023:

NMDDC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN REPORT & EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN REPORTS

Read:

Report dated 16 November 2023 from Caolain Boyd, Assistant Director, Capital Projects & Procurement, regarding NMDDC Emergency Management Plan & Emergency Communications Plan **(Copy circulated)**.

Mr Boyd presented the report advising that the Council Emergency Management Plan and Emergency Communications Plans had been updated to include the NI Civil Contingencies Framework (2021); updated JESIP principles; updated and streamlined internal arrangements; and hyperlinks added to relevant documentation for ease of access.

Councillor Sharvin highlighted the roles of Elected Members in emergency situations as outlined in Appendix 10, however stated it would be useful to know whether MLAs would be able to attend the resilience training as there had been some mis-information communicated during the flooding.

Councillor Byrne asked when regional emergencies are taking place, the coordination should be from the Assembly, however with the absence of the Assembly, who was responsible for coordinating?

Mr Boyd advised there was a Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Forum at regional level that all Council emergency planning officers sit on which was chaired at SOLACE level by the Council's Chief Executive. Emergency Planning meetings were taking place every couple of hours with all agencies, which was led and facilitated by NI Civil Contingencies Forum.

In response to a query from Councillor Byrne regarding NILGA's resilience training for Elected Members on 24th November from 10.30am – 1pm, Mr Boyd advised that he would endeavour to find out whether the training could be arranged outside working hours or if a recorded version could be made available.

Councillor Reilly queried whether there were practice emergency scenarios carried out to keep officers updated and also whether locations of sandbags could be identified going forward.

Mr Boyd stated there were 4 designated sandbag containers operated by DFI in Newcastle and there actually had been an emergency planning exercise planned for last week however it was called off due to the weather warning. He stated there would be other exercises planned for the New Year.

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed that all elected members note and familiarise themselves with the content of the NMDDC Emergency Management Plan and NMDDC Emergency Communications Plan and their roles and responsibilities in relation to emergencies and response of the Council.

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 O'Hare, 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 Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.

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

SPR/163/2023: **NMDDC EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN SEPTEMBER 2023 PROCEDURES**

Read: Emergency Communications Plan – Procedures and Appendices (Copy circulated).

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to note the NMDDC Emergency Communications Plan and Procedures.

SPR/164/2023: **DUBLIN BELFAST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (DBEC): COLLOBARATION AND FUNDING AGREEMENT**

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Conor Mallon, Director of Economy, Place and Tourism regarding DBEC Collaboration and Funding Agreement (Copy circulated).

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Howell, it was agreed to approve the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council sign the DBEC Collaboration and Funding Agreement, accepting NMDDC as the current lead Council on behalf of the collaborating Council's and Universities, under the terms and conditions as outlined in the agreement.

SPR/165/2023: **STA – SUN SYSTEM**

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Gerard Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance regarding the Finance System STA (Copy circulated).

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Howell, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve the STA to SYCSO Software to ensure continuity of financial systems. Cost is already included within the Council's Revenue Budgets.

SPR/166/2023:

NEWRY CITY PARK – CONTRACT FOR FUNDNG

Read:

Report dated 16 November 2023 from Mr Paul Tamati, Assistant Director: Leisure and Sport regarding Newry City Park – Funding Agreement (**Copy circulated**).

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve both the funding agreement as per appendix 1 of the officer’s report and the signing of the funding agreement between NMDDC and the Department for Communities in respect of the Newry City Park Project.

SPR/167/2023:

CONSOLATORY PAYMENTS

Read:

Report dated 16 November 2023 from Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director of Corporate Services regarding the Consolatory payment. (**Copy circulated**).

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Reilly, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to note the consolatory payment of £2000

SPR/168/2023:

CASTLEWELLAN PARK UPDATE

Read:

Report dated 16 November 2023 from Andy Patterson, Assistant Director Economy, Growth and Tourism regarding Castlewellan Heritage Landscape & Historic Demesne Restoration Project (**Copy circulated**).

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Howell, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the appointment of the preferred contractor to deliver the Castlewellan Landscape & Historic Demesne Restoration Project, and to approve the inclusion of the required budget in the Council’s Capital Programme to deliver the project to the agreed timescales.

SPR/169/2023:

DUMDRUM PLAYING FIELDS CHANGING PAVILION

Read:

Report dated 16 November 2023 from Paul Tamati, Assistant Director: Leisure and Sport regarding Dundrum Playing Fields, Changing Pavilion (**Copy circulated**).

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Howell, it was agreed to replace the changing pavilion at Dundrum Playing Fields as per the costs outlined in section 4.1 of the officer’s report, and to approve the business case as per appendix 1 of the report.

SPR/170/2023: SAINTFIELD HOCKEY PITCH – FLOODLIGHTING UPGRADE

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Paul Tamati, Assistant Director: Leisure and Sport regarding Saintfield Hockey Pitch Floodlighting Upgrade. **(Copy circulated)**.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to approve flood lighting upgrade works at Saintfield hockey pitch at a cost as outlined in section 4.1 of the officer’s report, and to approve the Business Case as per Appendix 1 of the report.**

SPR/171/2023: SPECIFIC DELEGATED FUNCTION

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Marie Ward, Chief Executive regarding Specific Delegated Function. **(Copy circulated)**.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to defer the report to be re-presented at a future SPR Committee Meeting.**

SPR/172/2023: MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

Read: Report dated 16 November 2023 from Gerard Byrne, assistant Director of Finance & Performance regarding Quarter 2 Management Accounts and Treasury Management Update. **(Copy circulated)**.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the Q2 2023-24 Management Accounts and the Q1 Treasury Management update.**

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 8.30pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 4 December 2023.

**Signed: Councillor Leeanne McEvoy
Chairperson**

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

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 16/11/23 VENUE: Downshire & Teams MEETING: SPR Committee

SUBJECT OF VOTE: SPR/156/2023 – Irish Language Strategy 2024-2027

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
J Brennan	X			
P Byrne	X			
C Enright	X			
O Hanlon	X			
R Howell	X			
T Kelly	X			
A Lewis		X		
D McAteer				X
L McEvoy	X			
A Mathers				X
S O'Hare	X			
A Quinn	X			
H Reilly		X		
G Sharvin	X			
D Taylor		X		
TOTALS	10	3		2