

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 15 February 2024 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre and remotely via Microsoft Teams

In the Chair:	Councillor S O'Hare	
In Attendance in Chamber:	Councillor J Brennan Councillor O Hanlon Councillor T Kelly Councillor D McAteer Councillor H Reilly	Councillor P Byrne Councillor R Howell Councillor A Lewis Councillor A Mathers Councillor G Sharvin
In Attendance via Teams:	Councillor C Enright	Councillor A Quinn
Non-Committee Members in Attendance in Chamber:	Councillor T Andrews	
Non-Committee Members in Attendance via Teams:	Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor J Truesdale
Officials in Attendance In Chamber:	Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive Mr A Cassells, Director of Sustainability and Environment Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy Regeneration and Tourism Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting) Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer	

SPR/018/2024: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors McEvoy and Taylor

SPR/019/2024: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

**SPR/020/2024: ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM STRATEGY, POLICY AND
RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON THURSDAY
18 JANUARY 2024**

Read: Action Sheet of the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 18 January 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor McAteer, to approve the action sheet from the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 18 January 2024.

FOR DECISION

SPR/021/2024

**MOURNE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY PROJECT –
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE
NATIONAL TRUST**

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism, regarding a Memorandum of Understanding between Council and The National Trust. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Mallon presented the report stating the wording had been agreed on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Council and National Trust. He advised the MOU had resulted from ongoing discussions with the National Trust since October 2023.

Councillor Enright stated his Party had some governance issues with the MOU advising they would be registering their abstention from a roll call vote. He advised the following:

- There had been no sight of minutes of any Project Board meetings, including responses to ten questions levied by Councillor Truesdale as a member of the Board.
- There was no sight of the risk register which should highlight the increasing costs from £44m to much higher figures and the spending of large amounts of irrecoverable monies on a project that the MOU makes clear may not take place.
- The MOU does not guarantee formal acquisition of the land, with no alternative projects as a back-up option.
- The Department for the Economy had suggested that the Project will cost £6m more than already advised.

Councillor Kelly queried what it would take for Council to reconsider their position on the Project. She noted her Party's cost concerns and stated an estimated cost of £44m in 2019 would only increase with the cost of inflation within the construction industry. She stated the MOU did not guarantee a lease and signing off on progressing the spend on a consultancy team without any clear progression on a lease agreement was concerning.

Councillor Sharvin queried whether Councillor Kelly had an issue with the overall Project or the estimated costs, to which Councillor Kelly noted her Party was not against the Mourne Gateway Project, rather they had concerns with the gondola element of the project, particularly in relation to costs that would have to be paid, plus any inflationary increases.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the item on the agenda was relating to the MOU agreement, and not about the Project in its entirety. She asked Members to remain on the agenda.

Councillor Hanlon noted that the Alliance Party had requested a formal agreement with the National Trust in previous meetings and stated that this MOU was the result of that request. She emphasised that the costs were still an estimate, and it was therefore inappropriate to

discuss figures at this stage. She expressed her confusion at the Alliance Party's abstention from a vote on an item that it had requested.

Councillor Lewis spoke to emphasise that the MOU showed effort from both parties involved to work together and address ongoing concerns. He further urged Members to be mindful of how information was shared, especially relating to costs. He urged Members to bear in mind that they were present to discuss the wording of an MOU, not the overall project. He also expressed his confusion the Alliance Party's position on a vote.

Councillor McAteer in proposing the Officer's recommendation, commended the MOU and advised that it should provide some assurances to those with concerns about the project, as it referred to enhancing, not harming the Mournes. He stressed the MOU stated that both parties would respect each other's principles.

Councillor Brennan reiterated that the MOU was an agreement between Council and National Trust to work together to achieve common goals and stated that it was in the best interests of everyone, including the public.

Councillor Enright stated the Committee was responsible for financial decisions and noted again the estimated costs of the project to date. The Chairperson reminded the Member that the item for debate on the agenda was the wording of the MOU, which had no resource requirements noted.

Mr Mallon clarified that the MOU was not a formal commitment to enter into any future legal contract, but merely an agreement to work together in a partnership, as noted in its wording.

Councillor Sharvin requested clarity on Councillor Kelly's statement regarding a lease with the National Trust, and queried whether the Member had information regarding a lease agreement and if there was a conflict that needed to be declared.

Councillor Kelly confirmed she misspoke, and stated there was no guarantee of a lease.

Councillor Byrne noted that any discussion relating to costs were inappropriate at this stage of the Project and reminded Members of the Code of Conduct and its application. He further noted that the Alliance Party had asked for alternatives to the project and those minutes were tabled at Item 14 on the agenda. He urged Members to review their membership on the Programme Board, as its aim was to deliver the project as agreed.

Mr Mallon stated a response from the Department had been received regarding costs, which outlined the cost estimate was £44m and confirmed that the Department had been engaging with Council to establish additional allowances to be built into the project, which had yet to be finalised.

At this stage, the proposal was put to a roll call vote, with the results as follows:

FOR	11
AGAINST	0
ABSTENTION	2

The proposal was declared carried.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the

**Memorandum of Understanding between Council
and The National Trust as outlined in Appendix 1.**

SPR/022/2024

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Ms M Ward, Chief Executive, regarding Governance Arrangements.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Howell, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve the April Council Meeting to take place on Monday 8th April 2024 and that the amended Committee Dates as outlined in the Officer's Report also be approved.**

**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 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 Brennan, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.**

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

SPR/023/2024:

INSURANCE RENEWAL 2024/25

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Andrew Cassells, Director of Sustainability and Environment, regarding Insurance Premiums 2024/25. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Brennan, seconded by Councillor McAteer, to approve the payment of insurance premiums for 2024/25 and subsequent additional year-end adjustments as required by Council's insurers.**

SPR/024/2024:

BELFAST LEGAL SERVICES – SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Ms E Cosgrove, Assistant Director of Administration (Acting) regarding Belfast Legal Services SLA. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Quinn, to enter into a one-year SLA with Belfast City Council Legal Services Department from 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 on a non-profit/cost recovery basis by virtue of the provision of section 105 of the Local Government (NI) act 1972 in relation to the legal services indicated at 1.4 of the Officer's Report.

SPR/025/2024: MAINTENANCE OF TIME AND ATTENDANCE SYSTEMS

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding the Maintenance of Time and Attendance System. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, to approve the payment of the maintenance fees for Time Management System for January 2024 – December 2024. It was further agreed to approve the ongoing maintenance fees for 1 year with the issue being brought back to Committee after that period of time.

SPR/026/2024: ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Assessment Centres. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Howell, to approve the recommendation as outlined in the Officer's Report.

SPR/027/2024: ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM RECRUITMENT REQUIREMENT

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism, regarding AONB and Geopark Environment Fund Staff Recruitment. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to approve the recommendation as outlined in the Officer's Report.

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

SPR/028/2024: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS UPDATE

Read: Report dated 15 February 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services regarding an Industrial relations Update. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, to note the update provided by officers.**

SPR/029/2024: STRATEGIC FINANCE WORKING GROUP ACTION SHEETS FROM MEETINGS HELD ON 16.01.2024 AND 31.01.2024

Read: Action Sheets from Strategic Finance Working Group meetings held on 16.01.2024 and 31.01.2024 **(Copy circulated)**.

On a point of clarity, Councillor Enright highlighted a spelling mistake within the action sheet. The Chief Executive advised that Members should contact officers prior to meetings if they spot small errors within minutes in order that they could be amended prior to the meeting.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Howell, seconded by Councillor Enright, it was agreed to note the action sheets from SFWG meetings held on 16.01.2024 and 31.01.2024.**

FOR NOTING

SPR/030/2024: MINUTES OF NEWRY CITY CENTRE REGENERATION PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING HELD ON 08.12.2023

Read: Minutes of Newry City Centre Regeneration Programme Board Meeting held 08.12.2023 **(Copy circulated)**.

Councillor Sharvin queried whether the ICT costs were in the existing budget, or if it was to be an additional cost.

Mr Mallon confirmed that the ICT fees were brought before the Committee prior to Christmas and approved by Council. He stated regular updates were tabled at the NCCR Programme Board meetings, and any changes would be brought before the Committee to be agreed.

Councillor Byrne queried whether a meeting had been arranged between the Department and officers regarding the Grade A office accommodation fund, as it was a required element of the BCRD.

Mr Mallon confirmed that this had been tabled at a recent Programme Board meeting, and a date for the launch of the fund would be agreed and shared in due course.

In response to a query from Councillor McAteer, Mr Mallon confirmed that a meeting had taken place with some of the arts representatives, and a full stakeholder group meeting was due to be held in the next few weeks.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed to note the minutes of the meeting.**

SPR/031/2024: **MINUTES OF MOURNE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY PROJECT BOARD MEETING HELD 06.10.2023 AND 16.10.2023**

Read: Minutes of Mourne Mountain Gateway Project Board Meeting held 06.10.2023 and 16.10.2023 **(Copy circulated).**

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

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 07.30pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 4 March 2024.

Signed: **Councillor Siobhan O'Hare**
Chairperson

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