

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 18 April 2024 at 6.30pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre

In the Chair: Councillor S O'Hare

In Attendance in Chamber: Councillor P Byrne Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor R Howell Councillor A Lewis
Councillor D McAteer Councillor A Mathers
Councillor M Rice Councillor D Taylor

**Non-Committee Members
In Attendance in Chamber:** Councillor A McMurray Councillor K Murphy

**Officials in Attendance
in Chamber:** Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services
Ms S Murphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy Regeneration & Tourism
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities
Ms V Keegan, Assistant Director: Digital and
Communications
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director: Finance and Performance
Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director: Regeneration
Mr P Rooney, Head of Legal Administration
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer
Mrs N Stranney, Democratic Services Officer

SPR/53/2024: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Enright, Howie, McEvoy, Quinn, Reilly, and Sharvin.

The Chairperson noted that Item 6 was to be tabled at the May Committee, as agreed with the proposer of the original Notice of Motion.

SPR/054/2024: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

**SPR/055/2024: ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM STRATEGY, POLICY AND
RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON THURSDAY
14 MARCH 2024**

Read: Action Sheet of the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 14 March 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve the action sheet from the Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 14 March 2024.**

NOTICE OF MOTION

SPR/056/2024

NOTICE OF MOTION – ETHICAL PROCUREMENT

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Notice of Motion – Ethical Procurement Policy. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Kelly advised Members that Council would be reviewing its Procurement Policy due to the implementation of new legislation later in the year.

Councillor Hanlon proposed the Report stating that the purpose of the initiative was to ethically advance how Councils tender and who they were affiliated to in accordance with international law obligations. She advised that by adopting this policy, Council could exclude businesses and companies involved in human rights and international law violations. She queried whether there was a time frame for the review of the Policy to begin, and whether Council would meet companies to assess compliance with the new policies.

Ms Kelly advised that the review process had started, and detail would be brought back to a future Committee. She further advised that Council's role in assessing compliance would require legal guidance.

Following a query from Councillor Byrne, Ms Kelly confirmed that the item would remain on the action sheet until such time as the new policies were considered at the Committee.

Following queries from Councillors Taylor and Lewis, Ms Ward confirmed that the Committee was to note that Council was going to consider a section on ethical procurement and that a policy would be brought back to Committee for agreement.

Following a query from Councillor McMurray regarding the difference between ethical procurement and being recognised as a fair-trade Council, Ms Kelly advised that legal advice would need to be sought as there were a number of Legal Regulations required to be adhered to in procurement process.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to note that Council will be updating its Procurement Policy following the implementation of the new Procurement Regulations 2024. It was also agreed that within the new policy, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council affirms to consider a section under ethical procurement and will review the Council's tender processes.**

It was further agreed that the matter would remain on the action sheet until such time as new Policies were forthcoming to the Committee.

SPR/057/2024

NOTICE OF MOTION – MMR VACCINATIONS

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Ms V Keegan , Assistant Director of Digital and Communications, regarding Notice of Motion – MMR Vaccinations. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Keegan outlined the contents of the Report following referral to Committee from Council on 5 February 2024. She confirmed that Council had worked closely with the Public Health Authority to deliver an online education campaign between 11 March and 25 March 2024. She highlighted the key issues contained within the Report outlined that Council’s own social media channels had reached over 52,000 people and the Council’s Media Monitoring Agency had found that the campaign’s total potential reach across both digital and print media channels were just under 400,000.

Councillors Byrne and Hanlon welcomed the Report, thanked the Communications and Marketing Team for their work and also thanked Councillor Devlin for bringing the motion to Council.

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

SPR/058/2024

NOTICE OF MOTION – PROJECTED RATES INCREASE

AGREED: **It was agreed that this item be tabled at the May SPR Committee Meeting.**

FOR DECISION

SPR/059/2024

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism, regarding Multiply Programme – Funding opportunity. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Mallon outlined the detail of the Report and highlighted the need for a recruitment exercise to appoint a dedicated officer to fill the role.

Councillor Byrne welcomed the Report and highlighted the need within the workplace to improve numeracy skills. He queried the progress of the action plan given its short due date and advised that it should contain short targets to ensure maximum uptake. He queried the presence of Council within the vast number of available online learning resources associated with this funding. He further queried the appointment of the dedicated officer and whether there was any possibility of an extension for the role.

Councillor McAteer also welcomed the Report and noted the benefits of numeracy skills for many across the District.

Mr Mallon advised that the action plan was under development and welcomed feedback from Members . He stated that he was unable to confirm the date of the appointment of a dedicated officer as it had to follow a recruitment exercise. He noted that there was no discussion regarding an extension of the post but confirmed Council would query this and

revert to Members

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor McAteer, the following was agreed:

- **Confirm to Department for Economy (DfE) that Council will recruit for a dedicated officer for Multiply Programme following receipt and acceptance of a Letter of Offer (for employment only)**
- **Liase with SRC and SERC to ensure there is no duplication of delivery in the district regarding interventions and targets.**
- **Develop an action plan through LMP and Community Development and submit to DfE by 26 April 2024.**

SPR/060/2024:

ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT CHARTER

Read:

Report dated 18 April 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Elected Member Development Charter. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Kelly outlined the Member Development Charter, noted the importance of training and development for Members and asked for their commitment to the Charter.

On proposing the Report Councillor Hanlon stated that her Party would support the use of all resources available to upskill Councillors across the district.

Agreed:

On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Lewis, Members agreed to the following:

- **To commit to the requirements of the Member Development Charter.**
- **To nominate Party Leaders as the Members to progress this Charter Requirements.**
- **That training and development requirements for Councillors will progress through the Charter arrangements.**

SPR/061/2024:

DRAFT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Read:

Report dated 18 April 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance and Performance, regarding Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-25. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Byrne presented the paper noting that the objectives contained within were developed with consideration given to the 2021-2023 Corporate Plan and the draft Corporate Plan 2024-2027. He confirmed that if approved, a 6-week consultation would begin immediately and would cease on 31 May 2024.

Councillor McMurray highlighted that of the 5 outlined objectives, he and his Party would continue to campaign for a Leisure Centre in Newcastle, would continue to highlight ongoing dog fouling and expressed hope that businesses would feel supported in the coming year.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to note the five draft performance improvement objectives 2024-25 as outlined in Appendix 1 of the Officer's Report. It was also agreed to approve the timetable for publishing the Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 as outlined in Appendix 2, including approval to commence the consultation and engagement process on 19 April 2024.**

SPR/062/2024: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT STAFF COMMISSION FOR NI.**

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Ms J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Local Government Staff Commission. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Kelly noted that this item was usually discussed in closed session but following a request for clarity from the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) it was confirmed that this could be discussed in open session as it was publicly held information. Ms Kelly outlined the background of the LGSC and detailed the payment required from Council.

Councillor Byrne expressed his confusion regarding the payment and queried the downsizing of the LGSC had been resulted in a reduced cost. He acknowledged that Council was duty bound to pay the cost but queried the cost benefit analysis of four employees serving 11 Councils.

Mrs Kelly and Mrs Ward both noted the excellent service received from the LGSC by Council and although the staff levels had reduced there had been no issues in contacting them. Mrs Ward also noted the difficult position the employees were in and highlighted that they had been proactive in engaging with Council on various issues.

Following a query from Councillor McAteer regarding replacement of the service, Mrs Ward advised that this would likely be part of ongoing discussions between NI Local Government Association (NILGA) and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

Following reservations expressed by Councillor Byrne regarding approving payments up to 2027, Mrs Kelly asked Members to note that payments would be required until 2027 and confirmed that the annual payment would continue to be tabled at Committee on an annual basis.

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the payment of the Commission of £26,316 from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council for the period of April 2024 to March 2025. It was also agreed to note this ongoing contribution of running costs up until 31 March**

2027, with annual costs being brought back to committee.

FOR DECISION

SPR/063/2024: PLANNING DEPARTMENT QUARTERLY UPDATE.

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Regeneration, regarding a Planning Department Update. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr McGilly outlined the reasons the paper had been tabled, the background to the ongoing work within the Planning Department and highlighted that this Council was consistently receiving high levels of applications in comparison to other Council areas, with the exception of Belfast City Council.

Councillor McAteer thanked the officers for the detailed Report and noted his appreciation for officers on their efforts and ongoing work. He encouraged further work to continue to address any issues and queried whether Council had engaged with staff to highlight issues. He noted that it wasn't possible to sustain the current situation as the Planning Department could expect an increase in applications in the coming summer months.

Councillor Hanlon welcomed the paper and highlighted the fact that this Council was in receipt of the second highest number of applications. She commended the efforts of officers to overcome the backlog and noted in particular the high number of applications awaiting statutory consultee responses and suggested some work be carried out to address this matter.

Councillor Byrne echoed these sentiments and queried if it was possible to apply some resource management to current staffing levels within the Planning Department, to which Mrs Ward advised that staffing matters would be discussed in closed session.

Councillor Taylor noted that the Report highlighted that Council did not have the resources to deal with the volume of applications and stated that this ongoing issue could have major implications for the economy of the District especially if a perception existed regarding delayed planning applications. He queried whether Council had attempted to engage with other Councils to discuss recruitment or ways to encourage applicants both into Council, and to remain in Council.

Mr McGilly confirmed that the Planning Department was continually engaging with the Human Resources Department regarding recruitment, alternative short-listing management, and ongoing discussions with neighbouring Councils regarding resource sharing.

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

It was also agreed that Officers continue to table quarterly reports to update Members on progress or otherwise against actions outlined above.

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

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Lewis, 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 McAteer, seconded by Councillor Howell, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.

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

RESTRICTED - FOR DECISION

SPR/064/2024: **PROPOSED LEASE OF LANDS AT LISMORE PARK, CROSSMAGLEN**

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Mr P Rooney, Head of Legal Administration, regarding the lease of lands at Lismore Park, Crossmaglen under Council's Sports and Community Leasing Policy. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Mathers, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to enter into a lease with the club noted in the Officer's Report at Lismore Park, Crossmaglen as outlined in red on the map attached to the Officer's Report for a term of 25 years at a peppercorn rent subject to Departmental Consent.**

It was further agreed that a report be brought back to Committee detailing all lands leased at a peppercorn rent, whether they are in use and if not, be added to the surplus asset register.

SPR/065/2024: **LEASE PROPOSAL**

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities, regarding a lease review. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the recommendations as outlined within the Officer's Report.**

SPR/066/2024: **STA – ASSET MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance and Performance, regarding Asset Management System – Single Tender Action (STA). **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to approve recommendations as outlined within the Officer’s Report.**

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

SPR/067/2024: RATE SUPPORT GRANT UPDATE

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance and Performance, regarding Rate Support Grant Update – Independent Review. **(Copy circulated)**

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Lewis, to note that an independent review of the Rate Support Grant is to commence and should be completed by October 2024.**

SPR/068/2024: COMMUNICATIONS

Read: Report dated 18 April 2024 from Ms V Keegan, Assistant Director of Digital and Communications, regarding Communications. **(Copy circulated).**

Agreed: **On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Lewis, it was agreed to note the contents of the Officer’s Report.**

SPR/069/2024: EXEMPT MINUTES OF NEWRY CITY CENTRE REGENERATION PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING OF 5 FEBRUARY 2024.

Read: Exempt Minutes of the Newry City Centre Regeneration Programme Board Meeting of 5 February 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

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

FOR NOTING

SPR/070/2024: MINUTES OF NEWRY CITY CENTRE REGENERATION PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING OF 5 FEBRUARY 2024.

Read: Minutes of the Newry City Centre Regeneration Programme Board Meeting of 5 February 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

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

SPR/071/2024: MINUTES OF MOURNE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY PROJECT BOARD MEETING OF 8 FEBRUARY 2024

Read: Minutes of the Mourne Mountain Gateway Project Board Meeting of 8 February 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

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

SPR/072/2024: RESPONSE FROM MINISTER MURPHY RE ENHANCED FLOOR RELIEF SCHEME

Read: Communication dated 9 April 2024 from Minister Murphy regarding Enhanced Floor Relief Scheme **(Copy circulated).**

Councillor McAteer welcomed the response and noted that it was now recognised that there were businesses with damages in excess of the maximum available funds through the enhanced flood relief scheme.

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

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 8.16pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 7 May 2024.

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

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