

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

20 November 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid Meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on **Wednesday 27 November 2024 at 7.00pm.**

Yours faithfully

Susie McCullough
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Prayer
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Mayor’s Business
5. Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month of November 2024
(Copy attached)
6. Deputation from Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
7. Minutes of Council meeting dated 30 October 2024 (Copy attached)
8. Minutes of Committees (Copies attached)
 - 8.1 Special Audit Committee dated 23 October 2024
 - 8.2. Planning Committee dated 5 November 2024
 - 8.3. Environment Committee dated 6 November 2024
 - 8.4. Place and Prosperity Committee dated 7 November 2024
 - 8.4.1 Matter Arising from item 4 - International Relations (Report attached)
 - 8.5. Corporate Committee dated 12 November 2024

8.5.1 Matter Arising from Item 5 – Advertising and Sponsorship Policy (Report attached)

8.6. Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 13 November 2024

8.7 Special Planning Committee dated 18 November 2024

9. **Consultations**

9.1 Consultation response to the Draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (Report attached)

9.2 NIE Networks - Consultation on Cluster Substations (Report attached)

9.3. Department of Justice - Call for Views: New Victim and Witness Strategy 2025 – 2030 (Correspondence attached)

10. **Conferences and Courses**

10.1 Ongoing Conversations Invitation (Report attached)

11. Nominations to Outside Bodies (Report attached)

12. Queen's Parade Update (Report attached)

13. Sealing Documents

14. Transfer of Rights of Burial

15. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)

16. Notices of Motion

16.1 Notice of Motion received from Councillor Morgan, Alderman Cummings, Councillor Douglas, Alderman Smith and Councillor Ashe

The Comber representatives are delighted that Comber has won the Best Kept Medium Town Award this year and want to thank all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make this happen.

There is, however, a long-standing dilapidated hoarding in Castle Street which badly detracts from this important area of Town.

The Comber representatives recognise that Council officers and the Comber Regeneration Community Partnership have tried to address this issue, but this has not been successful.

Considering this, Officers should do a report exploring all further options available to resolve this issue with some urgency.

16.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Adair

That this Council condemns the failure by the UK Government to prioritise farming families and the rural economy as part of the Autumn Budget; notes with deep concern the decisions to introduce new thresholds for Inheritance Tax and

Agricultural Property Relief, which will jeopardise succession planning on farms and discourage investment in many farm businesses.

Further to this Council calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals to mitigate the impact of these damaging policies on local farms, as well as avoid significant increases in food prices; and further calls on the Minister to work with the Minister of Finance to deliver an early and firm commitment to farming families that current levels of financial support will not only be maintained but increased in the next financial year.

16.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Smart

That Council recognises the negative impact on the farming and agriculture industry caused by the first Budget of the new Labour Government, particularly the changes to Agriculture Property Relief and the damage that will do to the continuance of family farming. Council further recognises the intrinsic value of farming and agriculture to regional and national food security, and further commits to writing to the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to call on him to engage with the Chancellor at the earliest opportunity and demonstrate his absolute support for farmers affected by this Budget.

16.4 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor W Irvine and Councillor S Irvine

That this Council expresses its concern at the decision of the post office to propose to close its branches in Main Street, Bangor and Frances Street, Newtownards as part of a widened UK overhaul. We would call on the Post office to reverse this decision and meet with Council at the earliest opportunity to discuss the proposal and the impact it will have on staff and customers. This Council notes how important post office services are to our communities and the huge role it plays in serving constituents.

Circulated for Information

(a) NI Commissioner for Standards report – 2023/24

MEMBERSHIP OF ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Alderman Adair	Councillor Hennessy
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Brooks	Councillor S Irvine
Alderman Cummings	Councillor W Irvine
Alderman Graham	Councillor Irwin
Alderman McAlpine	Councillor Kennedy
Alderman McRandal	Councillor Kendall
Alderman McDowell	Councillor Kerr
Alderman McIlveen	Councillor McBurney
Alderman Smith	Councillor McClean
Councillor Ashe	Councillor McCollum
Councillor Blaney	Councillor McCracken
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McKee
Councillor Cathcart (Mayor)	Councillor McKimm
Councillor Chambers (Deputy Mayor)	Councillor McLaren
Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Moore
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Thompson
Councillor Gilmour	Councillor Smart
Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Wray

LIST OF MAYOR'S/DEPUTY MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS FOR NOVEMBER 2024

Sunday 3rd November 2024

14:00 Groomsport Remembrance Service, Walter Nelson Hall, Groomsport

Monday 4th November 2024

12:15 In Bloom Awards, Clandeboy Lodge Hotel

Wednesday 6th November 2024

10:00 Opening of Bangor Jobs, Support & Training Fair, Aurora Leisure Centre

12:00 It Takes All Sorts - Asylum & Refugee Rights, Bangor Castle

20:15 An Evening of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Blair Mayne DSO, Queens Hall, Newtownards

Thursday 7th November 2024

11:00 Crossroads Charity Shop Opening, 13A High Street, Newtownards

19:00 Ward Park District Association – AGM, Carnegie Library, Hamilton Road, Bangor

Friday 8th November 2024

13:00 Home-Start Ards, Comber & Peninsula Area AGM, Function Room 1, Londonderry Park Pavilion, Ards

Saturday 9th November 2024

12:00 Polish Independence Day Celebrations, St Comgalls Parish Centre, Main Hall, Brunswick Road

14:30 Plaque Unveiling, Newtownards Airfield

17:30 Polish Independence Celebration, Malone House, Barnett Demense, Belfast

Sunday 10th November 2024

10:15 Remembrance Sunday Bangor War Memorial, Ward Park

15:00 Annual War Memorial Reception & Gala, Aurora Leisure Centre

Monday 11th November 2024

13:15 Xmas Passport Photo Op, Bangor Castle

Thursday 13th November 2024

10:00 Xmas Passport Photo Op, Conway Square, Newtownards

16:00 Vikela Factory Opening, 2 Balloo Link, Bangor

19:00 Mayoral Reception - RBP 290 125th Anniversary Bangor Castle

Monday 18th November 2024

10:30 Community Orchard Planting, Linear Park, Bangor

Tuesday 19th November 2024

09:20 Economic Development Conference, Clandeboye Lodge Hotel

14:50 RNLI 200 Years and Plaque Unveiling

18:45 NI Food to Go Awards, Crowne Plaza Hotel

Wednesday 20th November 2024

09:30 Xmas Photo Op, Bangor Castle

Thursday 21st November 2024

09:30 Launch of Sports Awards, Clandeboye Lodge Hotel

12:00 TT Plaque Unveiling, Londonderry Room, Ards Arts Centre, Conway Square, Newtownards

14:00 Chinese Consul Tour of Lakeland Dairies, 46 Belfast Road, Newtownards

Friday 22nd November 2024

17:00 Friends of Columbanus European Visit, Bangor Castle

Saturday 23rd November 2024

14:00 Columbanus Partnership European Signing, Bangor Abbey Parish Centre

15:00 Bangor Christmas Fair and Passport Tour

Wednesday 27th November 2024

09:50 Disability Employment and Support Day, Comber Leisure Centre

10:30 Translink Photo Op Conway Square, Newtownards

Thursday 28th November 2024

18:30 Comber Fair in the Square / Xmas Lights Switch On, Comber Square

Friday 29th November 2024

19:00 Bangor Ladies Choir - An Evening of Music, Bangor Castle

Saturday 30th November 2024

10:00-19:00 Newtownards Xmas Switch-on (various times) Conway Square,

15:30 Hollywood Xmas Switch-on

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on Wednesday 30 October 2024 commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair:	The Mayor (Councillor Cathcart)	
Aldermen:	Adair	McAlpine (Zoom)
	Armstrong-Cotter	McDowell
	Brooks	McIlveen
	Cummings	Smith
	Graham	
Councillors:	Ashe	Kennedy
	Blaney	Kendall
	Boyle	Kerr
	Cochrane	McClellan
	Douglas	McCracken
	Edmund	McKee
	Gilmour	McRandal
	Harbinson	Moore
	Hollywood	Morgan
	S Irvine	Thompson
	W Irvine	Smart
	Irwin	Wray

Officers: Chief Executive (S McCullough), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Interim Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Director of Environment (D Lindsay), Interim Director of Place (B Dorrian), Head of Communications and Marketing (C Jackson), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

1. PRAYER

The Mayor (Councillor Cathcart) welcomed everyone to the meeting and commenced with the Chief Executive reading the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend were received from Councillors Chambers, Hennessy, McBurney, McCollum, McKimm and McLaren.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor sought Declarations of Interest from members at this stage and none were made.

NOTED.

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

The Mayor began by welcoming two new Members to the Council those being Councillor John Hennessy and Councillor Naomi McBurney. He also extended his best wishes and thanks to Christine Creighton and David Rossiter in their future endeavours.

Continuing he stated that he would also like to acknowledge another recent move by Councillor Gillian McCollum who had moved seats to represent Holywood and Clandeboye.

The Mayor then reported that October had been an extremely busy month adding that in particular he wished to draw attention to the special Freedom of the Borough Conferment on the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service. He had been delighted to see so many people from across the Borough attend the event at Bangor Castle to have fun and also recognise the dedicated and brave work of the Fire Service.

By way of summing up the Mayor mentioned that it was wonderful to attend and present an award at the Bangor Business Awards last week. Alongside the Chief Executive and a few of his colleagues, it was an opportunity to formally recognise the brilliant work of local, thriving businesses in the Borough.

At this stage the Mayor took the opportunity to remind members of two upcoming Remembrance Services in:

- Groomsport Remembrance on 3 November 2024
- Remembrance Sunday on 10 November 2024

Members were asked to indicate to Democratic Services which Service they wished to attend.

NOTED.

5. MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR ENGAGEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER 2024

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the month of October 2024.

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The Mayor reported on a busy month of engagements highlights of which had included meeting Prince Edward at Crawfordsburn Scout Centre, attendance at the Council's Shorelife Festival and the Ulster in Bloom Awards where Donaghadee received a prize in the Town Category.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the information be noted.

6. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING DATED 25 SEPTEMBER 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Thompson, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the minutes be signed as a correct record.

7. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

7.1. Audit Committee dated 23 September 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Hollywood, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.2. Planning Committee dated 1 October 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.3. Environment Committee dated 2 October 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Alderman McAlpine proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

Item 11.1 – Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Irwin and Alderman McRandal

Councillor Kendall said that she, along with her Green Party colleagues, had been great supporters of pedestrian access to HRCs and noted a proposal previously put forward by her colleague Rachel Woods in 2022 which requested the reintroduction of pedestrian access. This had then been subsequently altered at Council by Alderman Smith who had asked for a report to be brought back looking at the process of how those without a car or a van would be facilitated at HRCs going forwards. She

had noted that this Notice of Motion had essentially asked for the same thing and as such she was asking if there had ever been a previous report on pedestrian access to HRCs which she may have missed since 2022.

In response, the Director of Environment confirmed that this matter had been brought back on a number of occasions with a couple of reports for members to consider. He added that he was not aware that Councillor Kendall was going to raise this historical issue at this meeting and therefore he would need to come back to the member on that matter. However he indicated that his recollection was that the matter had been concluded and he was not aware of any outstanding issues to be reported back on.

NOTED.

Item 6 – Car Parking Promotional Tarriff Change

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter noted that during discussions at Committee it had been agreed that charges would remain as they were however she had been contacted by a number of constituents who had been experiencing difficulties when putting their pounds into the car park pay machines. She asked the Director for an update on this matter.

The Director of Environment confirmed that there had been no change to the tariffs which had previously been in place and therefore he suggested that it may have been an issue perhaps with the machine.

Thanking the Director, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter commented that those constituents who had been in touch had reported that the signage had changed on the machine and whenever they had put their one pound in, it had not given them the full amount. She indicated that she would send the detail through to the Director in due course.

At this stage the Mayor commented that while the Committee had agreed not to amend the charges, the local press had reported that those charges were to change and that he stated had not been helpful.

NOTED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McAlpine, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.4. Place and Prosperity Committee dated 3 October 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Councillor Gilmour proposed, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

Item 6.2 – Donaghadee TAG 12.8.24

Alderman Brooks noted that there had been numerous requests for a representative from Council to come along to meet with members of the TAG to discuss the matter of Donaghadee Sports Facilities. Despite this those visits had repeatedly been cancelled at the last minute and this had led to much frustration amongst the many local sports clubs. As such he sought some clarity from the Director why those Council representatives had not yet been able to attend such a meeting.

In response the Director of Community & Wellbeing advised that a meeting had now been arranged and was scheduled to take place soon. He added that he would report back to the member afterwards.

NOTED.

Item 3 – Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

Councillor Boyle referred to the Shop Front Improvement Grant Scheme at Portaferry noting that the ten applications received had not been completed properly and as such those applicants had been given an extension to resubmit. He asked for an update on that.

The Interim Director of Place confirmed that officers had spoken with each of the applicants affected and given them the opportunity to resubmit.

At this stage Alderman Adair expressed his thanks to all of the officers involved for their assistance with this matter.

NOTED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.5. Corporate Committee dated 8 October 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Councillor Cochrane proposed, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

Item 4 – Memorial to Queen Elizabeth II – Options Paper

Councillor Boyle stated that while he had no issue with recognising the 70 years of service rendered by the late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in some form, he did have some concern that it could cost up to £150,000. He expressed the view that would be quite the expenditure and as such he wished to ensure at this stage that his concern was noted. Councillor Boyle also referred to memorials which had been put in place by other Councils throughout Northern Ireland and some of the negative feedback which those had received and as such he urged caution to ensure what the Council put in place was appropriate.

At this stage Alderman McIlveen commented that much of Councillor Boyle's comments did not form any part of the minutes and instead suggested that it had been reported elsewhere externally. Instead he advised that the Committee had discussed various options, including the Royal Cypher adding that members had also been mindful of what had happened with other Council's memorials. As such he suggested that Councillor Boyle's comments were not accurate.

The Mayor commented that many members were enthusiastic about this recognition of the historic monarch who had granted Bangor City Status not long before she had passed away.

NOTED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.6. Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 9 October 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Alderman Brooks proposed, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

Item 4 – Hardship Funding 2024/25

Alderman McRandal proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that Council approve the 22 successful applications and award funding as detailed in table 1. Furthermore that Council officers review Winter Hardship funding guidance with a view to amending the acceptance criteria to make it permissible for Council to consider applications from individual St Vincent de Paul conferences. A report on findings of this review to be brought before Community and Wellbeing Committee.

The proposer Alderman McRandal acknowledged St Vincent de Paul's good work supporting those most vulnerable within local communities. He had noted the regret expressed by all within the Council Chamber that only one application from the organisation could be accepted and as such he hoped his amendment would enable individual applications made by St Vincent de Paul to be considered going forwards. In seeking to change the wording in the Winter Hardship Funding guidance he acknowledged that there could be ramifications for other applicants and he would expect the requested report to highlight that. In summing up he stated that in the future he would wish to see that St Vincent de Paul conferences were not excluded from this funding.

The seconder Councillor Irwin reserved her right to speak at this stage.

Alderman McIlveen acknowledged that St Vincent de Paul did fantastic work throughout the Borough. The issue for him was the wording of the proposal which was effectively asking for processes to be changed for one particular organisation and as such he would have concerns particularly around Council's Audit

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requirements and the potential for opening up a legal minefield if the Council was to proceed with this.

At this stage the Chief Executive advised that the amendment was asking for a report to be brought back which would highlight any potential issues. She suggested that the principal behind it was effectively to review the guidance to see if many other organisations would be affected by this.

Alderman McIlveen commented that it would be helpful if what had been proposed could be reworded.

The Director of Community & Wellbeing suggested that if the wording incorporated something along the lines of “Organisations with multiple branches” that could be helpful. He took the opportunity to remind members that the Hardship Funding had been a one off grant offered the previous year and DfC had indicated that it was unlikely there would be further funding going forwards. Continuing he stated that any changes to update the criteria under the Council’s Grant Policy would take place if the Grants mechanism was reintroduced in the future. As such a report would not be brought back immediately and instead an offer of further funding would need to be awaited.

Councillor Boyle recalled similar issues being raised previously and referring to what had happened this year with St Vincent de Paul, he indicated that he would be content to await the outcome of any forthcoming report.

The Director reiterated that if the Council was offered funding in the future, DfC’s own criteria would need to be applied before becoming part of the Council’s Grant funding. As such a report would only come back once it had been confirmed there was a grant scheme available of that nature. He reminded members that most criteria for funding was set by DfC however on this occasion that had not been the case, adding that the previous year multiple applications from an organisation had been awarded and at that time members had indicated their desire for that to be changed.

Alderman Adair recalled that regret had been expressed by the Committee and an amendment put forward which would have seen a report brought to the Council for consideration, however that had not been supported at that time. As such he was amazed that this proposal had been brought forward at this stage for consideration. Continuing he stated that he did not believe the criteria needed to be changed as every St Vincent de Paul conference was separate with their own Chairperson, Treasurer and Committee.

In response the Director advised that the constitution of St Vincent de Paul identified all of the conferences as the same organisations and as such he believed the Panel was right in respect of the decision that it had made to Council.

In response Alderman Adair suggested that needed to be looked at as there were multiple organisations which received funding through multiple funding pots from the Community & Wellbeing directorate. He added that many operated under one constitution and many were sporting organisations. Alderman Adair reiterated that

each St Vincent de Paul conference operated in different areas throughout the Borough.

Councillor Moore acknowledged the concerns which had been raised about the proposal expressly naming one organisation but advised that was because it had highlighted this particular issue which had become evident during the assessment process. Continuing she stated that the ultimate aim was for this funding, should it become available again, was to ensure that it reached those most in need throughout the Borough. Councillor Moore reminded members that it had been clarified on the night by officers that St Vincent de Paul would not be eligible for multiple pots of funding under the current guidance.

At this stage Councillor S Irvine sought clarification that St Vincent de Paul had a generic constitution.

The Director advised that the constitution provided identified them as the same organisation. He added that the criteria agreed by Council was that there could only be one application per organisation.

Councillor Kendall asked if it was possible for officers to review how those criteria were set.

The Director advised that the main milestone reached had been the commencement of the new Grants Policy and included within that was a requirement to bring forward any criteria for approval, following which the assessment panel could proceed to make the funding awards. The Council's opportunity to scrutinise was whenever a Grant Scheme was brought forward to the Council. He added that other work was ongoing around the rationalisation of application processes.

In respect of the Grant Policy Review, Councillor Wray indicated that he would be keen to wait for that to be in place adding that he did have a lot of sympathy for St Vincent de Paul. While he felt there was a solution to this he believed that it did not sit with the Council and instead he believed the onus was on those organisations to become separate limited companies with different constitutions. He added that he did not feel comfortable with the proposal which had been made and instead would feel more comfortable with a proper review being undertaken of the policy.

(Councillor Harbinson left the Chamber at this stage – 7.42pm)

At this stage the seconder Councillor Irwin commented that it was clear everyone was broadly on the same page. She thanked Alderman McIlveen for raising his concerns around the wording stating that there had been no intention for that to come across as one organisation being given preferential treatment. Instead the issue had become apparent as the result of its applications and she was of the opinion everyone was on the same page when it came to what was trying to be achieved.

Councillor Gilmour noted the Director's comments that currently there was no funding available and therefore she felt uncomfortable with the proposal which had been made. While she was supportive of the organisation in question and the work

which it carried out within the local community she could not support the proposal. Instead she suggested that members may wish to withdrawn their proposal and consider submitting a separate Notice of Motion on the matter.

(Councillor Harbinson returned to the Chamber at this stage – 7.44pm)

By way of summing up Alderman McRandal indicated that he was content with his proposal reiterating that it was not specifically about St Vincent de Paul but instead was a much wider issue.

The amendment was put to a vote and with 10 voting For, 21 voting Against and 3 Abstentions it FELL.

NOTED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Brooks, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The Executive Office – Draft Report for Government 2024-2027 (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services stating that on 5 September 2024 the Executive agreed a draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. An eight-week public consultation began on 9 September 2024 and would end on 4 November 2024. Feedback was sought on the following nine Priorities:

1. Growing a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy
2. Deliver More Affordable Childcare
3. Cut Health Waiting Times
4. Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
5. Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs
6. Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing
7. Safer Communities
8. Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment
9. Reform and Transformation of Public Services

Ards and North Down Borough Council welcomed this step in recognising the need to move to proactive delivery of services which prioritises wellbeing and need for transformation of public services.

RECOMMENDED that the attached ANDBC Consultation Response on the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 is approved.

Alderman Smith proposed, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Alderman Smith welcomed the Programme for Government commenting that it had been a significant step forward, particularly as nothing had taken place for a period of four years. He acknowledged that everyone would have their own views on it and as such those could be submitted in due course.

Echoing those comments, the seconder Councillor Wray stated that the response before them was very good, however he had one query to raise on page 8.

In addressing that the Chief Executive advised that the responses had been made by a number of Heads of Service and suggested that this was a typo, which would be changed.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

8.2. DEARA – Environmental Principles Policy Statement

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:-Correspondence from DEARA outlining its public consultation on the draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement (EPPS) for NI. Environmental Principles Policy Statement. Consultation responses to be submitted by 9 December 2024

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the consultation document.

Alderman Smith noted the closing date for consultation was 9 December 2024 and as such he asked why nothing had been brought forward for it to go to the Council's Environment Committee. He noted that within the Consultation there were references to the Windsor Framework and as such felt the Council may wish to make comment on that or he asked was it the case that officers had read through the document and discounted it.

Alderman Smith proposed, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that a report was brought to the next Environment Committee.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that a report was brought to the next Environment Committee.

9. DEPUTATION REQUESTS

9.1. Request from Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive advising that a deputation request had been received from Mr Declan Rogers (Group Commander) Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, see appendix attached.

Council was asked to note that NIFRS intended to deliver this presentation to Ards and North Down PCSP.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers this request.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the Deputation be heard by the relevant Committee.

9.2. Request from Donaghadee Heritage Preservation Company – Kelly Centre

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive advising that Donaghadee Heritage Preservation Society was licensed by the Council to care for the historic Lifeboat Sir Samuel Kelly, which was housed in a temporary shelter on a site leased from the Council in the Copeland Marina car park, adjacent to Railway Street, Donaghadee. The current lease was for four years.

The company had plans to build a Heritage and Visitor Centre for Donaghadee which could provide a permanent home for the Lifeboat, but in order to progress those plans it would need to be assured of a longer tenure, either on the present site or on another suitable site.

Following discussion with officers of the Council, the company wished to put to the Place and Prosperity Committee the case for building a new 'Kelly Centre', to explain how it might be financed and made sustainable, and to ask the Council to determine where it should be located.

The Group have asked if they could present to the January meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee.

RECOMMENDED that Council hears a deputation from Donaghadee Heritage Preservation Society at the January meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that the recommendation be adopted.

10. NOMINATION TO OUTSIDE BODIES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive stating that places on working groups were filled through nomination at the Council's Annual Meeting and were thus held by individual members rather than Parties. When a position became vacant, it reverted back to Council to nominate a member to fill the place rather than Party Nominating Officers.

Following the resignation of three members of Council, nominations were sought to fill each of the below positions for the remainder of the term as necessary. Following the resignation of David Rossiter from Council, a place had become available on each of the following groups:

- North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Fair Trade Working Group – 4 Places (4 Year Appointment)
- Body: Belfast City Airport Forum – 1 Place + 1 Substitute (4 Year Appointment)

- Body: All Party Group on Climate Action – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Body: East Border Region Members Forum – 6 Places (4 Year Appointment)

The below tables reflected the current membership of the above working groups:

North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Alderman Graham	Alderman Graham
2	Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Cochrane
3	Councillor Creighton	Councillor Creighton
4	Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Harbinson
5	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
6	Councillor Irwin	Councillor Irwin
7	Councillor Martin	Councillor Martin
8	Councillor W Irvine	Councillor W Irvine
9	Councillor McCracken	Councillor McCracken
10	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
11	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee
12	Councillor McKimm (Chair)	Councillor McKimm
13	Councillor McLarnon	Councillor McLaren
14	Councillor McRandal	Alderman McRandal
15	Councillor Rossiter	Councillor Rossiter

Body: Fair Trade Working Group – 4 Places (4 Year Appointment)

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Alderman Gibson	Councillor Gilmour
2	Councillor S Irvine	Councillor S Irvine
3	Alderman Keery	Councillor D Rossiter
4	Councillor Irwin	-

Body: Belfast City Airport Forum – 1 Place + 1 Substitute (4 Year Appointment)

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Alderman Keery	Alderman Graham
Sub	Councillor Greer (resigned 31.3.2023)	Councillor Rossiter

Body: All Party Group on Climate Action – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Rossiter	Councillor Rossiter

2	Councillor Woods (Replaced by Councillor Kendall)	Councillor Kendall
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Body: East Border Region Members Forum – 6 Places (4 Year Appointment)

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Councillor Thompson	Councillor Cathcart
2	Alderman Keery	Alderman McDowell
3	Alderman McDowell	Councillor Rossiter
4	Councillor Morgan	Councillor Blaney
5	Alderman Carson	Councillor Boyle
6	Councillor Boyle	Councillor McKimm

Following the resignation of Christine Creighton from Council, a place was available on each of the following groups:

- Mental Health Champion – 2 Places (4 Year Appointment) –2026/27 year only
- North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Percy French Management Committee – 4 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Ards Community Hospital – Multi Agency Forum – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Community Resuscitation Group – 2 Places
- Northern Ireland Museums Council – 1 Place (4 Year Appointment)

The below tables reflected the current membership of the above working groups:

Body: Mental Health Champion – 2 Places (4 Year Appointment) –2026/27 year only

	2022/23	Year 1 2023/24	Year 2 2024/25	Year 3 2025/26	Year 4 2026/27
1	Councillor Thompson	Alderman Armstrong Cotter	Councillor McLaren	Councillor McKimm	Councillor Creighton
2	Councillor Smart				

Body: North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Alderman Graham	Alderman Graham
2	Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Cochrane
3	Councillor Creighton	Councillor Creighton
4	Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Harbinson
5	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
6	Councillor Irwin	Councillor Irwin

7	Councillor Martin	Councillor Martin
8	Councillor W Irvine	Councillor W Irvine
9	Councillor McCracken	Councillor McCracken
10	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
11	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee
12	Councillor McKimm (Chair)	Councillor McKimm
13	Councillor McLarnon	Councillor McLaren
14	Councillor McRandal	Alderman McRandal
15	Councillor Rossiter	Councillor Rossiter

Body: Percy French Management Committee – 4 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Creighton	Councillor Creighton
2	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
3	-	
4	-	

Body: Ards Community Hospital – Multi Agency Forum – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart
2	Councillor Creighton	Councillor Creighton

Body: Community Resuscitation Group – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Creighton	Councillor Creighton
2	Councillor McKimm	Councillor McKimm

Body: Northern Ireland Museums Council – 1 Place (4 Year Appointment)

1	Alderman K Douglas	Councillor Creighton (appointed at Council in October 2023)
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Following the resignation of Gillian McCollum from Council, a place was available on each of the following groups:

- Elected Member Development Steering Group – 7 Places (4 Year Appointment)
- Diversity Champions – 3 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Parenting Champion – 1 Places (4 Year Appointment) – Year 3 only 25/26

- Community Development Grants Working Group – 5 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment) (First Meeting 23 January 2024)
- Percy French Management Committee – 4 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Community Advice Ards and North Down – 4 places (1 Year Appointment)

The below tables reflected the current membership of the above working groups:

Body: Elected Member Development Steering Group – 7 Places (4 Year Appointment)

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Councillor McAlpine	Councillor McLaren
2	Councillor P Smith	Councillor Smart
3	Alderman Keery	Councillor Moore
4	Alderman Gibson	Councillor McCollum
5	Councillor Thompson	Alderman McIlveen
6	Alderman W Irvine	Alderman Graham
7	Councillor S Irvine	Councillor Cochrane

Body: Diversity Champions – 3 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Irwin	Councillor McCollum
2	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
3	Councillor McKimm	Councillor McKimm

Body: Parenting Champion – 1 Places (4 Year Appointment) – Year 3 only 25/26

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Councillor Greer (resigned 31.03.2023)	Councillor Gilmour (year 1)
2		Councillor Wray (Year 2)
3		Councillor McCollum (Year 3)
4		TBC – One of the above (Year 4)

Body: Community Development Grants Working Group – 5 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
2	Alderman Cummings	Alderman Cummings
3	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart
4	Councillor L Douglas	Councillor L Douglas
5	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee

Body: North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment) (First Meeting 23 January 2024)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Alderman Graham	Alderman Graham
2	Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Cochrane
3	Councillor Creighton	Councillor Creighton
4	Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Harbinson
5	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
6	Councillor Irwin	Councillor Irwin
7	Councillor Martin	Councillor Martin
8	Councillor W Irvine	Councillor W Irvine
9	Councillor McCracken	Councillor McCracken
10	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
11	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee
12	Councillor McKimm (Chair)	Councillor McKimm
13	Councillor McLarnon	Councillor McLaren
14	Councillor McRandal	Alderman McRandal
15	Councillor Rossiter	Councillor Rossiter

Percy French Management Committee – 4 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Creighton	Councillor Creighton
2	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
3	-	
4	-	

Body: Community Advice Ards and North Down - 4 places (1 Year Appointment)

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Moore	Councillor Moore

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2	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee
3	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Smart
4	-	Councillor McCollum

Nominations were sought from Council to fill each of the above places for the remainder of the term as necessary.

RECOMMENDED that Council nominate a Member to the following groups, in place of:

(a) David Rossiter:

- North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Fair Trade Working Group – 4 Places (4 Year Appointment)
- Body: Belfast City Airport Forum – 1 Place + 1 Substitute (4 Year Appointment)
- Body: All Party Group on Climate Action – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Body: East Border Region Members Forum – 6 Places (4 Year Appointment)

(b) Christine Creighton:

- Mental Health Champion – 2 Places (4 Year Appointment) – 2026/27 year only
- North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Percy French Management Committee – 4 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Ards Community Hospital – Multi Agency Forum – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Community Resuscitation Group – 2 Places
- Northern Ireland Museums Council – 1 Place (4 Year Appointment)

(c) Gillian McCollum:

- Elected Member Development Steering Group – 7 Places (4 Year Appointment)
- Diversity Champions – 3 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Parenting Champion – 1 Places (4 Year Appointment) – Year 3 only 25/26
- Community Development Grants Working Group – 5 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment) (First Meeting 23 January 2024)
- Percy French Management Committee – 4 Places (1 Year Appointment)
- Community Advice Ards and North Down – 4 places (1 Year Appointment)

RESOLVED, on the proposal of, Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that the following nominations be madet:

a) To replace David Rossiter

N Down coastal path working group – Councillor Hennessy

Fair Trade working group – Councillor Irwin

Body: Belfast City Airport Forum – Councillor McCollum

Body: All Party Group on Climate Action – Councillor Moore
Body: East Border Region Members Forum – Councillor Morgan

b)To replace Christine Creighton
Mental Health Champion – Councillor McBurney
N Down coastal path working group – Councillor McBurney
Percy French Management Committee – Councillor Hennessy
Ards Community Hospital – Multi agency forum – Councillor Moore
Community Resuscitation Group – Councillor Harbinson
NI Museums Council – Councillor Hennessy

c)To replace Gillian McCollum
Elected Member Development Steering Group – Alderman McAlpine
Diversity Champions – Councillor McCollum
Parenting Champion – Councillor McBurney
Community Development Grants working group – Councillor McCollum
N Down coastal path working group – Councillor McCollum
Percy French Management Committee – Councillor McCollum
Community Advice Ards and North Down – Councillor McCollum

11. RESIDUAL WASTE DISPOSAL TENDER – DELEGATED AUTHORITY REQUEST FOR NOVEMBER ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that officers were currently working with arc21 on the evaluation of tenders for a contract to deliver a new residual waste disposal service. There was a degree of urgency in relation to this matter, as Council was aiming to have a new contract in place before the expiry of the existing landfill disposal contract early in the New Year.

To expedite the matter in a timely fashion, it was requested that delegated authority be granted to the November meeting of the Environment Committee to agree the award of a contract.

RECOMMENDED that delegated authority be granted to the Environment Committee to approve the award of a residual waste disposal contract.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

12. NOMINATIONS TO CAPITAL STRATEGY WORKING GROUP (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services advising that a report entitled Capital Strategy Working Group Terms of Reference was presented to the Corporate Services Committee on 8 October 2024. The report outlined the need for four nominations to take part in a Capital Strategy Working Group as outlined below:

Membership

DUP	1 nomination
APNI	1 nomination
UUP	1 nomination
Independents/Small Parties	1 nomination

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees the necessary nominations.

Alderman McIlveen proposed Councillor McClean.

Alderman McRandal proposed Councillor McCracken.

Alderman Smith proposed himself.

Councillor McKee proposed Councillor Kendall.

RESOLVED, that the recommendation be adopted and the following members be nominated to the Capital Strategy Working Group:

Councillor McClean

Councillor McCracken

Alderman Smith

Councillor Kendall

13. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES TO THE AREA OF INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP BOARDS (AIPBs) – UPDATE ON APPOINTMENT PROCESS (Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive advising that at the August meeting of the Council, Councillors were asked to consider whether they wished to individually submit an application to become a member of the South-Eastern Shadow Area of Integrated Partnership Board.

Following an appointment process, Councillor Smart had been appointed as the Ards and North Down Borough Council Local Government representative.

Enclosed was a copy of the letter received by Councillor Smart outlining his appointment and detailing a list of confirmed members of the Board.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the report.

Alderman Smith proposed, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Smith offered his congratulations to Councillor Smart on his appointment.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the recommendation be adopted.

14. CARE DAY REQUEST (Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive stating that further to the attached letter received by the Mayor, on 11 October 2024 from Voypic, the Council had been asked to light up civic buildings on the 21 February 2025 to mark Care Day, a joint initiative across five children's rights charities.

As members would be aware lighting up buildings was put on pause by the Council in January 2023 and following further consideration in March 2024, Council agreed, due to costs, not to replace the various lighting systems. Therefore, the option to light up Council buildings was no longer available.

A second request was to mark the tenth Care Day by planting a tree in a public place, in honour of the care experienced community. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries had confirmed that, subject to Council approval, this request could be accommodated.

RECOMMENDED that Council consider this request.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Alderman Adair stated that it gave him great pleasure to propose this, as he was aware of the many children who were in care throughout Northern Ireland. He recalled that last year the Mayor had hosted Voypic in the City Hall, Bangor and that had been a small demonstration of appreciation. He added that he would be fully supportive of the planting of a tree in a public place to mark the tenth Care Day in honour of the care experienced community.

Echoing the proposer's comments, the seconder Councillor Irwin commented that on a daily basis she would work very closely with Voypic and was only too well aware of the great work they carried out. She agreed that this would be a small demonstration of the Council's appreciation.

As had already been alluded to by Alderman Adair, Councillor Gilmour recalled how as Mayor she had hosted Voypic in the Mayor's Parlour for brunch. She stated that it had been lovely to hear firsthand about some of the experiences and stories and how beneficial it was to meet others who had been in a similar situation. As such she welcomed the proposal adding that perhaps the current Mayor could invite Voypic back again for a similar brunch event.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that the Council agrees to the planting of a tree in a public place to mark the tenth Care Day in honour of the care experienced community.

15. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2025 (Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive stating that a draft schedule of meetings for 2025 had been prepared and was attached to the report for members consideration.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the Schedule of Meetings for 2025.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted.

16. LAUNCH EVENT FOR THE DFI ACTIVE TRAVEL DELIVERY PLAN (Appendix VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing stating that the Minister for Infrastructure had invited five representatives from Ards and North Down Borough Council to the launch of the consultation on the Departments Active Travel Delivery Plan. The event would take place at Craigavon Civic Centre on Wednesday 13 November 2024, from 9.30am to 3.30pm.

Officers would recommend that given the Councils ongoing work to deliver greenways in the Borough, its stated interest in promoting active travel through this and other initiatives such as its commitment to developing a cycling friendly Borough, and its statutory planning function, that both officers and Elected Members attend this event on behalf of Council.

The appropriate officers to attend were the Director of Community & Wellbeing, the Head of Strategic Capital Development and the Senior Planner, Local Development Plan Team.

RECOMMENDED that Council appoint two Elected Members to join the three officers to attend this event.

Alderman McRandal proposed, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that Councillor Moore be nominated to attend.

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that Alderman Adair be nominated to attend.

RESOLVED, that the recommendation be adopted and furthermore that Councillor Moore and Alderman Adair be nominated to attend the launch of the consultation on the Departments Active Travel Delivery Plan.

17. CORONAVIRUS ACT 2020-REGISTRATION OF DEATHS AND STILL-BIRTHS (Appendix IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services stating that Council were originally approached by the General Registrar Office (GRO) for Northern Ireland on 12 August 2024. They were seeking the views of stakeholders about putting forward legislation that would make the remote registration process of deaths and still-births permanent. Council provided a set of responses that went to Council on 28 August 2024 for consideration and submission.

A letter was received by the Chief Executive on 14 October 2024 from the Department of Finance and Personnel, General Registrar's Office explaining that the current temporary coronavirus provisions contained in the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of deaths and still-births) (Extension) (No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 had been debated by the Assembly. The powers facilitate the remote registration of deaths and still-births. This extension would be until 24 March 2025. A copy of the letter was attached.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Alderman McIlveen recalled that this matter had previously been discussed and he expressed the view that it was to be welcomed particularly as it was considered to be a useful tool.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

18. EVENT LOCATIONS 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that a number of events had been approved by Council, subject to the rates setting process for 2025/26. The forthcoming Queen's Parade development works would result in site limitations at Bangor Waterfront for direct Council events delivery during 2025. Thus a review of the programme was required, taking due consideration of existing resource. Officers had reviewed the summer programme, and in particular the events affected in this context.

Armed Forces Day 2025 - At the Place and Prosperity Committee on 9 November 2023 it was agreed that *Council accepts the honour to host the main Armed Forces Day as part of Sea Bangor on 21 June 2025 with a musical event in Newtownards on 20 June, and approves officers to liaise with the RFCA to confirm programming opportunities and to budget accordingly, subject to lead in to Estimates process for 2025/26.*

VE Day 80 – At the Corporate Committee in June 2024 it was agreed via Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Gilmour and Councillor Martin that:

*8th May 2025 will be 80 years since **VE day**- the official end of the Second World War in Europe. This council recognises the significance of this occasion and tasks officers to bring forward a report outlining potential ways this historic anniversary can be commemorated. Including any national plans for beacon lighting and with the council working with local people and local community groups to look at holding fitting events to mark this occasion so that a budget can be included in the next rate setting process.*

Veterans' Day Parade 2025 - At the Corporate Committee in September 2017 it was agreed via Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors McIlveen, Armstrong-Cotter and Kennedy that *this Council proposes reviving the Veterans' Day event (which was previously hosted by Ards Borough Council) to recognise the invaluable contribution of men and women from this Borough who have served their country at home and abroad and tasks officers to begin conversations with the Royal British Legion, relevant regimental associations and other appropriate bodies with a view to hosting the first event in June 2018.*

Pipe Bands 2025 - At the Place and Prosperity Committee in January 2023 it was agreed *that officers submit a bid for the Council's Pipe Band Championship 2023 to the RSPBANI at £14,000 with a total Council allocated budget to a maximum of £26,500, subject to the Rates Setting process and confirmation of bid by RSPBANI. It was further agreed that the Council proceeds with Option 3 to rotate the hosting of the event in Bangor and Newtownards Airfield, the event being at the Newtownards Airfield in 2023 and Bangor in 2024, subject to annual negotiations with the Ulster Flying Club and the bidding process.*

A further report was brought to Place and Prosperity Committee in February 2024 outlining the opportunity to host the UK Pipe Band Championships at Ward Park Arras, seeking an additional budget of £12,860 to deliver the event (total budget £34,360). Officers had been working on the premise that the rotation was implemented annually by Council going forward and had been scoping costs and delivery within Newtownards for the event in 2025 (as per previous further rotation arrangement approved at Regeneration and Development Committee, October 2018).

Sea Bangor (annual) - Sea Bangor was included in the annual tourism events programme as per Borough Events Strategic Direction. It was hosted annually at Eisenhower Car Park and Pier.

Other Council Direct Delivered Annual Events include:

- Holywood May Day
- Ards Guitar Festival - April
- Comber Earlies Food Festival - last Saturday in June
- Creative Peninsula – August
- Portavogie Tide & Turf – early September
- Aspects Literary Festival – September
- Ards Puppet Festival – October
- Shorelife Celebration Festival – early October
- Bangor and Newtownards Christmas Light Switch On – November

(note Council also delivered a range of other events and activities throughout the year.)

1. Proposed event locations

Given the limited availability of suitable event space in Bangor, as a result of the Queen's Parade development for the upcoming year, it was proposed that the

following locations were agreed for each relevant event to allow necessary planning with external organisations.

Event	Date	Proposal	Notes	Comments
VE Day 80	Friday 9 May 2025	Castle Park, Bangor	Concert by the Band of the Royal Irish Regiment Beacons will also be lit on 8 May in Bangor, Newtownards and Ballyhalbert	
Armed Forces Day (incorporating Veteran Parade)	Saturday 14 or 21 June (tbc) 2025	Ards Airfield/ Parade from Conway Square leading to Airfield	One day event (final date subject to ongoing liaison with RFCA) Incorporate parade into AFD to maximise audience	This will require a new Council decision due to previously agreed location for AFD at Bangor (incorporated at Sea Bangor on the Saturday). Parade subject to asking Market to relocate
Pipe Bands	Saturday 19 July 2025	Regent House, Newtownards. Grounds at Comber Road/Castlebawn	New location due to request for alternative options in Newtownards from RSPBANI.	RSPBANI have been consulted and have confirmed this site is their preferred option in Newtownards. Confirmation of the site is subject to approval by the school's Board of Governors.

NB **Comber Earlies Food Festival	Saturday 28 June 2025	Comber Leisure Centre Car Park	Part of Taste Summer Festival and annual programme	** for note only for planning/resource as event occurs in June.
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The above table outlined how the events could be delivered due to the limitations of available event space at the Bangor Seafront in summer 2025. Due to the available staffing resource and other tourism events planned for June 2025 (Comber Earlies Food Festival – 28 June) Sea Bangor would be required to be paused for 2025.

Officers had considered how Bangor could be animated during June and were currently scoping an additional month of activity in Ward Park i.e. music/family activity in the Park at the weekend. The Music in Park event delivered by Open House at this venue, attracted an audience of 27,000 over an eight week period in 2023.

It was anticipated that the additional activity of five extra weeks would be planned for Saturdays (to be confirmed) to encourage people to the city centre to eat, drink and shop. An additional passport scheme attracting footfall into local businesses could be extended to coincide with this entertainment. Offers and attractions in city centre businesses could attract families to spend the day.

Early officer discussions with Open House anticipate that Seaside Revival would take place at Ward Park and would be programmed as Summer Revival for 2025. Date and venue were to be confirmed by the organisers.

Open House Festival supported by Council would continue as normal animating key venues in the city throughout the month of August. Council had also approved the hosting of a concert in Bangor in June, subject to licence. It was anticipated this would attract a large footfall and business to the city.

2. Budgets

VE Day 80 would be funded through the Civic Events budget.

Armed Forces Day (AFD) 2025 incorporating Veteran Parade would be funded from a projected tourism budget of £115,000, subject to the rate setting process (an additional £10,000 was anticipated as a contribution from Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association) and the civic aspect from the Civic Events budget, subject to the rates setting process.

The AND Pipe Bands 2025 event had an early scoped budget of £34,000 to deliver at the new site, taking consideration of potential traffic management fees, stewarding and a bid amount to Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI, subject to the rates setting process.

An additional budget of £10,000 was required to deliver the extra summer activity in Ward Park This would be included in projected tourism budgets as part of the rates setting process and would be subject to approval.

To deliver the reconfigured programme specific to VE Day 80, Armed Forces Day incorporating the Veterans' Day Parade and the Ards and North Down Pipe Band event the overall Tourism Events Budget required an additional £50,000 in comparison to that approved in 2024. Costs to deliver events safely, aligned to corporate priorities while retaining quality programming, continues to be a challenge for Council and increases for the delivery of other tourism events would be further brought forward as part of the rates setting process.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the following:

1. **VE Day 80** - A concert is held in Castle Park, Bangor on Friday, 9 May 2025, with beacons lit in Bangor, Newtownards and Ballyhalbert on the 8 May 2025 to mark the anniversary.
2. **Armed Forces Day 2025** is held at Ards Airfield on either 14 or 21 June 2025, incorporating the Veterans' Parade from Conway Square and further approves a tourism budget of £115,000 towards its delivery, subject to the rates setting process.
3. **AND Pipe Bands event 2025** is held at Regent House School Grounds (Comber Road/Castlebawn), Newtownards on 19 July 2025, subject to approval by the Regent House School Board of Governors and further approves a tourism budget of £34,000 towards its delivery, subject to the rates setting process.
4. Sea Bangor does not take place in 2025 due to anticipated site limitations in Bangor and an additional series of 'Family/Music in the Park' type events are held each Saturday (tbc) during June 2025 with a tourism budget of £10,000, subject to the rates setting process.

Councillor McCracken proposed an amendment, seconded by Alderman McDowell, that the Council notes the significant changes in this report to event plans that were previously approved. Given the scale of these changes it is recommended that this report is brought back to the next Place & Prosperity Committee for further discussion.

The proposer Councillor McCracken indicated that he had three points to make in respect of his amendment:

- He referred to the minutes of the June 2024 Place & Prosperity Committee at which an events evaluation report had been considered and highlighted the success of Sea Bangor which had a budget of £75,000 and attracted 30,000 visitors. As such he felt it was a significant decision to take to pause it in 2025 particularly given the visitor spend which it generated, and as such it was not a decision for the Council to take lightly.
- The decision around the Armed Forces Day he believed changed the intention of the members who had initially discussed and approved that proposal at the time. He stated that it would be the first time in seven years since the Borough had last hosted Armed Forces Day and as such it was privilege to do so. He did however remind members that this was considered an additional event which would require additional funding and as such suggested that needed to be reconsidered as part of the Council's rate setting process. Continuing he expressed the view that the original proposal to integrate Armed Forces Day

with Sea Bangor would work well given its long established military association as a maritime event. As such he believed it was extremely disappointing that the year the Council was to host Armed Forces Day that Sea Bangor could not be part of that.

- Councillor McCracken expressed concern about the process which had been undertaken and the manner in which those decisions had been reached. There had been no debate or opportunity for scrutiny by members and he believed that it had been a very rushed decision by officers to present this to Council without having gone through Committee.

By way of summing up Councillor McCracken expressed the view that many residents of Bangor would be disappointed that Sea Bangor would not be taking place in 2025 and in its place would instead be the proposed musical activity in Ward Park, Bangor. He believed that it would be a massive loss to Bangor particularly as both residents and businesses really valued those events. As such he believed that what was being proposed was not adequate and needed to be brought back to the Place & Prosperity Committee for further consideration.

The second Alderman McRandal indicated that he had nothing further to add at this stage.

Referring to Armed Forces Day, Alderman Cummings acknowledged that significant discussions had taken place with the 38th Irish Brigade during the past few months in respect of organising this event. He noted that many conversations had taken place around the most appropriate location for this event in the Borough and a request had been made for a single location for a variety of reasons including logistics and health and safety. In respect of budgets he stated that a timeline for that had already been established with a requirement for a budget to be put in place by the end of November 2024. He asked if the matter was to be deferred back to the Place & Prosperity how that might impact those timelines and budget setting process.

At this stage the Chief Executive referred to the Sea Bangor event advising that members had previously agreed to add Armed Forces Day into that event as had been the case previously. An additional £10,000 from the Council had been set aside with a further £10,000 to come from Armed Forces Day itself through a grant aid scheme. However because the Queens Parade developer would be on site at that time it was now no longer available for that major event to take place. Discussions had subsequently taken place to consider an alternative site of suitable scale for such an event and the outcome of that had been agreed by all relevant stakeholders that the next best venue to hold the event was the Airfield at Newtownards. She confirmed that a decision on that needed to be agreed as soon as possible to enable at least six months of planning. As such the matter could be referred back to the Place & Prosperity Committee with a final decision to be made at the November 2024 Council meeting. Continuing she noted the concerns expressed by the member in relation to what would replace Sea Bangor adding that consideration would need to be given to what any replacement event would look like, its budgetary implications and the ability of Council staff to deliver that in June 2025 which was an already busy month in respect of events.

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Alderman Smith acknowledged Councillor McCracken's concerns around the proposed pause of the Sea Bangor event. However he noted that the difficulty faced by the Council was that the site to hold the event would not be available and as such it would essentially be a short term loss for the City but with the long term benefit of significant investment. Continuing Alderman Smith expressed some concern about where the Council would go with this particularly as it had already been discussed at Group level where it was agreed that this was the best way forward. He recalled how well the event had worked back in 2014 when it had previously been held at Ards Airfield and Donaghadee, adding that he was only too well aware of the amount of time required when planning such an event. While also appreciative of the concerns of members around the impact on Bangor ultimately there were practicalities which the Council had to work with. He added that if the matter was pushed back to November 2024 to consider further he would have concerns about the impact in respect of the organisation around an event of this nature.

Councillor W Irvine agreed that this was a major change and as such should have gone through the scrutiny of a Committee. In respect of the proposals for Armed Forces Day, VE Day and the Pipe Band Championships, he asked if any contact had been made with the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA) around bringing the Championships back to Bangor.

In response the interim Director of Prosperity confirmed that officers had held conversations with the RSPBA during which it was indicated that this year would see a return to their normal pipe band events and as such it was keen to proceed with what had been proposed to take place in Newtownards.

Referring to the concert scheduled to take place in Bangor in June 2025, Councillor W Irvine asked if there were any further updates on that.

The Chief Executive advised that the Council had not received any confirmation as yet from the promoters.

At this stage Alderman McIlveen expressed the view that there could be a middle way through this, stating that if the concern was with Sea Bangor and the alternative events proposed then that element of the report was referred to the Place & Prosperity Committee with the remaining elements approved. He added that he was appreciative of the amount of work involved in organising events of this nature but equally he was mindful of the concerns raised by Bangor elected members.

Councillor McCracken indicated that he could be minded to accept that proposed course of action.

At this stage Alderman Brooks stated that if the Council was minded as part of the rates setting process to set a budget of £100,000 for an event he was quite sure the Donaghadee Community Development Association would be able to put on a fantastic event in Donaghadee next year. Continuing he referred to the very successful event which had taken place in 2014 in Donaghadee to mark the beginning of the Armed Forces Event, adding that he would welcome the opportunity to talk about that at the meeting of the Place & Prosperity Committee.

Councillor Gilmour stated that visitor numbers generated by Sea Bangor along with the economic benefits were massive and as such she appreciated the proposer's concerns alongside what was being proposed to take place next year instead. She added that she felt what was being proposed was a bit vague and agreed that it should be brought back to the Place & Prosperity Committee for further consideration to ensure visitors were encouraged to visit the city of Bangor.

By way of summing up Councillor McCracken referred to the third point which he had raised which was around his concern regarding the process which had been undertaken, particularly as it had been entirely foreseeable that work at Marine Gardens, Bangor was going to commence. As such he asked why that had not been brought to the Committee's attention, referenced and highlighted.

In response the interim Director of Prosperity advised that the report had been brought to the Committee in October 2023 when six days prior Planning Permission had been granted for Queens Parade. The expectation at that time was that work would have commenced on site within a couple of months however Council would not have known that it would have taken a further two years before work could commence on the site.

Continuing Councillor McCracken stated nonetheless as those delays became more obvious that should have been brought to members attention at a much earlier date. He suggested that other things could have been considered and as such he remained concerned about the process which had been undertaken. Continuing he acknowledged that the Council was where it was and the only point he wished to make was that Armed Forces Day had always been integrated with Sea Bangor. As such he indicated that he was happy to give way and suggested that the recommendation be adopted with the exception of Point 4 which should be referred to the Place & Prosperity Committee - for further consideration. He stated that Sea Bangor was a successful event which brought in significant revenue and as such if it could not take place a similar event on that type of scale which would enhance spend in Bangor city centre should take place instead. He suggested that was considered when the matter was brought back to the Committee.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McCracken, seconded by Alderman McRandal , that Agreed that Council approves the following:

- 1. VE Day 80 - A concert is held in Castle Park, Bangor on Friday, 9 May 2025, with beacons lit in Bangor, Newtownards and Ballyhalbert on the 8 May 2025 to mark the anniversary.**
- 2. Armed Forces Day 2025 is held at Ards Airfield on either 14 or 21 June 2025, incorporating the Veterans' Parade from Conway Square and further approves a tourism budget of £115,000 towards its delivery, subject to the rates setting process.**
- 3. AND Pipe Bands event 2025 is held at Regent House School Grounds (Comber Road/Castlebawn), Newtownards on 19 July 2025, subject to approval by the Regent House School Board of Governors and further approves a tourism budget of £34,000 towards its delivery, subject to the rates setting process.**

Furthermore that the following be referred to the Place & Prosperity Committee
- for further consideration:

4. Sea Bangor does not take place in 2025 due to anticipated site limitations in Bangor and an additional series of 'Family/Music in the Park' type events are held each Saturday (tbc) during June 2025 with a tourism budget of £10,000, subject to the rates setting process.

19. RESOLUTION

19.1. Letter from the Chief Executive of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council on Racism (Appendix X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Correspondence from the Chief Executive of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council advising of the Council's decision around racist attacks and intimidation that so many had experienced in recent times and seeking support for its resolution.

RECOMMENDED that the correspondence be noted.

Councillor Wray proposed, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Councillor Wray stated that he wished to reinforce his complete condemnation of any form of racism, adding that he was sure that he spoke for all of those members present in the Council Chamber. He commented that it was a sad fact that racism, hatred and discrimination still existed in Northern Ireland and even within the Borough. As such he reported that he had met with groups and individuals who had experienced this first hand in the Borough and added that he was aware statutory organisations including the Council were all doing excellent work alongside the Police Service of Northern Ireland as well as community and voluntary organisations. Therefore he was of the opinion that members could collectively create a platform from which to oppose racism in any form.

Commenting as seconder Alderman Graham indicated that he concurred with the comments made by the proposer.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted.

20. SEALING DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED: - On the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the Seal of the Council be affixed to the following documents:-

- a) D2666 – Change of tree number
Thomas Edward Pentland (Dec'd)

- b) D40574 – Change of Address
David Craig
- c) D40630 – D40673

21. TRANSFER OF RIGHTS OF BURIAL

Members were advised that no Transfers of Rights of Burial had been received.

NOTED.

22. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching Notice of Motion Status Report.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Thompson, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

23. NOTICES OF MOTION

23.1 Notice of Motion from Councillors Blaney and Hollywood

This Council notes with deep concern the fraudulent activity impacting local businesses through the manipulation of bank account information on Just Eat partner centre accounts, resulting in substantial financial losses; recognises the critical role these businesses play in supporting the local economy and acknowledges the severe impact these losses have on their ability to operate and resolves to write to Just Eat, expressing our deep concern over the financial harm caused to local businesses and calling on the company to urgently engage with affected businesses to resolve this devastating issue and prevent further incidents.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Place & Prosperity Committee.

23.2 Notice of Motion from Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Douglas

That this Council notes the 70% recycling target set out in the Climate Change Act 2022 and that the current household recycling average is 50.7%.

Further notes the aims and intentions around the consultation on “Rethinking our resources: measures for climate action and a circular economy in NI” includes the reduction in grey bin capacity by either volume of bin or three weekly collections;

Further notes that nappy collection scheme was not referred to in Rethinking our resources: measures for climate action and a circular economy in NI” despite around 4% of residual waste being made up of disposable nappies and other absorbent hygiene products;

Further notes with concern the impact reduced grey bin capacity will have on those households disposing of nappies and/or other absorbent hygiene products as well as the amount of recyclable materials such products contain;

This Council writes to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs expressing its view that there is a need for a nappy collection scheme in Northern Ireland in order to meet recycling targets and to support households if grey bin capacity is reduced as a result of any future Departmental strategy and, further, that this Council would be happy to engage with the Department on how to best deliver such a scheme.

And that a copy of this motion is sent to other Councils in Northern Ireland to encourage them to write to the Minister on similar terms.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Environment Committee.

23.3 Notice of Motion from Councillors Boyle and Wray

That officers bring back a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the huge success of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Options would include a Civic Reception to celebrate 6 years of the huge success of the facility in 2025.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community & Wellbeing Committee.

23.4. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor S Irvine and Councillor W Irvine

This Council agrees to consider as part of the upcoming rates setting process sufficient support to the cultural expression programme. Subject to this process, consideration should be given to committing funds from Council which are sufficient to meet the costs of planning activities without the uncertainty of funding coming from other sources, as has been the case for the last two years. Should in year funding become available from other sources, Councils contribution would be adjusted accordingly. This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives in an attempt to ensure that groups can prepare for their events. This will guarantee that each group agreeing to abide by the cultural expression agreement will receive a letter of offer in advance of 31st May, regardless of whether external funding is available via the Good Relations Action Plan, or any other third-party source.

This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives, ensuring that all the participating community groups can prepare for their activities without uncertainty regarding funding.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor S Irvine, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community & Wellbeing Committee.

23.5. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Harbinson and McCracken

That this Council should:

1. Prepare a visual map for all public sector land in Bangor City Centre and Ards Town Centre and colour code holdings that are potentially connected with future developments (even if not yet fully agreed), including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizen's Hub and the Council's Car Park Strategy. This includes public land belonging to the Council and NI Executive Departments.
2. To further identify public sector land that is currently unproductive and outside the scope of wider strategies, which could be made available for future private sector development. This includes land that is either vacant, contains empty or derelict buildings, or contains buildings that are under-utilised or dated to the point that redevelopment is required. The map should also include land that is facilitating meanwhile use.
3. Prepare a summary report to highlight how unproductive public sector land could be re-purposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive disposal policies.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Harbinson, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Place& Prosperity Committee.

CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:

- a) Invest NI - Policy and Programme Screening Report (Correspondence attached)
- b) Department of Education - Section 75 Screening Report July - September 2024 (Correspondence attached)

RESOLVED, that the correspondence be noted.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

At this stage the Mayor advised that following discussion with the Chief Executive it had been agreed to take Item 25 out of Committee and therefore it would be heard now.

NOTED.

25. UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND APPLICATION OUTCOME

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive stating that members were advised at the Council meeting of 28 August 2024 of the then imminent launch of the Communities and Place funding by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). Attached to that report was a table of proposed projects that could avail of the funding if successful.

The Ministry had indicated that in the region of c£9-£10m of grant funding would be allocated across the 11 Council areas. A total of £847,228 was allocated to Ards and North Down Borough Council for projects against which spend could be delivered by end of March 2025.

An overall submission under the title 'Creating positive outcomes for our communities and places' was submitted which included those that were considered to align with the successful regeneration of communities and place.

The Ministry had confirmed, as of 17 October, that the Secretary of State had allocated the total of £847,228 of capital funding for the period of 01 April 2024 – 31 March 2025, which was broken down as follows:

1	Improvement to Strangford Lough Navigational Aids	£80,000
2	Donaghadee Coastal Protection Study	£21,100
3	Edges of the Island – Burr Point Enhancements, Ballyhalbert	£135,123
4	Ward Park Dementia Garden	£155,000
5	Replacement of Outdoor Gym Equipment at The Commons, Donaghadee	£45,000
6	Installation of Open Water Swimming infrastructure at designated bathing water sites at Bangor (Ballyholme), Groomsport, Millisle, Cloughey, and Ballywalter	£85,000
7	Seapark Play Park	£250,000
8	Ward Park Play Park	£76,005 (with match funding by Council of £174,000)
Total		£847,228

The Chief Executive had completed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the successful application to the Communities and Place Fund in respect of the projects above.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the recommendation be adopted.

Welcoming the report, the proposer Alderman Adair, specifically made mention of the funding secured for the Edges of the Island – Burr Point Enhancements, Ballyhalbert. The village of Ballyhalbert had he stated quadrupled in population in recent years and as such required the relevant infrastructure to enable further development. Continuing he also welcomed the funding which had been secured for the Installation of Open Water Swimming infrastructure, adding that many people throughout the Ards Peninsula now participated in this activity. Continuing he referred to a live application through PeacePlus for swimming infrastructure and asked officers why a similar application had also been made through this funding stream. Also commenting on Play Parks, Alderman Adair noted that some Play Parks had been funded through this scheme and suggested that it may have been more beneficial to have applied for funding for Play Parks through this scheme and funding for the Open Water Swimming Infrastructure solely through the PeacePlus funding.

In response the Director of Community & Wellbeing confirmed that it had been the decision of the PeacePlus Partnership to include the bid for funding for Open Water Swimming infrastructure. When this opportunity came around a bid for that infrastructure was also made through this funding, successfully secured and meant it would not be expected to be delivered by PeacePlus therefore freeing up that funding for other projects on the list which the Partnership had agreed to. In terms of Play Parks he advised that those on the list had been included as being deliverable in the current year.

Thanking the Director for his comments, Alderman Adair referred to the two Play Parks which had received funding and as such he asked if that would free up funding for those Play Parks which were next on the Council's priority list. He added that he was particularly thinking of the villages of Ballyhalbert and Greyabbey both of which were in dire need.

The Director confirmed that while it would free up the money it would not necessarily free up manpower or the time which would be required to deliver them. He reminded the member that there was a limited amount of manpower to carry out such work and as such that could be undertaken in the not too distant future depending upon resources.

Alderman Adair commented that it was a wonderful amount of money and given the dire need there was currently in respect of Play Park provision he would hope that could be utilised for that purpose.

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Councillor Irwin noted the funding which had been secured for the Donaghadee Coastal Protection Study welcoming this and looking forward to it being progressed. She took the opportunity to express her thanks to Donaghadee Sailing Club and the Community Association in Donaghadee for the work which had been undertaken in respect of this matter.

Alderman McIlveen reminded members that it was the Council which had put the bids in rather than PeacePlus as delegated powers had been removed from the Partnership. Continuing he welcomed the funding which had been secured for the Ward Park Dementia Garden, adding that it would be nice to see that replicated throughout the Borough. In respect of Play Parks Alderman McIlveen commented that there were many which were in need but one of particular note was that in the Bowtown area of Newtownards which currently did not meet DDA requirements. He asked for that to be looked at as a matter of some urgency.

The Director of Community & Wellbeing advised members that every year inspections were undertaken of all of the Council's Play Parks and each one prioritized in terms of work needing to be undertaken. He stated that work was undertaken until that funding had been fully utilised but he added that he would take the members comments on board.

At this stage the Mayor commented that he had opened a number of new Play Parks already during his term in office, adding that in his own area the proposals for Ward Park were very welcome. Continuing he reported that the Park at Skipperstone was of particular concern to the local community as it was not currently fenced and a river was nearby.

Welcoming the report Councillor McCracken commented that the proposals for open water swimming would be very well received adding however that he was aware of ongoing issues around water quality. In respect of the Play Park at Ward Park, he sought clarification that it was planned to move it to where the old tennis courts were.

In response, the Director confirmed that was the case and the space left would likely be used for the Dementia Garden site. In respect of water quality he took the opportunity to confirm that those sites listed were designated bathing areas and as such were regularly tested for their water quality.

Councillor Thompson welcomed the proposals for the replacement of Outdoor Gym Equipment at The Commons, Donaghadee, which he stated was well overdue. He also welcomed the proposals for the open water swimming infrastructure as this was growing in popularity throughout the Borough and the Donaghadee Coastal Protection Study which was of significant importance.

(Councillor S Irvine left the meeting at this stage – 8.49pm)

Rising in support of Alderman McIlveen's comments around the Bowtown Play Park, Alderman McDowell suggested that some of the available funding was targeted to Play Parks in the Newtownards area.

Councillor McKee welcomed the report adding that each of the projects were indeed very worthy. In respect of the Open Water swimming proposals he asked if there were any designation plans for the likes of Brompton and Donaghadee and the provision of infrastructure there through PeacePlus funding.

In response, the Director confirmed that those listed in the report were currently designated as bathing water sites which were under Council control. He stated that if those sites were specified within the PeacePlus application he was unsure if they could be reallocated but added that he was aware some were in the process, adding that ultimately it was a question of timing.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the recommendation be adopted.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

24. CONTRACT AWARD FOR THE PROVISION OF A MANAGED SENTINEL AND EXTENDED DETECTION AND RESPONSE (XDR) SERVICE

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

In Confidence - 3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

The Council was asked to award a contract for the provision of a 'SOC as a Service solution' Managed Sentinel and Extended Detection and Response (XDR) Service, procured through the PSSN (Public Sector Shared Network) Framework.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.56pm.

ITEM 8.1.**45****ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) Special meeting of the Audit Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, on Wednesday 23 October 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: -

In the Chair: Councillor Hollywood

Aldermen: Armstrong-Cotter

Councillors: Harbinson McKee (Zoom)
McCollum Wray

Independent Member: Mr P Cummings

In Attendance: NIAO - Brian O'Neill

Officers: Chief Executive (S McCullough), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Director of Community & Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Finance (S Grieve), and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman (Councillor Hollywood) sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies were received from Councillors Ashe, Cochrane, McLaren and Thompson. Further apologies had also been received from the Deloitte representatives.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman asked for any Declarations of Interest and none were declared.

NOTED.

3. MINUTES OF AUDIT COMMITTEE DATED 23 SEPTEMBER 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of minutes of Audit Committee dated 23 September 2024.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the minutes be noted.

REPORTS FOR NOTING

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS AUDIT COMMITTEE: LEISURE SERVICES CONTRACTURAL ARRANGEMENTS (FILE FIN65)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that its purpose was to provide members of the Audit Committee with the following:

- Outline the background to the Council decision which resulted in the appointment of Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT)
- Provide further details on the contractual arrangements
- Provide a management response to the audit finding

Background

Chronology

It was important to state from the outset, that none of the existing Senior Management team either worked for the Council or were directly involved with the process undertaken which concluded in 2012. Therefore, much of the historic information was obtained from the review of Council papers and meeting minutes from that time rather than from first-hand experience. For background, the table below set out the chronology.

<i>November 2010 (Policy Committee)</i>	Council approved an Options Appraisal to be undertaken into the best method of management and operation of the new Leisure Centre in Bangor.
<i>June 2011 (Policy Committee)</i>	Policy committee reviewed business case and agreed on an option to commence the outsourcing process.
<i>September 2011</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open day held for prospective contractors. • Contract notice issued. • Procurement pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) was issued.
<i>October 2011</i>	Four applications received and PQQ assessment panel assessed the four applications.
<i>November 2011 (Policy Committee)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Policy Committee agreed that the four applicants progress to the next stage. • Council approved the draft PQQ evaluation report which recommended that the four companies proceed to the next stage. • One company subsequently withdrew.

November 2010 (Policy Committee)	Council approved an Options Appraisal to be undertaken into the best method of management and operation of the new Leisure Centre in Bangor.
January 2012	Final clarifications were issued.
July 2012	Invitation issued to submit final tenders.
August 2012 (Council Meeting)	The NCLT bid was approved at a special Council meeting.
September 2012	Offer of contract was issued to NCLT.
November 2012	Signed NCLT Leisure Management Services contract received.
December 2012	Commencement of the NCLT contract.

Extracts from August 2012 Council Meeting

The following was an extract from the papers presented and included in the minutes of the meeting of the Council in August 2012 to appoint the preferred supplier:

“At the outset, the primary reason for embarking on the process of tendering for a Management Contractor was to offset the risk of exceeding the budget, either by underachieving on income (viewed as the major risk) or over-spending. It was also anticipated that Management Contractors would deliver services at a lower net cost, thus creating a saving and a beneficial impact on the rates. The specification required the bidders to offer proposals which maximised income, controlled expenditure and transferred the commercial risk to the Contractor.

The financial evaluation of the tenders concentrated on the management fee proposed by the bidders based on a fixed annual payment. The tenders were also assessed in terms of how each bidder intended to maximise income and minimise costs, taking account of the Council’s requirements to ensure that the facilities and services were accessible for all sections of the community. Finally, each bidder was scored on how they proposed to share any surplus income they generated with the Council over the life of the contract.

Each bidder was required to submit an income and expenditure projection over a 10- year period based on the requirements set out in the specification. They were also required to provide supplementary information setting out the rationale behind the financial projections.

The financial templates and supporting information were scored using a weighted scoring method and scores were awarded using objective evidence and the professional judgement of the evaluation panel. The lowest management fee submitted was given full marks and the other bidders were scored in proportion to this based on their comparison to their management fee. The annual management fees proposed by the bidders were as set out in the table below:

Bidder X	Bidder Z	Bidder Y	In-House Comparator
£295k	£364.6k	£373.1k	£1,347k*

**This equates to the mid-range estimate from the economic appraisal.*

As seen from the above table there was just over £1m difference between the lowest management fee and the in-house comparator. When compared to the optimistic model of the business case, this difference decreases to £760k. A further £135,000 of savings had been identified in central support costs (Finance, Human Resources, ICT and maintenance budgets). Some of these savings would be achieved immediately e.g. maintenance contracts. The other salary related savings would be achieved through natural attrition at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst there were some differences in the expenditure projections between the bidders and in-house comparator, the material difference was in the income projections. On average the bidders had projected their income £1m (or £760k compared to the most optimistic in-house model) higher than the in-house comparator. All 3 bidders based their income projections on;

- Detailed research of the local market including population analysis and travel times*
- The use of specialist leisure management information systems*
- Benchmarking tools, using their experience of operating similar 50m centres in GB*
- Access to their central professional teams and resources in marketing and sales providing specialist knowledge and economies of scale*
- Consideration of their private sector commercial expertise in this field*
- The use of financially incentivised sales staff*

All of those factors, combined, had historically produced significantly higher levels of sales than any typical local authority approach.

Risk

When examining the financial projections it was important to consider how the risk associated with fluctuations in costs or income would be distributed. This is outlined as in Table 5, below;

Risk	Responsibility	Comment
Income	Contractor	Contractor must manage their income as set out in their financial template.
Expenditure (generally)	Contractor	Contractor must manage their costs as set out in their financial template.
Inflation	Council	Contract will be adjusted annually to take account of pay and price increases.
Routine Maintenance	Contractor	Day to day maintenance is the responsibility of the Contractor. Council

Risk	Responsibility	Comment
		<i>is responsible for building repairs and plant replacement.</i>
Utilities	<i>Split</i>	<i>Contractor responsible for the efficient use of oil, gas, electricity. Contract will be adjusted annually to reflect changes in tariffs.</i>
Pension – Annual contribution	<i>Council</i>	<i>Tender based on Admitted Body Status contribution of 21.5%, the contract will be adjusted if this changes.</i>
Pension – Initial Shortfall	<i>Council</i>	<i>This can only be determined on the day of transfer and has been estimated to be £540k.</i>
Pension – Exit Shortfall	<i>Council</i>	<i>This can only be determined on the last day of the contract. Employer contributions will be monitored and adjusted to minimise this as far as possible.</i>

Analysis of 2012 decision

The reason for outsourcing the contract was to minimise risk. In setting a fixed consumption rate for energy, the Council passed the energy consumption risk to the Contractor. The Council therefore had certainty over energy consumption levels, meeting the objective of minimising risk.

The Council assessed value for money in the selection of the preferred contractor by comparing the received bids against each other, plus comparison with an in-house comparator model. When comparing the preferred contractor to the in-house comparator, the saving from outsourcing was over £1m per year - £10m over the initial contract period.

Contractual Arrangements

Contract fees explained

The details of the management fee were set out in Schedule 4 of the Leisure Services contract.

The management fee was made up of the following parts:

Line	Term	Explanation
1	Base Payment	Contract fee excluding utility payments
2	- Performance Deduction	In connection with performance failures

3	+	Utilities Payment	Payment calculated using the utility mechanism
4	+/-	Pension Adjustment	In connection with NILGOSC enrolled staff
5	-	Profit Share	Reduction due to contract being in surplus
6	+/-	Utility Adjustment	End of year
7	+/-	Loss of Income Adjustment	In relation to loss of income events
8	+	Mobilisation Fee	Fee for year's 1 and 2 of the contract period.

For the purposes of explanation this report would focus on items 1, 3 and 6. The remaining items did not have regular adjustments.

The contract payments were based on a financial model which was included in the contract. This was inflated each year in the following ways:

- Base payment – this was increased by inflation each year.
- Utility payment - increased based on actual prices for the next year based on the year past.
- Utility adjustment - at the end of the year a utility adjustment was made based on the actual prices paid by the contractor in comparison to the budgeted prices.

The utility mechanism was based on the standard calculations for price variances and volume variances.

For illustrative purposes information for two individual years was set out in the table below, along with the totals for the first 10 years of the contract and the total payments set out in the contract.

	2018/19	2019/20	10 Year Total	Contract Schedules
	£	£	£	£
1 Base Payment	(242,946)	(249,019)	(2,564,855)	(2,307,805)
2 Utility Payment	491,859	585,273	6,155,870	6,156,760
3 Utility Adjustment	94,255	(4,194)	1,344,974	-
4 Total cost	343,168	332,060	4,935,989	3,848,955

Points to note:

- The base payment was actually in favour of the Council, not the contractor. Over the 10 years this totalled £2.5M (line 1). The difference in the contract schedule and the 10 year total related to inflationary uplifts.
- The utility payment overall showed minimal difference between the contract schedule and the ten year cost. The reduction in consumption by the contractor offset the unit price increased over the contract period.

- The utility adjustment of £1.3m was driven partly by the cost increase associated with energy price volatility during the period and would have been incurred by Council under any operating model. It also included the reduced levels of consumption (equivalent to c.£600k) noted in the audit report.

Consumption Targets

As this was a new centre of a major scale that had never been operational before, no data existed on energy consumption. Consumption targets were set based on estimates leveraging advice from industry experts. A mechanism was included within the contract that allowed for review after the first two years to allow targets to be reset once operational needs were better understood. This review resulted in a 6% reduction in the gas target and a 25% reduction in the electricity target.

The finding within the report to those charged with governance stated that “Serco never had to bear additional energy costs in any year of the contract and the council had to pay this additional amount over the period of the contract.”

While overall, NCLT did not bear additional charges, that was not correct in terms of electricity consumption where in five of the 10 years the contractor exceeded the target and had deductions made from the annual adjustment payment. In addition, the benefit received by the contractor in those particular years was also curtailed.

Contract Variation

When the contract was first put in place in 2012, the contractor was obliged to procure the utilities on the understanding that they would be able to achieve a better price than Council.

However, by the time extension discussions were undertaken in 2022, there were a number of interlinked factors that had come to the fore for the operator:

- Utility prices had increased very substantially.
- This increase was having a negative effect of the operators’ irrecoverable VAT position.
- Council had joined a consortium with other Councils and was able to achieve more competitive prices than the contractor.

The Council procuring utilities partially addressed the first issue, however as the contract stood it would not solve the second issue in connection with VAT. Following professional advice the operator therefore requested a contract variation which would resolve this issue. This was agreed to following the Council consulting its own VAT advisors, and results in the operator’s fixed contribution to utilities being deducted from the agreed contract payment. This results in the operator contributing to the cost of utilities, as shown in the table below:

Table 8

	Note	2023/24	2024/25
Contract Payment	1	£ 527,669	£ 435,928

Utility Contribution	2	£ (701,615)	£ (728,276)
Base Payment	3	£ (173,946)	£ (292,349)

Notes:

1. Contract extension fee plus inflation
2. Utility contribution by operator plus inflation
3. Net payment to Council to be offset against utilities paid.

Management Response to Audit Finding

The draft report to those charged with governance presented by the NIAO to the September 2024 Audit Committee contained the following recommendation:

“Contracts should not include clauses that result in 3rd parties receiving payments over and above that which is paid by the Council for services provided. Any incentives within service contracts should ensure that reasonable limits are in place to cap the amounts that the council may pay out. In this case, where the council was paying energy costs, payments should have been based on actual usage, with conditions in place to ensure that the usage is reasonable.”

Management’s response was as follows:

Contractual overview

In August 2012, North Down Borough Council let a contract for the provision of leisure services to the operator who was assessed as providing the most economically advantageous tender. This recommendation only considers one aspect of the payment mechanism associated with this contract, without reference to the contract as a whole and therefore management feel misrepresents the benefits of the deal obtained by Council, which per the original business case projected a saving of approximately £10M over the contract period versus the in-house model.

Contract stipulation

It is our understanding that the energy consumption element of the contract is a reasonably standard clause adopted by leisure services operators across the industry for this type of facility.

Energy usage

In compiling their bid each bidder will have considered the whole contract, both from expenditure and income aspects and will have pitched their management fee to Council on that basis. Should the utility mechanism have been based on actuals only (rather than both targets and actuals), the bidders would have had a reduced incentive to minimise consumption. The Council would therefore have been exposed to more risk, which is counter to the Council’s initial objectives for outsourcing.

Value proposition

It is management’s view that a change to one stipulation in the contract should not be viewed as having an isolated impact, but rather had a different contractual clause

been used for energy consumption, that the value propositions in the initial bids received would have been different.

Investment

The analysis does not account for any investments made by Northern Community Leisure Trust to drive down energy consumption.

Management would consider the recommendation made by the NIAO should the Council decide to tender for similar services in the future, however, would ultimately make the decision based on what the Council saw as the contractual stipulations which were mostly like to provide the Council with the best overall commercial deal.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

At this stage the Director of Corporate Services provided members with an overview of the report which had been circulated.

Questions were sought from members at this stage.

Councillor McCollum expressed her thanks to officers for accommodating Audit Committee members by having this special meeting. She felt that it had been a worthwhile exercise and as a result she now had a better understanding of the matter in question. Continuing she referred to Page two of the report stating that the extract of the 2012 minutes had been helpful and sought further comment from officers around the section which referred to the need for potential bidders to offer proposals which maximised income, controlled expenditure and transferred the commercial risk to contractor.

The Director of Corporate Services reminded members that none of the current members of the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) were part of the CLT in 2012 hence the extract of the minutes which had been provided for members. What was clear from those minutes was that one of the key issues had been to transfer as much risk as possible and that he stated related to income as well as utility consumption in a brand new facility which had never been previously operated by anyone before.

Turning to page three Councillor McCollum referred to the £1M difference between the lowest management fee and in-house cost and sought clarification around whether or not that was the in-house comparator.

The Director advised that at that time there would not have been any in-house cost comparator because the facility was not functioning and therefore this was a comparison of the expected costs associated with an in-house delivery model.

In response to a further query from Councillor McCollum around obtaining an in-house comparator, the Head of Finance advised that this was based upon the economic appraisal for the construction of the facility. It was assumed that would have been a significant document which would have gone through the Government Gateway process, been assessed by DCAL and subject to a full Treasury Green Book Appraisal.

Councillor McCollum stated that it was nonetheless a very significant piece of information upon which a lot of assumptions had been made and a lot of decisions depended. In relation to the value for money element which members had been so concerned about previously she asked if the in-house comparator had been what the value for money had been based upon.

The Head of Finance confirmed that to be the case, as well as the other bids received.

Continuing Councillor McCollum referred to page six of the report which detailed a review to be undertaken after two years which resulted in a 6% reduction in the gas target and a 25% reduction in the electricity target and sought further explanation from officers.

The Head of Finance reiterated that this had been a new facility at that time and targets had been set based upon the professional advice received. After two years of operation the contractor would have had the opportunity to get a feel for the building and how it operated enabling those targets to then be revised. When those revisions were made it resulted in the reductions quoted by the member. He added that it was also important to remember that those two utilities were linked due to high gas consumption resulting in low electricity consumption. As such that review was undertaken after two years of operation and the reduction would remain in place for the remaining eight years.

Councillor McKee referred to the proposed management response and the line which stated that:

“It is our understanding that the energy consumption element of the contract is a reasonably standard clause adopted by leisure services operators across the industry for this type of facility.”

He asked if officers could provide any evidence or steer on this conclusion.

The Head of Finance reiterated that this was a new facility at the time and therefore in terms of benchmarking because there were so few facilities of a similar nature it would have been difficult to carry that out. As such each facility was unique and the approach of setting targets was not unusual across the country. He added that they were not aware of specific facilities but confirmed that advice had been taken which suggested that this was not uncommon.

Councillor McKee referred to comment within the report which asked if the utility measures should have been based on actuals rather than targets. He added that he was mindful the NIAO had taken a very different viewpoint and he asked what benefit there was to the ratepayer through reduced consumption of electricity.

In response the Head of Finance advised that would result in a lower management fee. He added that the objective of the contract was to transfer commercial risk which involved maximising income and controlling costs.

Continuing Councillor McKee welcomed the information provided in the report adding that one thing that had occurred to him which had not been mentioned in the report was the Covid 19 pandemic during 2021/2022. During that period there would have been an energy payment made at the same time a large piece of funding had been received from DfC and paid to the operator as Covid relief. He therefore had some concerns that the Council had not been fully informed of all the money which had been assigned to the operator. As such he was keen to get some more information around that particularly as it could be the case that the operator had profited twice.

The Head of Finance commented that detail had not been included as it would only have added further complication to the report. However, he proceeded to confirm that the operator did get support from the Council through the Covid support mechanisms as well as an energy payment as based within the contract. He advised that mitigation factors had been taken into account by the contractor to minimise the burden placed upon the public purse. Internal Auditors were also employed to carry out due diligence work on two of the four claims which had been submitted and that had resulted in some minor changes to the support provided. He stated that in his view that merely illustrated that if the contractor had not received the energy payment those would have been additional costs which they would have claimed through the Covid mechanism.

At this stage Councillor Wray referred to page four of the report and the analysis of the 2012 decision where it stated that the Council had certainty over energy consumption levels, indicating that he would struggle with the element around the certainty. He believed in that situation the Council would not have had certainty no matter what because those costs were unknown. On reading over the minutes of the September Audit Committee meeting he felt that he had not got direct comment to his question around the time of the drafting of the contract he had asked if the Council was of the opinion that £600,000 would likely be paid to the winning bidder through the energy cost arrangement. Continuing he also asked that in terms of the winning bidder, did all of the bidders believe that if they had written the contract in that way that they would have got £600,000.

In response the Head of Finance stated that the contract had been written on the assumption that there would be no price rises. As such there would have been no perceived benefit to the contractor. In terms of certainty, he confirmed that the Council had obtained certainty in that it was aware that it would not pay utilities in excess of the thresholds within the contract. Continuing he stated the management fee and utilities calculations were linked. He added that it also needed to be understood that the Trust was contributing £2.5m throughout the life of the contract to the cost of utilities and as such the £600,000 could not be considered a benefit in isolation. He added that it was management's view that the recommendation therefore misrepresented the commercial deal which Council had obtained at that time.

In response to a further query from Councillor Wray around energy costs, how the Council was now paying that and if it was an actual cost, the Head of Finance stated that the Auditor had made an assumption that the rest of the management fee would not have changed and therefore they had stated that this was an additional cost. Management's contention was that if this benefit had not been received the

management fee would have changed. Section 2.3 of the report advised why the contract varied as the result of a number of things which had happened over the course of ten years. Following reorganisation the Council had joined with other Councils to form a tendering process to collaborate on energy provision and as such it had become the case that Council could procure utilities at more competitive rates than the operator. Continuing he also referred to the hike in utility costs during Covid 19 and as the contractor was a partially exempt VAT operator, they were unable to recover all the VAT which they paid out. The hike in utility prices had a detrimental effect on the contractors VAT position. Therefore it was in the Council's interest to pay a lower price and it was in the contractor's interest to vary the contract to mitigate the issues around VAT liabilities, hence the contract variation which was put into place.

Councillor Wray commented that as it currently stood there remained a maximum amount and asked if the contractor did not meet that would the Council still pay that back.

In response the Head of Finance confirmed there were still consumption targets in place however it was the Council which paid the bills and as part of the arrangements the contractor fixed their contribution to utilities and therefore the contract fee would go in the favour of the Council. He added that the Council was monitoring consumption to ensure the targets were not exceeded. While there remained a control mechanism in place the difference now was that there was a history of how the building could be operated enabling more appropriate energy targets may be set.

At this stage Alderman Armstrong-Cotter acknowledged the difficulties around auditing something which had not previously been done. She referred to the NIAO opinion which was that this was something which should have been done differently adding that it was difficult for a defence to be issued to something which had not been carried out by the current Council. As such she was keen to ensure that the management response to the NIAO was appropriate. She asked if documents referred to by officers earlier in the meeting were available for members to view.

The Director indicated that officers had not sought to go into that level of detail and instead at this stage it was the intention to draw out from the historic minutes of 2012 the decisions which had been taken at that time.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter stated that such documents concerning terms of reference would be useful to have going forward. She expressed the view that the initial report from the NIAO had come across quite differently to how things had been put during this meeting and as such her concern was whether or not the Audit Committee was content that it had appropriately addressed the issue which had been raised.

At this stage the Director reminded members that the role of NIAO was to audit the Council and provide findings and recommendations, following which management had the opportunity to provide a response to those recommendations. In the case of this particular recommendation management was providing a response to say that the Council would view this differently to how the NIAO had viewed it.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter acknowledged the work which had gone into the report at Item 4 and asked for clarification if Item 5 would then form the basis of the management response.

The Director indicated that in normal circumstances the NIAO would be get Item 5 however in this case Mr O'Neill also had access to Item 4. In many cases those recommendations would be around future work but in the case of this issue it was not something that was rectifiable or something the Council would be rectifying.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter acknowledged that this was a legacy issue which the Council had been left with and from which lessons could be learnt. She added that she was just keen to establish where a line would be drawn with this matter given its uniqueness.

In response the Head of Finance referred members to the last paragraph of the proposed management response which was that management would consider the recommendation made by the NIAO but ultimately Council would do what it believed to be in the best interests of the Council. As such management was content that the legacy Council had already done that and therefore this would remain a point of disagreement. He added that the Council would move on and take due consideration of what had been said.

At this stage Mr O'Neill from NIAO commented that the discussion which had taken place had been very helpful when going back to those elements which his office had looked at and subsequently raised around the net benefit of over £600,000 during the term of the contract. He advised that the response submitted by management would be included in the Final Report to those Charged with Governance which would remain between the NIAO, the Council's Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services. He added that the main issue going forward was that management would look at issues which had been raised and identify what would be done in the future if something of this nature was ever to arise.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE (FILE FIN65) (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services stating that the NI Audit Office provided a draft report to those charged with governance at the Committee's last meeting in September. This report detailed management's responses to those recommendations that the Local Government Auditor made in that report for the Committee's information.

Following the Committee meeting those would formally be issued to the NIAO and they would finalise their report.

Recommendation 1

“Contracts should not include clauses that result in 3rd parties receiving payments over and above that which is paid by the Council for services provided. Any incentives within service contracts should ensure that reasonable limits are in place to cap the amounts that the council may pay out. In this case, where the Council was paying energy costs, payments should have been based on actual usage, with conditions in place to ensure that the usage is reasonable.”

Management response

Contractual overview

In August 2012, North Down Borough Council let a contract for the provision of leisure services to the operator who was assessed as providing the most economically advantageous tender. This recommendation only considered one aspect of the payment mechanism associated with this contract, without reference to the contract as a whole and therefore management felt misrepresented the benefits of the deal obtained by Council, which per the original business case projected a saving of approximately £10M over the contract period versus the in-house model.

Contract stipulation

It was the Council's understanding that the energy consumption element of the contract was a reasonably standard clause adopted by leisure services operators across the industry for this type of facility.

Energy usage

In compiling their bid, each bidder would have considered the whole contract, both from expenditure and income aspects and would have pitched their management fee to Council on that basis. Should the utility mechanism have been based on actuals only (rather than both targets and actuals), the bidders would have had a reduced incentive to minimise consumption. The Council would therefore have been exposed to more risk, which was counter to the Council's initial objectives for outsourcing.

Value proposition

It was management's view that a change to one stipulation in the contract should not be viewed as having an isolated impact, but rather had a different contractual clause been used for energy consumption, that the value propositions in the initial bids received would have been different.

Investment

The analysis did not account for any investments made by Northern Community Leisure Trust to drive down energy consumption.

Management would consider the recommendation made by the NIAO should the Council decide to tender for similar services in the future, however, would ultimately make the decision based on what the Council saw as the contractual stipulations which were mostly like to provide the Council with the best overall commercial deal.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that for any direct award art contracts, that meet the definition of regulation 32, the council documents the initial process for how the selected artist was chosen.

Management response

We note that the NIAO agree that a direct award is justifiable in line with regulation 32 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and that the Council had prepared a business case to support the procurement method followed. Management would endeavour to further document the process followed on future projects of a similar nature, should the opportunity arise.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that:

- The Council continues work to ensure that all policies are up to date and formally approved;
- Fraud training is provided to all Council staff and Members; and
- The Council assesses the potential benefits of IT ISO 27001 accreditation.

Management Response

A new policy register was in the process of being rolled out to Heads of Service and Service Unit Managers. The updating of significant policies had been a particular focus over the past year with a number of important policies having been updated and related Internal Audit actions closed. Work would continue to address those which remained overdue. Managers would be reminded to ensure that policies were updated in a timely manner.

An updated Scheme of delegation was approved in July 2024 and was now in operation. This would now be reviewed on an annual basis.

Council had assessed that it had a low risk of fraud and did not, at this stage, intend to give training to all staff, however an online training module was in development which would be rolled out in a targeted fashion to those roles where risk was greater.

Work was currently underway to align Council's ICT systems to ISO27001, although accreditation was not being actively considered at this time due to the cost and resources involved. This would be kept under review. Management were not aware of any Northern Ireland Council that was accredited to ISO27001 standards. Council would continue to work through the implementation of the recommendations agreed with Internal Audit.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this update.

Councillor McCollum proposed, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor McCollum asked if it would be possible for the Director to elaborate on the proposed responses.

The Director of Corporate Services stated that he had nothing further to elaborate on in respect of Recommendation 1. In relation to Recommendations 2 and 3 he reported that those related primarily to policy and training matters and as such a number of pieces of work had been undertaken by officers in order to minimize those outstanding Audit actions.

Referring specifically to Recommendation 2, Councillor McCollum asked that when Management had indicated its intention to document the process further on any future projects of a similar nature how that would look at Committee level. She asked if it would be proposed that members would receive documents at an earlier stage given the tight deadlines which were in place at times.

In response the Director expressed the view that exercises such as this would be few in number and as such the likelihood of something like this occurring again was small. Therefore the need to carry out any action would be dependent upon the circumstances at that time. Continuing he reiterated that Regulation 32 had been adhered to in this case and the process followed in relation to that was in keeping with that. He added that a Business Case had been carried out to justify both the procurement route which had been followed and also the piece of art which had been chosen. In relation to documenting the process further he indicated that if a similar situation was to arise in the future the Council would give consideration to how it could further document the decision-making process.

At this stage Councillor McKee indicated that he still felt uncomfortable with the management response to the Energy Costs matter. He acknowledged that officers were doing the best they could with the information they had in the absence of those who had been present when the initial contract had been drawn up. A Priority 1 recommendation was a very serious matter and as such he felt the management's response could have been worded more strongly however he recognised that professional officers believed that response was appropriate. He asked to be recorded as being against the management response in respect of the Priority 1 finding.

At this stage the Chairman reminded Councillor McKee that the matter had been presented to members for noting.

Mr Cummings stated that he believed the management response was very balanced and on reading it he could not identify anything which had been done wrongly. He also believed that the NIAO response was equally balanced and added that if a similar situation were to arise in the future there may be a different way to deal with it. Continuing he noted that Council officers were very clearly stating that they had found no error and as such they felt the Council had obtained value for money.

Councillor Wray expressed the view that it was a disagreement around the practice adding that he too agreed that the Council's management response and the NIAO response were both balanced. In essence he believed that disagreement lay with whether it had been good or bad practice and as such he did not believe that anyone should be blamed. Continuing he stated that he also felt uncomfortable when reading the recommendation which had been made in comparison to the management response which stated that it would take that into consideration. However, if a situation of that nature was to arise again and the Council believed that it would be advantageous for it to go another way that would make him uncomfortable. He asked that if a situation was to arise again for a different contract would the Council be over the detail of that or because it would be part of the contract agreement members may not actually be made aware.

In response the Director referred to the extraction of the 2012 minutes noting there was a section which did show the key assumptions associated with the contract which was put into place at that stage. Missing from that however were the implications of that but that would not have been known at that stage. He suggested that the learning from this was that Council going forward would want to ask more questions around this and officers would take that on board. The Director added that the particulars of this situation were that the facility at that time was very unique in a GB context and that was part of the rationale behind the steps which had been taken.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that there were no Items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

CLOSING REMARKS

At this stage Mr O'Neill advised that the NIAO would proceed to issue a final Report to those Charged with Governance as well as issue the Annual Audit Letter. He added that the Annual Audit Letter would be published on both the Council's website and the NIAO website reminding members that reference would be made to the Priority 1 Finding relating to Energy Costs pertaining to the Serco contract. At this stage members were also reminded that the Local Government Auditor would be reporting on the 2023-24 financial statements with an unqualified audit opinion.

NOTED.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.00pm.

AC.23.10.2024

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Planning Committee was held in the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Tuesday 5th November 2024 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman McIlveen

Aldermen: Graham
McDowell
Smith

Councillors:	Cathcart	Morgan
	Harbinson	McCollum
	Kendall (Zoom)	McClean
	Kerr	Smart
	McKee (Zoom)	Wray (Vice Chair)

Officers: Interim Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Acting Head of Planning (G Kerr), Principal Planner (C Blair), Senior Planner (A Todd) and Democratic Services Officer (S McCrea)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend were received from Councillors Hennessy and McBurney.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made, but Members were reminded that they could declare at any time throughout the meeting.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING OF 01 OCTOBER 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above minutes.

Alderman McIlveen reminded Members to note that a Special Planning Committee born from matters discussed at the October Committee regarding the Local Development Plan was due to take place later this month.

NOTED.

4. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

4.1 LA06/2023/1895/F - 5G TELECOMS INSTALLATION: 15M HIGH STREET POLE TELECOMS MAST AND CABINETS WITH ANCILLARY WORKS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor East & Donaghadee

Committee Interest: A local development application attracting six or more separate individual objections which are contrary to the officer's recommendation.

Proposal: 5G telecoms installation: 15m high street pole telecoms mast and cabinets with ancillary works

Site Location: Approx. 14m north of 122 and opposite 121-123 Ballycrochan Road, Bangor

Recommendation: Approval

The Head of Planning reminded Members that Item 4.1 had been deferred from the Planning Committee meeting of 6 August 2024 following a proposal by Cllr McLaren and seconded by Cllr Kendall. The reasons provided for deferring the application were to request the applicant to appear at a future Planning Committee meeting for questioning, seek further advice from Environmental Health Department; and to further examine Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) decisions for similar applications.

As a full presentation had been provided when the application was first presented in August, the Head of Planning provided a summary of images from the site location, general area and a drawing of the elevation of the proposal.

The objector had spoken against the proposal at the August Committee meeting, making reference to his property at 122 Ballycrochan Road having planning permission for an extension. This was a material consideration in the assessment originally presented to Members, but since then, the foundations and floor of the front extension had been constructed. This recent approval was considered in full within the initial case officer report and as such had not been revisited in the Addendum.

Planning officials had, several times since August, requested that the applicant appear at a meeting in order to clarify any queries Members had. There was no response from the applicant and the agent acting on their behalf stated that as they had received no instructions from their client, they would not be making themselves available for questioning.

Unfortunately, despite extensive requests to the applicant from the Planning Department there had been no response, meaning there was no one present to answer Members' queries with regard to the proposed siting, engineering queries, the number of masts required in the upgrade works and the area which the mast covers.

The Environmental Health Department was made aware of the deferral of the application and Members' concerns with the potential health issues associated with 5G technology.

As had been clarified in the Addendum Report, the Environmental Health Department utilised the policy and guidance adopted by the UK Government in regard to public health in respect of such proposals. The Environmental Health Department advised that such policy was continually reviewed by Public Health England with the last review undertaken in 2020, which took account of 5G Masts operating at higher frequencies, and as a result endorsed the international guidelines for limiting exposure to radio waves, published by the International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). This was in line with current planning policy, which required a planning application to be accompanied by a declaration that required any operational equipment to be compliant with these international guidelines. Therefore, the Environmental Health Department had no other comment to make if this was present, which it was in the application.

This position was also confirmed by the Planning Appeals Commission as had been set out in the Addendum Report and Slide 03. None of the recent appeals had been decided with a refusal reason relating to public health concerns. In an example set out in the slide presentation, the PAC decision under 2018/A0200 was clear on the position in regard to matters of public health. It stated:

"The appellant has provided a declaration of conformity with the ICNIRP guidelines, which takes into account the cumulative effect of the proposal and all radio base stations present at, or near, the proposed location. The concerns expressed by the objectors do not justify setting aside standards accepted by government, and I am not persuaded that there are justifiable health and safety reasons for rejecting the proposal."

These recent PAC decisions were however decided upon the potential visual impact of a mast on a locality. As was set out in detail in the initial case officer's report, the applicant had carried out a sequential test to consider various sites with it concluded that the present site was deemed to be the most suitable and least visually intrusive. The mast would 15 metres high and of course as a result there would be a degree of visual impact.

In terms of the PAC decisions regarding visual impact, Members were asked to note that the decisions were primarily made on a site by site basis with those appeals dismissed citing prominence in the street scene, lack of information provided on alternative sites, impact on the setting of two listed buildings and would be visually intrusive to residents in an apartment block opposite a site. On the other hand, the appeal listed as 'allowed' stated that the proposed mast would not be visually harmful to neighbouring residential amenity nor would it result in visual clutter in the existing conservation area street scene.

The Head of Planning advised that it was important to remind members of the details of the site. Slide 5 showed two photographs of the proposed site location from critical views in either direction along the wide Ballycrochan Road. The proposed mast was slimline and would not dominate the street scene or result in visual clutter.

As set out extensively at the last Planning Committee meeting in August, Members may have recalled that a sequential approach test required by policy TEL 1 of Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 10 was carried out which set out the map and a table of discounted sites in the immediately surrounding area. Slide 7 provided some photos of these discounted sites.

The Head of Planning was unable to provide any further clarification on Members' queries with regards to siting and the discounted locations as the Planning Department had not received any further communication from the applicant since the application was deferred in August and therefore could not comment further in terms of that previously discussed at the last meeting other than the detailed work carried out by the case officer in respect of the research on relevant PAC decisions.

As there had been no material change in circumstances since the original presentation of the proposal and following further consideration of PAC findings, the recommendation remained to approve the proposal. As raised at the last meeting, the proposal fulfilled the material policy requirements as contained in Policy TEL1 with relevant supporting information submitted to the Planning Department for consideration including a signed statement of compliance required as part of public health guidance.

RECOMMENDED to approve planning permission.

Councillor McCollum expressed her disappointment at the lack of engagement from the applicant despite numerous attempts at initiating contact. From the Environmental Health investigations carried out, the Department had also mentioned being conscious of the need of further research. The Head of Planning explained that the Environmental Health Department had to make themselves aware of any updated guidance and that planning professionals had to consider what was in the policy and all requirements had been fulfilled.

Councillor McCollum, in a line of questioning, asked for clarification on the distance of the proposed mast from the bedroom of the objector and whether four of five PAC decisions being dismissed due to damage on visual amenity had been considered. Within those PAC decisions, two also mentioned a lack of information whilst one or more advised that a lack of visual representations existed for the proposals if placed at alternative sites. The Head Of Planning advised that a distance of 10-12 metres would exist between the proposed mast and the bedroom of 122 Ballycrochan Road. Of the PAC decisions, two had been the same height as the proposal before Members this evening. There was also a 20 metre mast, a 17.5 metre mast and a newer 20 metre mast proposal. Each site was decided upon by a case-by-case basis. The Cromac Street proposed mast had been refused due to a lack of information on other suitable sites. By comparison, the applicant had provided other sites with this application. In a 2023 PAC decision regarding a 15 metre high mast, one reason was listed with regard to no visuals being submitted.

Councillor McCollum advised that her primary concern had been the location. She recalled that at the previous meeting, Alderman Smith had said that it was the applicant who would be relied upon for the 100 metre radius of effective coverage from the mast and if such were the case, they should be asked to justify the location

of choice in this application as the coverage radius would surely mean hundreds of masts would be required across the borough. Councillor McCollum was also aware of speeding reports on the Ballycrochan Road and queried if the Department for Infrastructure had referenced visibility splays. The Head of Planning advised that no mention had been made of splays but that each application was considered on a site-by-site basis, citing how a 20metre high mast had been approved within a conservation area. In that regard, Councillor McCollum asked why it may be a case for an undue visible harm in a countryside application but not in a busy neighbourhood where a mast would be highly visible. The Head of Planning explained that it could be argued that a mast placed in an urban area would sit amongst street furniture and as such, it would not be such a drastic change or be so noticeable as a new structure in the countryside, adding that different policies existed for applications between such different locations. Councillor McCollum referenced another location, citing logistical issues had appeared to have been overcome in relation to access of an open green site despite no direct access being a logistical impediment. In addition, whilst citing other visuals on page 8 of the report with the exception of D7, she thought other sites appeared to have substantially wider pavements. The Head of Planning advised that a decision could only be made on the site before Members this evening as opposed to discussing hypothetical possibilities, adding that there was no right in law to a public view. Some of the locations shown were cul-de-sacs but the applicant had been informed that they were not helping their case by not making themselves available to attend this evening's meeting.

Councillor Cathcart noted the lack of attendance from the applicant and that the report advised Officers accepted there was a visual impact and that the recommendation had come from balancing visual disruption and the benefit of telecommunications, asking why the latter had been considered an outweighing benefit. The Head of Planning advised that it was clear from PAC decisions that masts were a benefit to the public. There was also supporting evidence from those that had businesses located in their homes or worked remotely.

Alderman McIlveen, in relation to the mention of businesses, asked if there was any knowledge of the number of businesses operating out of homes in the area which he believed would be an important factor in considering the application. The Head of Planning advised that it would be hard to clarify but that masts were seen as a public rather than a private interest. The onus had been on the applicant to submit information but with the supporting information available, the mast would offer public betterment due to connectivity. It was also noteworthy to consider that, with the aftermath of the pandemic, working practices had changed to include remote working or for businesses being operated from houses. No additional information had been submitted since the last Committee.

Alderman Smith asked if the applicant did not engage at the initial meeting or today when Members would want clarification on issues material to their consideration if the Committee could make any decision in good faith. The Head of Planning advised that the decision lay with Members and that Officers would provide support in terms of any refusal reasons in line with relevant policies. She reminded Members that whilst no further information had been supplied, the Planning Department had noted the applicant's name on several planning appeals.

Mr Mark Lilburn of 122 Ballycrochan Road, objector to the proposal, was invited to address the Committee and reminded that as he had spoken on the issue at the August Committee, he had three minutes to present his argument.

Mr Lilburn appreciated comments made by the Head of Planning but advised that one of the referenced proposals in PAC decisions had been for a replacement mast. Mr Lilburn advised that the masts were not as slim as they were proposed to be and that in the three days of the mast being constructed near Bangor Grammar School, it had been covered in graffiti; a problem that would be suffered for the Ballycrochan proposed mast as well as any others. The proposed mast also affected road safety. The Ballycrochan Road was already subject to frequent speeding with Mr Lilburn outlining that in the eight years since moving to the area, within 100 metres of his home there had been four cars overturned, one person killed and a tractor with an overturned trailer. He believed that upon sight of a new mast in the area, already reckless drivers would likely be involved in further RTAs or RTCs. With regard to businesses requiring connectivity, Mr Lilburn advised that houses already have access to the internet which removed the need of a 5G mast in the area. If there was such concern over businesses and access, he suggested Ashbury Retail Park would be a much wiser choice of location. Mr Lilburn reminded Members that his objection was backed by 40 other residents who lived in the local vicinity. Further to no queries arising from Members, he returned to the gallery.

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be rejected on the basis of insufficient evidence to make a decision through lack of engagement by the applicant.

Councillor McCollum noted the work of Officers throughout the process and again spoke of her dismay at the applicant's lack of engagement with the Committee or in engaging with Officers. This was not a question of 5G provision but of the location. With the speed of technological advancement, she suggested it would not be long before masts did not have to be such imposing heights and why residents should be left with what could soon be an antiquity that detracted from the enjoyment of their properties.

Councillor Cathcart advised that his reason to refuse was, as worded in Policy TEL1 of PPS 10, that it had not been demonstrated that telecommunications development having regard to technical and operational constraints have been cited and designed to minimise visual and environmental impact. He did not believe the benefits of the mast would outweigh the visual impact but if the application had been in the town centre, there may have been a different outcome due to proximity to businesses and need for public space whilst this was a residential area. If the applicant was present, he would have used the opportunity to ask why this specific location had been chosen. Both Alderman Smith and Councillor McCollum were content to include this as part of the proposal.

The Director advised Members that rather than deferring consideration of the refusal reasons to the next Planning Committee meeting, Members could afford delegated authority to Officers to draft refusal reasons in line with the Members' concerns as outlined.

The Head of Planning, advised that, in line with protocol, Members should be aware that Officers should be given an opportunity to explain the implications. The decision this evening could be subject to a challenge and as such, Officers should prepare wording for the next meeting with regard to refusal reasons and ensure they are relevant to planning policy.

Alderman McDowell asked of potential costs and additional workload involved in any appeal to the PAC. The Head of Planning explained that Officers as part of duties already dealt with appeals as part of their workload. A Statement of Case would be prepared and the objector could also make a submission as well as other parties, taking place either online or in person. Costs would be up to the PAC, however it was considered that the Planning Department had not put the applicant through any additional cost that they would not already have incurred in going through submission. Costs would be based on whether the applicant applied for them.

Councillors Smart, Morgan and McClean all advised that they were unable to be part of the decision given that they had not been present at the August Planning Committee meeting where the application was first presented.

Alderman Graham believed the Committee was in a difficult position given the history of mast applications reaching the PAC. Whilst he understood why Officers had recommended approval, Alderman Graham agreed with Mr Lilburn's comments on housing in the area already having access to personal internet. The mast's approval would be more of a benefit to the communications company. In conjunction to not having had the opportunity to ask the applicant further questions, Alderman Graham agreed with rejecting the proposal given the scale of the structure in a residential area.

Alderman Smith was happy to accept the amendment to the proposal, summarising that there had been a lack of engagement and information with substantive questions that needed to be answered in order to make an informed decision. The scale, form and siting had been major issues for Alderman Smith and how it would dominate the area.

The Chair, Alderman McIlveen, clarified that Members were agreeing to grant officers delegated power to provide wording for the refusal.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor McCollum that the application be rejected, on the basis of insufficient evidence and, in regard to technical and operational constraints, the Committee had not been satisfied that the proposal had been sited and designed to minimise visual and environmental impact in line with Policy TEL 1 of PPS10 - Telecommunications. In addition, Officers were granted delegated authority to provide reasons for refusal in line with relevant policies.

4.2

LA06/2024/0559/F

– QUEEN'S PARADE PROPOSAL

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor Central

Committee Interest: An application falling within the major category of development.

Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings at 5-12 and 35-41 Queen's Parade, 22-30 Main Street (formerly B & M Bargains), 34-36 Main Street (Oxfam and Hospice shops), 6-34 King Street and 5-17 Southwell Road; minor extension and elevational changes to 40-42 Main Street (Caffe Nero); creation of new means of escape and installation of rooflights to 20 Main Street (Halifax); creation of new bin storage and basement access together with minor facade works to 48 Main Street (TK Maxx); erection of a mixed use development comprising culture and leisure facilities (class D), a 66 bedroom hotel, retail units, food and beverage outlets, offices (class B1-(a)), 137 residential units comprising 113 apartments in 3 blocks and 12 duplex apartments along King Street, creation of a new vehicular access onto Southwell Road to serve undercroft car park comprising 217 spaces together with 14 courtyard spaces and 24 on street, creation of new vehicular access onto King Street to serve residential parking, minor modifications to the Main Street and King Street junction and creation of a two-way street along Southwell Road from the junction with Primrose Street, creation of a new service vehicle access onto Main Street, creation of new public squares and courtyards including new pedestrian access points; and the redevelopment of Marine Gardens Car Park including partial demolition of seawall to create a public realm space comprising gardens and lawns, play areas, events spaces, covered shelters, 4 kiosks and 2 pavilions (housing food and beverage operators), together with other ancillary development.

Variation of the following conditions of LA06/2020/0097/F:

- Condition No.2 - Amended phasing of development
- Condition No.3 - Minor landscape layout amendments to public realm
- Condition No. 6 - Minor amendments to hard and soft landscaping within public realm,
- Condition No.14 - Amendment to drawing references showing plant rooms
- Condition No.16 - Amendment to reflect updated drawing reference
- Condition No.43 - Amended drainage proposals
- Condition No.44 - Amendment to reflect updated drawing reference
- Condition No.45 - Amendment to reflect updated drawing reference
- Condition Nos.48, 49, 54 and 56 - Amended phasing of roadworks
- Condition No.57 - Amendment to reflect updated drawing reference

Site Location: Lands at and to the rear of 18 – 52 Main Street (Reeds Rain to TK Maxx), 2 – 34 King Street, 5 -17 Southwell Road, 5 – 41 Queen's Parade, Marine Gardens car park, the Esplanade Gardens, and area around McKee Clock, Queen's Parade, Bangor.

Recommendation: Approval

The Senior Planner explained that Item 4.2 was an application for the variation of 13 of the planning conditions attached to the original planning permission for the redevelopment of the Queen's Parade site in Bangor. As the application was made under Section 54 of the Planning Act for the variation of planning conditions, it was only matters relating to these specific conditions that could be considered under the application and the principle of the development itself could not be revisited.

The conditions proposed for variation were listed on slide 2 for Members. The main amendments related to the phasing of the development, the landscape layout of the public realm area, surface water drainage proposals and the phasing of roadworks associated with the updated phasing plans.

The full description of the proposal was set out on the following slide, the main elements of which included demolition of a number of existing buildings and erection of a mixed-use development including leisure facilities, a hotel, retail units, food and beverage outlets, offices, 137 residential units, an undercroft car park, new public squares and courtyards and the creation of a new public realm area at Marine Gardens.

Slide 4 provided the extent of the site approved for re-development and slide 5 showed the Development Plan context with the site being located within the city centre, primary retail core and Bangor Central Area of Townscape Character as proposed in the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP).

The next few slides showed some photos of the site and elevations of the approved development - in the first instance, Main Street where the offices and some retail would be located followed by Queen's Parade frontage where the hotel, retail, food and beverage units, apartments and the central Market Place were to be located. Marine Gardens car park would be replaced with the new public realm area. Southwell Road would accommodate apartments and finally, King Street would accommodate some smaller scale duplex apartments.

In terms of background, this current application was the second Section 54 application for the development with planning permission previously granted for the variation of conditions 2 and 3 of the original approval in December last year. These conditions related to the phasing of the development and their variation allowed phases 1, 2 and 3 to be commenced concurrently instead of only one phase being permitted to be under construction at any one time. The previously approved amended wording of condition 2 was shown on the slides and it was this that formed the basis for the wording of condition 2 under the current application which proposed further variations.

Updated phasing plans had been submitted with the current application which now encompassed the entirety of the Marine Gardens public realm into phase 1 instead of being split between phases 1 and 2 and it was proposed to vary condition 2 further to reflect these updated plans. In practical terms, this would allow the developer to proceed with the delivery of the entire public realm in phase 1 without the pre commencement requirement to construct the new access onto Southwell Road within phase 2.

Phase 2 would then only include the retail, food and beverage units and apartments on the southern side of Queen's Parade. Phase 3 remained largely unchanged but would then include the creation of the new vehicular access from Trinity Way onto Main Street instead of the provision of this as part of phase 1 as originally proposed. This would allow the developer to focus solely on the delivery of the public realm under phase 1.

Phase 4 would also remain unchanged and included the destination building and residential units fronting King Street. As part of the review of the overall phasing of the development, it was also proposed to vary condition 56 of the original permission which required a Road Safety Audit to be carried out and any outworkings to be submitted for approval prior to commencement of development. The proposed revised wording of the condition would then allow a phased approach for the submission and approval of the carrying out of the audit and any outworkings required. As the amended phasing plans would then involve no public highway works within phase 1 of the development, the requirement for the carrying out of the audit and the submission of any outworkings for approval was proposed to be amended to relate only to phases 2, 3 and 4 and the requirement to undertake stage 1 and 2 audits prior to the commencement of the public highway works within these phases. This varied wording would allow the developer to proceed with the delivery of the public realm within phase 1 without a pre commencement requirement in relation to the audit.

The proposed changes to the phasing plans would provide greater simplicity for the developer in relation to pre-commencement requirements. However, the wording of condition 2 would still incorporate a number of important clauses which would continue to ensure that the development within each phase was completed in a timely manner and that the important public realm and open space aspects of each phase were delivered prior to occupation or operation.

Permission was also sought to vary conditions 3 and 6 of the original permission which related to the landscape layout of the public realm. The amendments proposed were very minor in nature and had already been recently approved under an associated Non-Material Change application. Slide 16 showed the original approved layout and slide 17 showed the revised layout.

As could be seen in slide 17, the general layout and extent of the public realm remained unchanged. The minor amendments related mainly to the removal of the central water feature, the narrowing of the central waterfront plaza, a slight change to the footprint of the pavilion buildings, replacement of hard surfacing within the 'multi-purpose open space' area with grass and other minor changes to hard and soft landscaping.

The application also proposed the variation of condition 43 of the original permission which related to the surface water drainage proposals for the site. The original approved drainage solution as was shown on slide 18, proposed discharge of surface water to the two existing culverted watercourses on the site along with the installation of several attenuation tanks under Marine Gardens. Condition 43 as originally worded required the submission and approval of a final drainage assessment and a detailed drainage network design for this solution prior to the commencement of development.

Under the current application, a final drainage assessment and detailed drainage network design had been submitted for an alternative drainage solution as was shown on slide 19. This would provide a direct discharge into the marina via a new outfall sewer and had required additional approvals to be obtained from NIEA Water Regulation Unit in relation to consent to discharge and DAERA's Marine and

Fisheries Division regarding a Marine Construction Licence. DFI Rivers had advised it was content with the details of the alternative solution subject to the amended wording of condition 43. The alternative solution was considered to be the most advantageous as it would allow full removal of surface water from the existing NI Water combined sewer, relieving pressure on the local sewer infrastructure and would help to mitigate against potential local out of sewer flooding. It would also allow full removal of surface water from the existing DFI Rivers culverts, relieving upstream capacity pressures and would negate the requirement for large underground attenuation tanks within Marine Gardens.

Maintenance requirements would be considerably less and ownership arrangements were likely to be more logical with the system being fully aligned to adoptable standards.

Slide 20 showed the management and maintenance responsibilities and anticipated ownership of the proposed drainage infrastructure. Upon completion, it was likely be offered for adoption by the Council and/or NI Water.

In summary, the Planning Department was content that the proposed revised wording of the specified conditions were acceptable in the context of the development plan and the relevant planning policies, allowing a greater degree of flexibility in terms of the delivery of the development but also still maintaining the various safeguards to ensure the completion of the important public realm aspects of the development. All of the consultees including DFI Rivers, DFI Roads, NIEA and Shared Environmental Service were content with the proposed variation of the conditions and no objections had been received from any third parties. The Section 76 Planning Agreement executed under the original permission to secure the provision of travel cards for the development and additional off-site parking for the approved offices would remain applicable and all other conditions of the original approval also remained applicable to the development.

RECOMMENDED that full planning permission be granted.

Councillor Harbinson queried if the traffic audit was no longer part of Phase 1 whether it would take into account plant machinery. The Officer advised that plant machinery would not be covered by the audit as it was to do with outworkings required as it was a product of development.

Mr N Salt of Turley was invited to the Chamber, speaking in support of the application. Mr Salt was reminded that he had five minutes to speak on the matter.

Mr Salt welcomed the Planning Team's recommendation to approve the application. This application sought to vary planning conditions on the existing Queens Parade planning permission to achieve the following: Firstly, amending the phases of development to ensure that the entirety of Marine Gardens was delivered as Phase 1. This would provide efficiencies during the construction phase and ensure that the whole of the new Marine Gardens would be delivered concurrently for residents and visitors to avail of. The phasing of roadworks would also be amended to reflect this.

Secondly, revisions were to be made to the surface water drainage design to provide a more effective and cost-efficient solution. The revisions would see surface water

run off being discharged safely into the Marina. This change had received positive responses from NI Environment Agency, DfI Rivers and NI Water.

Thirdly, minor changes to the landscaping design for Marine Gardens had been made to reflect those approved under a previous non-material change application. The changes were very minor and did not alter the fundamental purpose or quality of the space. Drawings had been updated to reflect the changes and variations to other planning conditions to update the drawing references were sought as a result. Subject to the approval of the application, Bangor Marine was intending to start the site works before the end of the year, to deliver what would be an exceptional new public realm area at Marine Gardens.

As there were no queries to Mr Salt from Members, he was returned to the public gallery.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the recommendation be adopted, and that planning approval be granted.

Councillor Cathcart expressed his delight at seeing yet more progress being made and was pleased to hear of works beginning shortly, praising the work of the officers on the processing of these various applications, and the applicant in trying to progress the scheme. Councillor McClean shared the same sentiments, explaining that it had been 2014 when he first joined the Council when a then scheme for Queen's Parade had been well ahead, and he had long been aware of frustrations amongst residents waiting to see diggers, or scared of getting their hopes up, whilst Councillor Harbinson stood to say that he was in agreement with comments made by other Members.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor McClean, that planning permission be granted.

4.3 LA06/2024/0102/F - DEMOLITION OF EXISTING 2-STOREY DWELLING AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW BUILD DWELLING

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor Central

Committee Interest: A local development application attracting six or more separate individual objections which are contrary to the officer's recommendation

Proposal: Demolition of existing 2-storey dwelling and construction of new build dwelling

Site Location: 14 Shandon Park West, Bangor

Recommendation: Approval

The Principal Planning Officer explained that that Item 4.3 sought full planning permission for the Demolition of the existing 2-storey dwelling and construction of new build dwelling at 14 Shandon Park West, Bangor. This was a local development application which had attracted six or more individual objections from separate addresses, which were contrary to the case officer's recommendation.

The Site Location Plan and Google Earth image were displayed to Members on slide 2. The site was located within the settlement limit of Bangor. The existing dwelling was two-storey with a render finish and ground floor front bay windows split centrally by a porch. The pitched roof had a chimney at either end. There was a single storey detached garage to the rear of the driveway inside the northern side boundary and a lean-to conservatory on the opposite side along the southern gable. The site comprised of existing front and rear gardens and was located at the top end of the existing cul-de-sac. There was a mixture of dwellings finished in render or facing brick or a mixture of both within the cul-de-sac. These houses had windows either with a horizontal emphasis or others with a vertical emphasis. Some of the buildings had canted bay windows, some had gabled projecting bays, whilst others had recessed openings under archways. There was also an existing bungalow located at No.3. This cul-de-sac was located within the proposed Bangor East Area of Townscape Character, and it was evident that it was characterised by existing residential properties of different forms and design.

Slides 3 and 4 showed the recently approved floor plans and elevations of an extension to No.14 whilst slide 5 showed the approved site layout and the front and rear elevations of the existing dwelling.

Members were asked to note that LA06/2022/1152/F was granted full planning permission on 3 March 2023 for a modern designed flat-roofed rear two storey-extension with a retractable canopy and solar panels on the roof.

On slide 6, the Draft BMAP 2015 Bangor East Area of Townscape Character (ATC) and designation BR14 could be seen. The existing site was located within this ATC. As outlined by the Planning Appeals Commission in recent decisions, which was detailed in the case officer report, proposed ATCs could not be considered under the retained PPS 6, which set out policy for designated Areas of Townscape Character only, however the character and appearance of the entire ATC remained a material consideration.

Although objectors had raised concerns regarding the demolition of the dwelling, it was not listed and did not incorporate any historic or architectural features worthy of retention within the area. The Planning Department's Conservation Area Officer was consulted and did not raise any concerns about the removal of the dwelling or that it would result in the loss of a significant building in the proposed Bangor East ATC.

Slides 7 and 8 showed the proposed site layout, elevations and floor plans of the new dwelling. Policy QD1 of PPS 7 was the principal policy for the assessment of this proposal in the Bangor urban area. The new two-storey dwelling was to be sited on the same footprint of the existing dwelling and recently approved extension. The dwelling was 10m from the rear boundary, 3m from the northern side boundary and 2.2m from the southern side boundary. It was over 8m from the front boundary. Members were asked to note that the proposed dwelling did not come closer to the site's boundaries than the existing dwelling with the approved extension if it were constructed. It was also to be noted that the planning permission for the extension to the existing dwelling remained extant on the site until 2028.

As this was a replacement of one dwelling with another there was no impact on density. The proposed dwelling was of similar height to the existing meaning it

continued to sit comfortably in the street scene. The dwelling was proposed with a hip roof instead of pitched roof and whilst this was not a design specifically within the significant mix of dwelling types within Shandon Park West, it was however, not out of keeping in the surrounding ATC with dwellings on the nearby Clifton Road and Clifton Mews, 75m north of the site and could be viewed from within Shandon Park West, exhibiting hipped roofs. Therefore, this was a design type acceptable within proposed Bangor East ATC.

Whilst the proposed dwelling incorporated a contemporary design, this did not conflict with policy. Within the local context there was a mix of modern and older styled detached dwellings. The proposal was finished with a facing brick and a blue grey slate or tile roof which was comparable with other existing dwellings in the surrounding area.

Slides 9 through 12 showed photographs of views within Shandon Park West towards the site and looking outward. There were also examples of other hipped-roof dwellings, both modern and older within the surrounding area. Neighbouring dwellings located at No's 12 and 16 Shandon Park West, 20 and 22 Shandon Park East, and No's 13 & 15 Shandon Drive were closest in proximity to the application site. As set out already, the proposed dwelling was not sited closer to existing boundaries when considering the footprint of the current dwelling and the approved rear extension.

This rear extension was permitted with a window at first floor level looking onto the rear garden and the proposed dwelling's master bedroom window at first floor on the rear elevation would have the same outlook. Given this similar design feature and the adequate separation distance to neighbouring dwellings there was no adverse impact in terms of overlooking or loss of privacy. An additional first floor side window was proposed on the northern gable elevation towards No.16 Shandon Park West. Given the proposed 3 metre separation distance and potential to overlook the rear private amenity space within No.16, a condition to obscure the glazing and for it to be permanently retained, was to be imposed should the application be granted permission. This window was a secondary minor window of the master bedroom on the first floor with the principal fenestration on the rear elevation.

The proposed replacement dwelling respected the existing building line and did not dominate the street scene or have a detrimental visual impact through loss of natural light to neighbouring dwellings. Solar panels were proposed to the new dwelling's southern roof plane and to the existing garage's southern roof. Approximately 105 square metres of private amenity space was proposed within the site which exceeds the recommended 70 square metres set out in Creating Places and existing boundaries were to be retained and would be conditioned should approval be granted.

Nine letters of objection from nine separate individual addresses had been received as well as three letters of support for the application, with all issues considered in the case officer's report. Members were asked to note that no further letter of objection had been received following a re-neighbour notification process on 9 August 2024 after the submission of amendments to the house design, which added a

symmetrical full-length bay across the front of the house at ground floor level with a standing seam shallow pitched roof. NI Water had no objection to the proposal.

In terms of access and car parking, this was an application for a four-bedroom dwelling. According to Creating Places, such a dwelling required 2.75 spaces. The proposed site layout plan showed there would be ample room for parking with space for at least two vehicles to the front of the dwelling and parking on the driveway to the side towards the existing garage, which was to be retained. The access into the site was to be widened and subsequently DfI Roads was consulted, and offered no objections to the proposal, as it complied with Planning Policy Statement 3, Access, Movement & Parking.

In summary, the proposal was acceptable, taking account of the Development Plan and relevant policy requirements. The proposed design and layout of the new dwelling did not visually detract from the surrounding area and respected the built form, as well as the character and appearance of the surrounding proposed Bangor East ATC.

RECOMMENDED that full planning permission be granted.

The planning agent for the application, Mr David Wilson, was invited to speak in support of the matter online via Zoom and reminded of the five minute time limit. He explained that he had once acted as agent and applicant as those who owned the house were due to move back to Australia and provided some background information on those related to the house. With no further objections since the last amendment, Mr Wilson explained that it was a robust report.

Further to no queries being raised by Members, Mr Wilson returned to the public gallery on Zoom.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman Graham, that planning permission be granted.

5. UPDATE ON PLANNING APPEALS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity attaching information about the Appeal decisions, as below.

Appeal Decisions

1. The following appeal was dismissed on 15 October 2024.

PAC Ref	2022/A0073
Council Ref	LA06/2019/1195/F
Appellant	Mrs Rosina Herron
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of Full Planning Permission for two single storey infill dwellings
Location	Lands adjacent to and south of 9 Killinakin Road, Killinchy

The Council refused the above application on 3 March 2022 following a Planning Committee decision to overturn the Planning Service's opinion to approve the application at a meeting held on 18 January 2022. The application was refused for the following reasons:

- i. The proposal was contrary to The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy CTY1 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside in that there were no overriding reasons why this development was essential in this rural location and could not be located within a settlement.
- ii. The proposal was contrary to The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and Policy CTY8 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside in that the proposal did not constitute a small gap sufficient only to accommodate up to a maximum of two houses within an otherwise substantial and continuously built-up frontage, and would, if permitted, result in the creation of ribbon development along the Killinakin Road.
- iii. The proposal was contrary to The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and CTY13 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside, in that the proposal would approach the top of a slope location and would be a prominent feature in the landscape and would not visually integrate into the surrounding landscape as the site was unable to provide a suitable degree of enclosure and backdrop.
- iv. The proposal was contrary to The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland and policy CTY14 of Planning Policy Statement 21, Sustainable Development in the Countryside in that the dwellings would, if permitted result in a suburban style build-up of development when viewed with existing and approved buildings and create a ribbon of development which would therefore result in a detrimental change to further erode the rural character of the countryside.

There was no dispute amongst parties that there existed a substantial continuously built-up frontage (SCBUF) with three buildings identified – the dwellings at No's 1 and 9 Killinakin Road and the detached garage at No.9, as set out under policy CTY 8 of PPS 21. It was argued that the gap site was not small enough and would accommodate more than two dwellings. The Commissioner outlined that to consider whether a gap is "small" in an otherwise substantial and continuously built-up frontage, one had to assess its size, scale, siting and plot size.

The Commissioner firstly concluded that No.1 measured 0.48Ha in area and No.9, 0.22Ha. As the plot size of the appeal dwellings would be approximately 0.3Ha per dwelling plot it would respect this aspect of the development pattern.

Secondly, in terms of plot width the Commission found that No.1 measured 83m and No.9 measured 60m. Taking into account the guidance in Building on Tradition, which stated that when the gap frontage was longer than the average ribbon plot width, and when the gap was more than twice the length of the average plot width, it

was often unsuitable for the infill with two new plots. In this case, the average plot width was approximately 72m. As the proposed gap was 91m, it was not more than twice the length of the average plot width and therefore did not offend policy CTY 8 in this regard.

However, the Commissioner concluded that the proposed dwellings would be sited further back from the road than No's 1 and 9 and behind the building line. As a consequence, the front gardens would be much deeper and taking this in combination with the centralised proposed access point, which did not respect the pattern of development in the area leads to development more akin to a suburban style of development.

Whilst the Commissioner found there to be a small gap in an otherwise SCBUF, the proposed dwellings would not respect the existing development pattern and be thus contrary to policy CTY 8. As the gap represented an important visual break in an otherwise SCBUF, and shared a common road frontage with No's 1 and 9 Killinakin Road and the garage at No.9, the proposal would result in a ribbon of development. The Commissioner found that the appeal therefore did not meet the requirements of Policy CTY 14 of PPS 21, criteria (b) and (d).

Furthermore, the Commissioner found that the site represented an important visual break with the gap being fully visible on an exposed hill, which provided relief between two settlements in this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In terms of integration, the Commissioner concluded that No.8 on the opposite site of the road to the site provided a degree of a backdrop to Site A only with Site B partly breaking the skyline when read from a critical viewpoint on Whiterock Road. The Commissioner concluded that the site was prominent, and the appellant would be required to rely upon new planting to integrate and therefore failed to meet the requirements under Policy CTY 13 of PPS 21.

Third parties' arguments were not accepted regarding that the proposal did not comply with policy NH5 of PPS 2 'Natural Heritage' as there was no evidence of an adverse impact on priority habitats or priority species. This was based on the fact that only a small section of the roadside boundary hedge would be removed, other hedges within the site would be retained and augmented and that there was no clear evidence that the existing hedgerows are species rich or have biodiversity value.

Finally, the Commissioner was content that given the number of vehicle movements associated with the proposal, her on-site observations and that DfI Roads did not have any objections to the proposal, it would not prejudice road safety or inconvenience the flow of traffic.

It was also considered that the septic tanks could be located within the site however their installation etc fell under separate legislation outside the Planning Act (NI) 2011.

- 2. New Appeals Lodged** - No new appeals had been lodged since the date of the last report.

Details of appeal decisions, new appeals and scheduled hearings could be viewed at www.pacni.gov.uk.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report and attachment.

The Principal Planning Officer advised Members that there had been a dismissal of an appeal on 15 October 2024. It was an application that had been put before Members with a recommendation of approval and was overturned to refusal. The list of reasons for dismissal of the appeal could be found within the report such as substantial built-up frontage along an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. No new appeals had been issued since the last report.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the report be noted.

6. DFI LEGISLATION ON VALIDATION CHECKLISTS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity detailing the undernoted:

Background

1. The purpose of the report was to advise Members that the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) Regional Planning Governance & Legislation Branch had written to the Council advising that it had made a Statutory Rule entitled “The Planning (General Development Procedure) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2024 which will come into operation on 01 April 2025.
2. This represented an amendment to the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (NI) 2015 (“the GDPO”), the main purpose of which was to permit the management of development within the revised two tier planning system with both councils and the Department operating as planning authorities where appropriate.
3. The purpose of the aforementioned amendment was to enable councils to publish a Validation Checklist. The purpose of a Validation Checklist was to extend the minimum level of information for an application to be legally valid (as currently set out in the GDPO at the time of writing) in order to improve the quality of applications submitted for processing.
4. This legislation was to come into effect from 1st April 2025, providing councils time to prepare and consult on their Validation Checklist if deemed appropriate in advance of it becoming operational under statute.

Detail

5. Currently Article 3 of the GDPO sets out what was to be contained within an application for planning permission as follows:

- A written description of the development;
 - The postal address of the land which the development related to (or description of the land if no postal address);
 - Name and address of applicant and agent (if applicable);
 - A plan sufficient to identify the land to which it relates and showing the situation in relation to the locality and neighbouring land;
 - Such other plans and drawings as necessary to describe the development;
 - A plan identifying where any neighbouring land is owned by the applicant;
 - An ownership certificate;
 - A pre application community report (for proposals in major category of development);
 - A design and access statement (if required);
 - 3 additional copies of plans; and
 - The relevant fee.
6. Article 3 (6) sets out that the Council may by direction in writing addressed to the applicant require such further information as may be specified in the direction to enable the Council to determine any application.
 7. The above list was what is referred to as being the 'validation checklist' and the Council must be in receipt of all the above before being able to deem an application 'valid' in order to commence the appropriate processing. However, it had been recognised that the legislation as exists had set an extremely 'low bar' to make a legally valid planning application.
 8. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) Report into the planning system in Northern Ireland, dated February 2022, reported a view that the criteria set out in the Planning Act was too narrowly prescribed and did not require submission of key supporting documentation (e.g. flood risk assessments, transport assessments, bat surveys) at the point of submission. This meant that potentially 'incomplete' (not appropriately front-loaded) applications must currently be accepted by the planning authority (having met the minimum statutory requirements) and from which the time period for statutory processing began.
 9. The NIAO believed this contributed to inefficiency and poor processing times in a number of ways:
 - statutory consultees were often expected to provide a substantive response to planning applications where essential supporting information was missing;
 - consultees were spending time on poor quality or incomplete applications, and often had to be consulted multiple times on the same application; and
 - applications which arrived at the Planning Committee for a decision often had to be deferred to allow supporting information to be provided.
 10. The NIAO considered if the planning system continued to accept poor quality applications, this created a culture of speculative applications, whereby the system was being used to effectively "MOT" proposals and determine the assessments required.

11. The Public Accounts Committee Report, published March 2022, highlighted significant concern regarding the quality of applications that entered the planning system, and that the current system did not encourage submission of good quality applications. Thus, it was recommended that the Department for Infrastructure implement changes to improve the quality of applications entering the system and believed the introduction of validation checklists was one way to achieve this.
12. At the time of writing, the Council operated an informal Validation Checklist, based on that of Belfast City Council, introduced in January 2020. This, however, had limitations because it was advisory and did not hold statutory weight. The inability for Councils to mandate the minimum level of information supplied with applications had a seriously detrimental impact in terms of adding significantly to processing times, placing additional burden on staff and consultees, and time wasted assessing proposals without the key information.
13. Councils were measured on the average time for processing Major and Local applications with “Day 1” being the date when the bare minimum level of information was provided. The clock did not stop to allow for the submission of the necessary additional information to properly assess and process the application. This significantly lengthened application processing times and made it difficult for planning authorities to achieve statutory targets. The time for an amendment to existing legislation was long overdue, having been raised with the Department many times since transfer, and as referenced in the report to Planning Committee at its October 2019 meeting concerning introduction of ANDBC’s Validation Checklist.
14. The legislation would enable a Council to specify additional information requirements for applications for full planning permission, outline planning permission and approval of reserved matters, according to the “nature, scale and location” of the proposed development. The information requirements must be “reasonable” and proportionate and be “material” to the consideration of the application.
15. The Validation Checklist must be reviewed and re-published by the Council at no more than 3-year intervals. Where an application was submitted which was not in compliance with the Validation Checklist, councils would normally request the additional information from the applicant on an informal basis. However, councils may ultimately issue a formal “notice” of non-compliance with the Validation Checklist. The applicant would then have the ability to lodge an appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) within 14 days from the date of the notice. The PAC would then preside over the appeal and determine whether the additional information in question was necessary. Where the appeal was allowed, the applicant may resubmit the application to the Council absent the originally requested information.
16. The statutory average processing time would be measured from the date of the last information required to make the application valid in accordance with the published Validation Checklist. DFI had been preparing best practice guidance on the publication and implementation of Validation Checklists with support from

Councils. The best practice guidance had not been published at this time but was expected in due course.

17. It was not considered necessary for the Planning Service to consult publicly on the content of its Validation Checklist, as it would be likely be entirely upon that introduced and in operation since January 2020 (as reported to Committee in October 2019 as Item 11) albeit on a non-statutory basis. That checklist was formulated on the basis of trying to help our customers get a timely planning decision and for officers and consultees to have all the relevant information from the outset (and appended to this report). A report detailing the content of our proposed Validation Checklist was to be brought to Committee in the coming months for approval, after liaison with our statutory consultees.

Conclusion

- The attached Order amends the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 (GDPO), to enable local council planning authorities to prepare and publish planning application validation checklists.
- Article 5A was inserted to enable councils to specify by direction validation particulars or verifying evidence that was required by the council to accompany an application for planning permission or for approval of reserved matters.
- Article 12A was inserted requiring councils to issue a notice (notice of non-compliance with direction) to an applicant where an application did not comply with the specified information requirements in the direction.
- Article 12B was inserted and set out four grounds for appealing against a notice of non-compliance with direction. Appeals were to be to the Planning Appeals Commission.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of this report and attachments.

The Head of Planning explained that the Department operated validation checklists for approximately two years though not required in legislation. Belfast had been operating to frontload applications for better quality which Ards & North Down Borough Council felt was long overdue. The Department for Infrastructure had issued a letter stating the period for Councils to either refine checklists or compose them which would be due to come into legislation in April 2025. When this Council's checklist was created, Officers contact the top 50 agents that had worked with the department. These changes were amendments to the GDPO legislation and it was worth noting that the applicant could appeal against requests for further information. These changes would also affect the timeframes for completion of cases as the timer would stop and be from the date that Officers felt they had all necessary information to assess an application rather than ticking through whilst awaiting further information.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Alderman Smith , seconded by Councillor Wray, that the report be noted.

7. NIW ON 'THE STORY OF BELFAST LOUGH

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity detailing the undernoted:

Background

Officials within Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and the Council had previously been engaged in relation to the Living with Water Programme (LwWP) water sampling, and the LwWP Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) upgrade project. Through those discussions, matters around water quality, flood risks and development constraints were raised.

Planning officials raised the matter of funding for the LwWP with Members at the Planning Committee meeting of 09 April 2024 – Item 6, at which Members agreed that the Council wrote to the Minister for Infrastructure seeking assurances that the monies committed to NIW for infrastructure projects, particularly the planned upgrade to Kinnegar WwTW, be reinstated forthwith. A response to that letter was reported to Committee at its meeting of 06 August 2024 – Item 6.

We had since reached a critical stage as NIW and other LWWP partners awaited the outcome of the Department for Infrastructure's review of the LWWP, which would determine if any of the LWWP Major Projects (which included the replacement of Kinnegar WwTW) would be able to proceed as had been planned in 2021.

The Story of Belfast Lough

NIW had provided the attached document, entitled 'The Story of Belfast Lough' which it prepared and had released to stakeholders, after review by the Utility Regulator and the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The report referenced how improvement of the water quality in the rivers of Belfast and Belfast Lough was dependent upon key decisions being made today.

In relation to Ards and North Down Borough Council Members were asked to note that:

- Figure 2.1 illustrated how the LWWP catchment area spanned from Holywood to Helen's Bay
- Figure 5 showed the locations of storm overflows in the ANDBC area that were 'unsatisfactory' - causing pollution
- Section 5.4 set out how the odour at Kinnegar was a result of land reclamation coupled with unsatisfactory overflows
- Section 6.4 set out the impact of pollution on swimming at designated Bathing Waters controlled by ANDBC
- Section 6.5 set out the impact of pollution on Seapark – and the important role of the Council in advising the public about the risks of water quality
- Section 7 set out the impact of capacity constraints on economic development

- Section 9.5 set out how the NI Assembly had until 3 December 2024 to respond to a report by the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)

Living With Water Programme (2021)

In many places, the 'Story of Belfast Lough' referenced the 'Living With Water Programme' (LwWP) and the Living With Water In Belfast Plan. Further information on this could be found at the following link:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/infrastructure/living-with-water-in-belfast-plan-updated-apr22.pdf>

Storm Overflows Document and Data

In March 2024, NIW published the document '*Northern Ireland's Wastewater System*' on its website.

This could be accessed from the storm overflow page:

<https://www.niwater.com/%2Fstorm%2Foverflow%2F&data=05%7C02%7Cann.mccullough%40ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk%7Cc5bb2a45eb504c12fa2908dce1fd8399%7C39416dee5c8e4f5cb59d05c4bd0dd472%7C0%7C0%7C638633726685750215%7CUnknown%7CTWfPbGZsb3d8eyJWljoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQljoV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=T3kJZVh8hNsAhX1KZM%2F5KAbMIs7yT1byhX19594NuWs%3D&reserved=0> (Storm Overflows - niwater.com)

NI Water had also launched a second webpage called '*storm overflow performance*' that makes available in a spreadsheet the modelled results for frequency and volume of spills from storm overflows. This can be accessed from the storm overflow performance page:

<https://www.niwater.com/%2FStorm%2FOverflow%2Fperformance%2F&data=05%7C02%7Cann.mccullough%40ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk%7Cc5bb2a45eb504c12fa2908dce1fd8399%7C39416dee5c8e4f5cb59d05c4bd0dd472%7C0%7C0%7C638633726685767057%7CUnknown%7CTWfPbGZsb3d8eyJWljoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQljoV2luMzliLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=6NZbr3Qc20MrUqlpkiPi7iH71qVIhVqjwKh9qsUbrGM%3D&reserved=0> (Storm Overflow performance (niwater.com))

Sharing of this information was part of NIW's commitment to increasing understanding of Northern Ireland's wastewater system, how it worked and performed. Publishing drainage modelling data also ensured that NI Water was compliant with FOI requirements.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of this report and the attachment.

The Head of Planning explained that correspondence had been issued from the Council which sought assurances that NI Water would receive money for upgrades. Kinnegar had been mentioned in the report with issues of odour being raised. Whilst

recommendations did exist in the report for improving infrastructure around Belfast Lough, the only way they could be met was through funding.

Proposed by Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the recommendation be amended to, 'we note the report from NI Water, welcome its publication and write again to the Minister for Infrastructure asking him, in light of the findings of the report, to revisit the issue of funding for upgrades to Kinnegar Waste Water Treatment Works as a matter of urgency.'

Councillor McCollum welcomed the report and noted comments made by the DAERA Minister in which he stated that he felt the country was on course for Belfast Lough to become the next Lough Neagh, an issue which Connie Eagan MLA had also raised. The report contained bleak statistics and in the same week of its release, Councillor McCollum had been contacted by constituents who were looking to meet. The Alliance published their document on the same week. 80% of 270 overflows in the vicinity of Belfast Lough were considered unsatisfactory with Victoria Road combined overflows tallying at 150 with over 70,000 cubic metres of overflow. 90% of bacteria and nutrients found in the lough stemmed from overflows. This highlighted the chronic underinvestment in wastewater infrastructure that would lead to disastrous consequences for the environment and those businesses who relied on the lough. There would also be a knock-on effect for Planning and development with the ability to build new homes. Councillor McCollum recalled that Council had written to the Minister previously who had responded to say he believed much could still be achieved in relation to the Council's ambitions, encouraging them to work jointly with NI Water to seek innovative solutions and maximise opportunities available.

Councillor McCollum asked the Director, on that response if she had been aware of innovative solutions and opportunities. The Director of Prosperity advised that it would be difficult to come up with any solutions when there was no legislative mechanism to take money from developers to pass onto statutory consultees. This issue had been raised throughout the years from 2015 without solution.

Councillor Harbinson mentioned plastic on the beaches that was often found as part of beach cleaning teams such as one that he and Alderman McRandal jointly worked on.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the report be noted and its publication welcomed, and write again to the Minister for Infrastructure asking him, in light of the findings of the report, to revisit the issue of funding for upgrades to Kinnegar Waste Water Treatment Works as a matter of urgency.

8. FIRST QUARTER 2024/25 STATISTICAL BULLETIN

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity detailing the undernoted:

Background

The Department's Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch published provisional statistics for Planning activity on 03 October 2024 for Quarter 1 (April – June) of 2024/25.

The Statistical Bulletin was attached to this report.

Members could view the full statistical tables at

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-april-june-2024>

Detail

Local Applications

The Council determined 164 residential applications in Quarter 1 of 2024/25 compared to 248 such applications in the same period of the year before. The majority of applications received in Quarter 1 were in the residential category at 73% (133 out of 183).

The average processing time for applications in the local category of development in Quarter 1 was 14.9 weeks, in line with the statutory performance indicator of 15 weeks.

Major Applications

Recorded in the statistics was one application determined in the major category of development with an average processing time of 76.6 weeks against the statutory performance target of 30 weeks.

The detail of the application could be found below.

Application No:	LA06/2022/1072/F
Proposal:	Erection of new post-primary school with car park, bus drop-off area and playing pitches with floodlighting
Site Location:	Former Redburn Primary School Site, Old Hollywood Road, Hollywood

The application was submitted in October 2022 on a site within the settlement limit of Hollywood within an area designated as Open Space. The site was also within a proposed Local Landscape Policy Area for Hollywood. Extensive Consultations were required with many requesting submission of further detailed information in order to be able to provide substantive responses.

In addition to receipt of the requested information, further re-advertisement neighbour notification was required, in addition to assessing submitted objections to the proposal.

Processing time was ultimately hindered by lack of response from DFI Roads to its initial consultation request issued 12 January 2023, whereby DFI Roads did not respond until 19 March 2024 stating the proposal was unacceptable. When raised

with DFI Roads, it was advised that the consultation had been delayed in the system between the various sections within DFI Roads, as unfortunately other sections, such as Traffic, had their own priorities which don't always align with Development Management.

DFI Roads issued its final response on the application on 20 June 2024, and the application was presented to Planning Committee on 02 July 2024 with a recommendation of approval.

There had been an improvement in the processing time of major applications of 93.2 from Quarter 1 of last year, where in the case of an application requiring re-consultation to address consultee queries was not going to be in a position to meet a 30 -week target - rather planning officers worked with the Education Authority, statutory consultees and agent to deliver this much need educational facility for Hollywood and beyond. All parties worked together to a point where statutory consultees were content and the Planning Service could write up its assessment and present its professional recommendation to the Planning Committee.

Further information on majors and locals was contained in Tables 3.1 and 4.1 respectively of the Statistical Tables.

Enforcement

The Planning Service opened 79 new enforcement cases in the first quarter of 2024/2025, whilst 77 cases were concluded resulting in a conclusion time of 89.6% against the target of 70%.

84 cases were closed with the reasons as follows:

Closure Reason	Number
Remedied/Resolved	30
Planning permission granted	8
Not expedient	10
No breach	31
Immune from enforcement action	4
Enforcement appeal upheld – i.e planning permission granted under ground (a) appeal	1

Householder Applications

During Quarter 1, the Planning Service processed 78 applications within the householder category of development.

25 of these were processed within the internal performance target of 8 weeks (32.5%), with 63 being processed within the 15-week statutory performance indicator (80.7%).

Additional Activity

Additional activity details the "non-application" workload of the Planning Service, and included Discharge of conditions, Certificates of Lawfulness (Proposed & Existing), and applications for Non-Material Changes.

Type	No. Received	No. Processed
Discharge of Conditions	27	24
Certificates of Lawfulness (Existing/Proposed)	20	18
Non-Material Changes	16	13
Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)	8	12
Proposal of Application Notice (PANs)	0	0
Consent to carry out tree works	18	8

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the content of this report and attachment.

The Head of Planning advised that Item 8 provided statistics for the first quarter for noting. The statutory performance target had been met with 14.9 weeks for local applications. Whilst major applications did not meet the target, there had been a drop in processing time compared to the previous year. By way of example, the former Redburn Primary school site was discussed and the liaising with different bodies for a satisfactory agreement whilst working with the Education Authority to get the facility in the pipeline for the Borough.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the report be noted.

9. DECISION NOTICE BY NI LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION FOR STANDARDS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity detailing the undernoted:

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report was to advise members of the findings of a Report by the Assistant Commissioner of the NI Local Government Commissioner for Standards against a former Councillor within Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC).
2. This Committee Report coincided with the updated information on the adjudication procedures and sanctions guidelines related to the NI Local Government Code of Conduct, as recently advised by the NI Local Government Commissioner for Standards.

Background

3. Members would have been aware that a key element of The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 was an ethical framework for local government in Northern Ireland which included a mandatory code of conduct for councillors. As a result, the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors was subsequently introduced on 28 May 2014. Part 9 of that Code (planning) was implemented from 1 April 2015. The Act imposed a requirement on councillors to observe the Code.
4. The Report by the Assistant Commission came about as result of an investigation into various complaints made against a former LCCC Councillor in 2017 where it was found that the former councillor had breached seven paragraphs within the Code of Conduct for Councillors. The individual concerned was suspended from being a Councillor for a period of four years from the date of the written decision in February 2024.
5. As a consequence of the Report, the Chief Executive of LCCC prepared a 'Lessons Learned' Report for that Council (copy attached), the purpose of which was to identify any learnings from the Assistant Commissioner's findings with a view to minimising the risk and reputational damage to LCCC in the future.
6. It was prudent for ANDBC Members to review the Assistant Commissioner's Report in the context of operation of its Planning Committee.
7. Within LCCC's Report on Lessons Learned, Part 9 details a table of Actions, Guidance and Recommendations. Officers had set out below those elements of that table considered relevant, with the final column setting out the position within ANDBC. For clarity those actions numbered as A4, A5, A12, and A13 in LCCC's report were not considered relevant to ANDBC.

No.	Action	Members or Officers	Action Complete
A1	Issue Conflict of Interest Form to all Councillors each year, after the Annual Meeting	Officer	Yes – Ongoing Development of online form to be developed for Members to update as and when required
A2	Councillors must complete and return Conflict of Interest Forms annually	Members	As above
A3	Publish combined Elected Member Conflict of Interest register annually	Officers	Yes – published on Council website under Home/ Council / Your Councillors Declaration of interest made at meetings recorded in Council/Committee minutes

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A6	Update declaration of interest form to capture relevant guidance on what is a significant private or personal non-pecuniary interest, including the expected action by those who declare an interest.	Officers	To be undertaken for 2025
A7	Amend the Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee to note that, where a Councillor declares an interest and does not leave the room without providing valid justification, the matter should be challenged by the Chair of the Committee, or other Councillors	Officers	ANDBC's Protocol states at paragraph 40 that when a Member declares an interest, they must leave the Council Chamber (including the Public Gallery)
A8	Member Services to have present at any Council, Committee, or sub group meeting, details of the declared conflicts of interest of all Members with voting rights	Officers	Considered that Democratic Services and Director attending Committee has access to Register on website accordingly
A9	Amend the Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee to report annually for noting, all declarations of interest made relating to the work of the Planning Committee	Officers	Considered that all Conflicts of Interest are recorded in the minutes of Committee accordingly
A10	Where the Council's legal adviser has concerns about the action of a Councillor following declaration of interest, the legal adviser should bring those concerns to the attention of the CEO/Director.	Officers	ANDBC does not have its legal adviser present at all Planning Committee meetings. Considered that current Protocol is clear at paragraph 40 on need for Member declaring an interest to leave the Chamber. Director can raise any concerns as appropriate with CEO.
A11	Include the NIAO guidance as part of the prescribed training in order for a Member to sit on Planning Committee	Officers	Propose that this is implemented for any new Members to ANDBC Planning Committee into training as provided by legal advisers
No.	Guidance	Members or Officers	Action Complete

G1	For circumstances where a Member on the Planning Committee works for an MLA or MP who wishes to make representation on a planning application under consideration, a pecuniary interest should be declared and the member should leave the room. There are no exceptions to this because there is a pecuniary interest.	Members	Ongoing
G2	For circumstances where a Councillor on the Planning Committee is related to an MLA or MP who wishes to make representation on a planning application under consideration, a significant non-pecuniary interest should be declared and the member should leave the room. The member could remain if they have been given dispensation by DFC to remain or where they believe it would be to the Council's benefit for the Member to remain. Any members deciding on this latter course of action should be prepared to be challenged by other Members of the Committee and/or by the CEO/Director either during or following the meeting, recognising an increased risk of the report potentially coming under greater scrutiny through the declaration of interest.	Members	Considered that the current Protocol deals with this matter and Members have been appropriately trained by legal advisers prior to coming onto Planning Committee. Additionally, paragraphs 11 and 12 of the current Protocol deal with situation whereby Committee becomes inquorate due to declarations of interest.
No.	Reminder	Members or Officers	Action Complete
R1	Regularly reflect on their conduct as part of their role as an Elected Member to avoid bringing themselves or the Council into disrepute	Members	Ongoing
R2	Refresh conflicts of interest declared during the course of the year should new pecuniary or nonpecuniary interests arise	Members	Ongoing

R3	Note the requirement in law to comply with a Commissioner's request in connection with an investigation, even following the end of their term as a Councillor	Members	Commission's report to be included as part of ongoing training for new Members of Planning Committee and available to all Members
R4	Declare any significant private or personal nonpecuniary interest arising at a Council, committee or sub group meeting	Members	Ongoing
R5	A requirement to withdraw from the relevant meeting when the matter to which an Elected Member has a significant private or personal interest is being discussed	Members	Ongoing
R6	Continue to reflect on the 12 requirements of Section 8.1 of the Code in reaching decisions regarding the business of the Council	Members	Ongoing
R7	Councillors on the Planning Committee to continually reflect on their role in relation to the planning process.	Members	Ongoing
R8	The risks related to planning decision outcomes increase significantly where the Planning Committee overturns the recommendation of professional planning officers, more notably for single houses in the countryside	Members	Considered that the current Protocol deals with such matters, specifically at paragraphs 53 to 60 which had been inserted previously further to legal advice, entitled ' <i>Decisions Contrary to Officer Recommendation</i> '
R9	Be aware of options that exist to the Council to allow for quick and effective engagement with Elected Members where a declaration of a pecuniary or significant non-pecuniary interest has not been made. Early intervention in such circumstances is crucial.	Members	Ongoing
R10	Being a councillor requires the highest standards of probity and integrity. In submitting a planning application for land within the Council's boundary, councillors should ensure appropriate declaration of any interest, by them (and of their wider family), in the land.	Members	Ongoing

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of this report and attachments.

The Director of Prosperity explained the background that led to this item being on the agenda. The Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council's Chief Executive had brought this matter to the attention of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) in respect of its Planning Committee. Luke Poots, son of Edwin Poots was a Councillor within the area and Chair of the Planning Committee. His father had represented numerous objectors as an MLA at the Committee and on numerous occasions, the decisions agreed were in contradiction of Officers' recommendations. In numerous complaints, it had been seen that a declaration of interest had not been submitted.. A legal representative raised the issue who had attended the Planning Committees with the case eventually being referred to the Commissioner. The decision note was attached and particulars of applications that had been determined to fall within it. The Chief Executive of Ards & North Down Borough Council therefore believed it wise to look at lessons learned and any issues that may be relevant to this borough's Planning Committee.

The Director of Prosperity was satisfied that this Council had dealt with any such issues in the past by way of updates to the Protocol and procedures, and reminded that those serving on the Committee should abide by the published Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the report be noted.

10. PLANNING BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity detailing the undernoted:

The Planning Service's Budgetary Control Report covers the 6-month period 1 April to 30 September 2024. The net cost of the Service was showing an overspend of £8k (1%) – box A on page 2.

Explanation of Variance

The Planning Service's budget performance was further analysed on page 2 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£103k favourable	2
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£11k favourable	2
Report 4	Income	£122k adverse	2

Explanation of Variance

The Planning Service's overall variance was summarised by the following table: -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(103)	Vacant posts include PTO and SPTO. The HPTO vacant for first 5 months. SPTO post to be recruited this month.
Income	122	Mainly Planning application fees. No major applications received yet this year.

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2024					
	Year to Date Actual £	Year to Date Budget £	Variance £	Annual Budget £	Variance %
Planning					
730 Planning	855,589	847,500	8,089	1,740,400	1.0
Total	855,589	847,500	A 8,089	1,740,400	1.0
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Planning - Payroll					
730 Planning	1,158,072	1,261,300	(103,228)	2,522,500	(8.2)
Total	1,158,072	1,261,300	(103,228)	2,522,500	(8.2)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Planning - Goods & Services					
730 Planning	113,424	124,200	(10,776)	367,500	(8.7)
Total	113,424	124,200	(10,776)	367,500	(8.7)
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Planning - Income					
730 Planning	(415,907)	(538,000)	122,093	(1,149,600)	22.7
Totals	(415,907)	(538,000)	122,093	(1,149,600)	22.7

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

The Head of Planning explained that Item 10 covered a six month period from April to September. In relation to the previous report, income was down £122k along with payroll, in light of vacant posts. However, the Department was recruiting for a Senior Planning post which it hoped to fill in the near future.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Alderman Graham , seconded by Alderman Smith, that the report be noted.

11. REVISION TO SCHEME OF DELEGATION

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity detailing the undernoted:

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report was to bring to the attention of Members a Court Order quashing a decision of the Council whereby it granted planning permission on 11 May 2023 under planning reference LA06/2020/1115/F .

Background

The Council granted planning permission under delegated authority, to the following application proposal under the above reference:

Proposal: Retention of dwelling approved under W/2014/0177/F, including alterations to fenestration of approved dwelling, revisions to patio/terrace area, landscaping and associated ground retention to include existing timber retaining structure. Also proposed amendment to existing development to include new 'Macwall' block wall to facilitate culverting of existing small watercourse which runs adjacent to boundary with No. 29 Station Road.

Location: 27 Station Road, Hollywood

An application for leave to judicially review (JR) that decision was made by the objector ("The Applicant") to the decision citing a number of grounds of challenge.

Further to review and upon receipt of legal advice, the Director agreed to concede the challenge on one ground only which is stated as follows:

'That the Council erred by misdirecting itself and/or acting in a procedurally improper manner by failing to consider that the threshold of "*six or more separate individual objections which are contrary to the officer's recommendation, and where a material planning matter has been raised*" was met", requiring the application to be called in for consideration by the full Planning Committee.'

The decision had been quashed by Court Order dated 17 October 2024 and the application remitted back to the Council for reconsideration.

Detail

The ground of contention (as accepted by Council) was "*Breach of policy in relation to the Council's Scheme of Delegation*". The Applicant (objector) took issue with the fact that the planning application had been determined by Officers acting under the Council's Scheme of Delegation, rather than having been automatically

'referred/called in' to be considered by the full Planning Committee. His point was that six separate objections were made which all raised material planning concerns so that relevant condition for call-in to the Committee had been met.

The Council had received material objections from five individual addresses; whereby the objector claimed that a consultation response from NIE should be considered as an objection, thus making up the sixth objection so that the relevant trigger for call-in was operative.

The Judge considered that the Council's Scheme of Delegation did not make clear on its face that a qualifying "objection" could only come from a private individual or company who was not a statutory consultee. Indeed, he considered that such an interpretation may seem counter intuitive. He took issue with a situation whereby a statutory body, or a body required to be consulted under statute, objected on material planning grounds, and the Council did not consider that to be a separate objection (over and above others) which would warrant consideration by the committee if the threshold has been reached.

In a leave hearing judgment dated 29 May 2025 the Judge considered that against this background there was an arguable case that the Council had misdirected itself as to whether or not its Scheme of Delegation required a call-in in these circumstances.

Action Required

Further to legal advice on this issue, given the fact that the Judge had raised this particular point within his leave hearing judgment, it was prudent to accede to quashing of the decision on this singular point. Thus, the Council required to amend its current Scheme of Delegation to address this point going forward, so there could be no further ambiguity.

It was therefore proposed to amend the Scheme of Delegation by the addition of the wording highlighted in the Scheme of Delegation attached.

Subject to approval, the Council was required to submit this Scheme of Delegation to the Department for Infrastructure for its approval, before publishing it on the website accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of this report and approves the amended Scheme of Delegation, for submission to the Department for Infrastructure for approval.

The Head of Planning explained that a revision to the Scheme of Delegation was required following a Judicial Review (JR) finding. In a JR brought by McMullan against a planning decision for Hastingsthere had been a number of grounds of challenge. On receipt of legal advice, the Director agreed to concede the challenge on one ground, *'that the Council erred by misdirecting itself and/ or acting in a procedurally improper manner by failing to consider that the threshold of six or more several individual objections which are contrary to the Officer's recommendation and where a material planning matter has been raised was met requiring the application*

to be called in for consideration by the full committee.’ The application had attracted five objections however, it had been found that the Scheme of Delegation was not clear enough in explaining that consultee objections did not count as objections contributing to the threshold for referral to a Planning Committee meeting. Advice had since been sought and wording amended. The Department for Infrastructure had to be notified of change hence the requirement for approval at Committee. These changes would make it clear to anyone reading the document that objections by statutory or non-statutory consultees would not count toward the threshold and would be excluded from any such calculation.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Smart that the recommendation be adopted, and that the report be noted and approves the amended Scheme of Delegation for submission to the Department for Infrastructure for approval.

Councillor Cathcart asked if the application that it had referred to had to start afresh from a planning perspective. The Head of Planning explained that it would be readvertised again and additional information would be submitted from the agent and therefore may go onto the delegated list rather than come before the Committee.

Councillor Smart asked if any Council had considered the views of statutory consultees as an objection for the same purpose. The Head of Planning advised that every Council had a different Scheme of Delegation and that this was the first time the issue had been raised in almost ten years since its inception.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted, and that the report be noted and approves the amended Scheme of Delegation for submission to the Department for Infrastructure for approval.

12. REVISED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from Director of Prosperity detailing the undernoted:

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report was to seek approval of a revised Planning Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). Subject to approval by Council, and once receipt of agreement had been received from the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) in accordance with Section 4(3) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the SCI shall be published, thus fulfilling obligations under regulation 7 of the Planning (Statement of Community Involvement) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 – available at

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2015/63/contents/made>

Background

2. The purpose of a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was to outline how the Council proposed to engage the community and stakeholders in exercising its planning functions. The SCI set out a council's policy as to the involvement, in the exercise of the Council's functions under the development management and local development plan provisions of the **2011 Act**, of persons who appeared to the Council to have an interest in the matters relating to development in its area.
3. The SCI explained how the community and stakeholders would be involved in the development management process (planning applications) as well as the preparation of the local development plan. It would also set out the steps that the Council would take to facilitate community involvement. It allowed everyone to know with whom, what, where and when participation would occur in the planning process. In short, it presented a vision and strategy for involving the community and stakeholders at various stages of the planning process. The SCI set out the standards to be met by the Council in terms of community involvement, building upon the minimum requirements set out in both the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (NI) 2015 and the Planning (Statement of Community Involvement) Regulations (NI) 2015.
4. Section 4 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 required a council to prepare a SCI. The SCI Regulations set out the requirements for the preparation, form and content and publicity for the SCI.
5. A Council should involve the community at an early stage in the planning process and anyone who wished to get involved was encouraged to do so at the opportunities provided. The following groups of people were most likely to become involved:
 - People living within the area / neighbourhood;
 - Elected representatives;
 - Voluntary groups;
 - Community forums / groups / umbrella organisations;
 - Environmental and amenity groups;
 - Residents' groups;
 - Business community
 - Public bodies;
 - Developers / landowners;
 - Government departments;
 - Adjacent councils;
 - Groups identified under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
6. It should be noted that the above list was not intended to be exhaustive and in no way restricted other individuals, groups and organisations from participating in the planning process.
7. The planning system could be difficult to understand which meant some groups of people may find it difficult to get involved. These underrepresented groups could include young people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and

disadvantaged communities. The Council may therefore wish to liaise with community representatives to help identify under-represented groups within its area and develop strategies and specific consultative methods in order to encourage engagement with these groups in the planning process. This may include targeting participation through workshops, focus groups or mapping exercises and ensuring venues for consultation events are as accessible as possible to all groups of the community, and that events were held at locations within the community and at varying times which appealed to a wider range of people.

8. The SCI last required updating in 2020 with detail provided on how Ards and North Down Borough Council would engage the public across its planning functions against the backdrop of the COVID pandemic.
9. The SCI had since been reviewed and updated to take account the arrangements for community involvement in the planning system post-pandemic and, once approved by Council, would be submitted to the DFI for review seeking to agree terms as per Planning Act (NI) 2011, Part 2 section 4 (3).

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of this report and approves the updated Statement of Community Involvement.

The Head of Planning summarised the report, explain to Members of the revised Statement of Community Involvement and the need to notify the Department for Infrastructure. This was a general guide to allow the public to be more involved with the last document being updated in 2020 for Covid-19. In the revised document, any reference to arrangements for Covid-19 had been removed and some general refinements had been made. The previous SCI had been included in the report to allow Members to see the differences.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the report be noted and the updated Statement of Community Involvement be approved.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 20:34

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Environment Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Wednesday, 6th November 2024 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman McAlpine

Aldermen: Armstrong-Cotter
Cummings

Councillors:

Blaney	Irwin
Boyle	Kerr
Cathcart	McKee
Douglas	McLaren
Edmund	Morgan
Harbinson (Zoom)	Wray

Officers: Director of Environment (D Lindsay), Head of Assets and Property Services (P Caldwell), Building Control Services Manager (R McCracken), and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Blaney: Item 16 – Tender for the Treatment of Residual Waste – Delegated Authority to Approve Award.

NOTED.

3. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION – DONAGHADEE HARBOUR

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that Members would recall that a Notice of Motion report was brought to the September 2024 meeting of the Environment Committee around a proposal to further progress a study into the potential for enhancing the sea defences at Donaghadee Harbour and the town seafront.

The Council agreed that before committing any additional expenditure to further development of the feasibility study produced on the subject in 2020, officers should engage with relevant statutory consultees around the principles of sea defence measures initially suggested in that report. Officers had now commenced work to progress a 'PAD' (pre application discussion) process to elicit the views of those consultees.

The Council had since received confirmation from the Secretary of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, that the Council had been allocated the funding required to undertake the 'Phase 1' further investigation work as set out in the September report to Committee, from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. In light of that and given that the PAD process was liable to take some time, it was now proposed that the Council proceeded with the Phase 1 further study work in relation to potential enhancements to the Donaghadee sea defences, in parallel with the PAD process.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees to proceed with the 'Phase 1' further investigation work regarding potential Donaghadee sea defence enhancements, as identified in the report brought to the Council in September 2024.

Proposed by Councillor Irwin, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Irwin thanked officers for the work that had been undertaken to date and paid tribute to the sailing club at Donaghadee and the Community Development Association which had been at the forefront of making the work happen. She asked about the next steps and if there was a timeline for those and the Head of Assets and Property Services said that approval of tonight's recommendation needed to be granted before a timeline could be firmed up.

Seconding the recommendation Councillor Boyle thanked the officers for the report and had been very encouraged and pleased to read that progress was being made.

Councillor Edmund wondered if consideration had been given to nautical access and the tidal swell. The officer replied that such detail would be considered at a later stage.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Irwin, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

4. CLOTH NAPPY LIBRARY

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that there was a significant environmental impact and cost to the Council associated with disposable nappies. Landfilling disposable nappies costs Councils thousands of pounds a year.

According to the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), by the time one baby is potty trained a baby could use 4,000 to 6,000 disposable nappies. The UK

disposes of around 3 billion disposable nappies each year, representing an estimated 2% to 3% of all household waste. It was estimated that by using reusable nappies, the average household waste of families with babies could be halved, avoiding an average 750kg per household per year.

Cloth nappies were an alternative to disposable nappies and the Council was keen to show its support to those that were prepared to use cloth nappies as an alternative to disposable nappies. Many Councils had adopted incentive schemes to support and encourage those wanting to use cloth nappies and thereby assist in promoting this practice on a wider scale basis across the community.

Proposal

Officers were proposing to introduce a modest incentive scheme whereby cloth nappy 'trial kits' would be purchased and administered from The Library Group (a cloth nappy 'library'). The Library Group provided information and support to parents and carers wishing to use cloth nappies and slings with their children. Those kits would allow up to 30 people/year to be loaned a nappy trial kit from The Library Group and that would in turn give insight into which cloth nappy style would suit the user before making their own personal financial commitment to buying cloth nappies for use as an alternative to disposable nappies.

The Library Group offered trial packs which were supplied on a two-week basis so parents could "try before they buy" and see what was on offer in terms of styles and materials. Trial kits were mailed out to participating families and The Library Group supplied all instructions (both written and video) via email. The kit was then returned at the end of the trial period and sanitised before being loaned to the next family. The participants could watch the videos back at any time during the trial and if they had questions, they could contact The Library Group for further advice and information.

It was proposed that a budget of £1,080 would be allocated to the scheme, from within existing revenue budgets. The kits would only be available to loan to Ards and North Down residents. The administration of the kits would be the responsibility of The Library Group. Council Officers would be able to report on the uptake of the campaign annually.

The direct benefit to the Council would be from avoided landfill costs, particularly should a user opt to use cloth nappies in the longer term. It was also proposed that the scheme would be promoted and publicised as an element of the Council's overall sustainable waste resource management communications campaign, helping to build upon the initial direct benefit by promoting wider awareness and use of real nappies as an alternative to disposable nappies among families across the Borough.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approve the above proposal.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle queried where the report had come from, if it had been raised previously or if it had been requested. The Director explained that a similar proposal had been brought forward and agreed by Council some time ago, but it had run into problems with the proposed delivery partner. Following a query by an Elected Member, officers revisited the issue recently and were now pleased to identify a partner in the Cloth Nappy Library. This organisation had been working successfully with other Councils in Northern Ireland. Reduction in disposable nappy waste by facilitating greater usage of reusable nappies in this way, was viewed as one piece in the puzzle in terms of sustainable waste resource management.

Councillor Boyle thought the figure of £1,080 was a modest investment but sent out a signal from the Council, and if demand exceeded expectation it was hoped that the scheme could be extended. The Director agreed with those comments and stated that the success of the initiative and feedback from it could be judged in a say a year's time. He stressed that the purpose of the scheme was to support and encourage parents who may be reluctant to invest upfront in the purchase of reusable nappies until they were able to trial them and assess if they worked for their family needs. The initiative also fitted well with the Council's sustainability agenda, which was not only about recycling but also reducing waste.

Councillor Wray was happy to second the recommendation particularly since it was such a modest sum, and he was pleased that parents would have the opportunity to explore reusable nappies as an option. He expressed a degree of scepticism, having reservations around the energy required to wash and dry cloth nappies.

Councillor Irwin approved the recommendation as did the Alliance Party. Her colleague in Comber, Councillor Ashe, had been exploring the promotion of reusable nappies with constituents and she and the Party believed that reducing waste and recycling were equally important. She hoped that there would be a wide uptake of the scheme to trial the reusable nappies.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter fully supported families who felt strongly about their choice to use reusable nappies and admitted that she did not feel it would have been an option for her when her children were babies. She hoped that the message that the Council would give would be that cloth nappies were a very good option but that they would not be a choice that every family could make. She wanted the public to know that the Council was not putting pressure on families and there should be no sense of 'mum guilt' for those that elected to use disposable nappies, since she believed that most families were doing the best they could in their individual circumstances.

Councillor Morgan was happy to support the scheme and agreed that there should be no shame in using disposable nappies but that the Council had a mandate to reduce, reuse and recycle so it must demonstrate that it could walk the walk. She was pleased to hear that the scheme had been successful in other Councils.

Councillor Douglas rose to give the recommendation her support and indicated that she would be presenting a Notice of Motion later in the meeting which was looking at recycling of disposable nappy waste.

The Mayor, Councillor Cathcart, explained that he would be leaving the meeting soon to attend a Mayoral engagement but that he had experience of using cloth nappies. His sister had made cloth the choice for her family, but he understood that it was not a decision that every family could make. He referred to the savings in terms of waste generated and he queried the savings to the Council in terms of reduced landfill for each child who did not use disposable nappies. The Director did not have a figure available, but it would not be insignificant being a simple calculation of landfill cost per tonne of nappy waste generated. Those figures could be brought back to the Committee in future reports on the uptake of the scheme.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. REVIEW OF VEHICLE REPLACEMENT POLICY (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that a recent audit of the Fleet Transport Service Unit highlighted a number of areas for improvement, specifically around the recording of procedures for the procurement, replacement and disposal of vehicles.

Officers had since updated the vehicle replacement policy to include a number of new documented procedures to address the auditor's recommendations and the revised policy was attached.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees the revised version of the vehicle replacement policy.

Proposed by Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Cummings was happy to propose the recommendation and referred to the forecasting of future spend on Council vehicles. He asked if there was any indication that the Council's fleet size would reduce in the future. The Head of Assets and Property Services stated the use of vehicles was considered carefully before any purchase was made, including a challenge on whether the purchase was required at all.

Councillor Edmund referred to the difference in running diesel / petrol engines against the use of electric and referred to the risks of electric vehicles catching fire. The officer explained that the Council had already agreed to the Roadmap to a Green Fleet and that included a proposal to phase in electric vehicles. The safety of vehicles was always under review, but the Council had no immediate concerns in respect of safety of electric vehicles.

Councillor Blaney expressed concern over the depreciation in value of electric vehicles and wondered if leasing vehicles could be an option to overcome that and be a prudent choice to test the market. The officer said that electric vehicles were relatively new to the market, and it would be seven years before the resale value for the Council could be accurately estimated, and that what was already agreed gave some flexibility in terms of lease options. The purchasing of vehicles was an operational decision for officers but for vehicles more expensive than £30k, Council approval would be required.

Referring back to Councillor Edmund's point earlier in the discussion Councillor McKee explained that there was much misinformation spread about electric vehicle safety. He stated the latest statistics which showed that electric vehicle fires occurred in 0.0012% of cases, and the figure for internal combustion engine vehicles was much higher at 0.1%.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. TECHNICAL BUDGET – ESTIMATES PROCESS FOR 2025/26

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment.

Strategic Context

The Council's agreed Maintenance Strategy incorporated a "needs based" budgeting model, rather than a more traditional "fixed amount" approach for its refurbishment programme.

Properties were condition scored (as a percentage) and a threshold for action was to be agreed by the Council, subject to budget considerations.

By making this budgetary decision at this stage, ahead of the rates setting process, Members were able to see the detail behind each option in order to inform the decision and give officers guidance on the amount to include in the next draft of the budget estimates for 2025/26. Members would of course have the ability to change any decision taken in relation to this report, as part of the overall final rates setting process.

Area of Focus for 2025/26

In 2025/26 works would focus on Cemeteries, Community Centres and Car Parks.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Cemeteries & assoc. buildings	Tourism Buildings	Administrative Buildings
Community Centres	Public Toilets	Leisure Centres
Car Parks	Waste Recycling Centres & Transfer Stations	Sports Pavilions

Notable Trends of Improving Condition Scores and Lower Costs

Historically the Council's threshold for action had been between 75% and 80%, with costed options for revising that threshold up or down. In 2023/24 there were several large-scale operational projects required, and the threshold had to be lowered to 70% to meet budget demands. Conversely in 2024/25 there was a lower than usual requirement for operational works, enabling the budget to stretch to allow a higher-than-normal condition acceptability threshold.

Generally, there had been a trend of improving condition scores within the estate. Subsequently, the agreed threshold for action had had an upward trend whilst at the same time the revenue budget required for refurbishment projects had been reduced, as demonstrated by the table below.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	23/24	24/25
Condition Related Works	£291,000	£169,000	£98,500	£48,000	£166,000	£50,000	£110,500
Operational Works	£20,000	£84,000	£154,000	£143,500	£20,000	£131,000	£77,000
Revenue Budget	£311,000	£253,034	£252,079	£191,500	£185,924	£181,000	£187,500
Acceptability threshold	70%	75%	75%	80%	85%	70%	92%

That clearly demonstrated that the Council's planned proactive refurbishment programme was actively improving the condition of the Council's estate on a reducing budget requirement, and in time would reduce our reactive maintenance burden as envisaged within the Council's maintenance strategy.

As noted in the previous reports however, care should be taken not to deplete the revenue budget too much, as that naturally limited the Council's ability to maintain its estate in good order and was liable to create a bigger impact on future maintenance budgets when it was reinstated.

Limitations of the Process

It should be noted that the surveys focused solely on condition i.e., how functional the various aspects of the building were. The surveys did not capture or reflect whether a building looked "dated", or its suitability with regard to its intended (potentially changed) purpose. Those aspects were covered during our stakeholder conversations (see next section).

Cross-Departmental Working

Cognisance of wider strategies and plans for those assets was essential to meet the expectations of the Council's internal customers and reduce the likelihood of spending significant sums of money on assets that may be disposed of or replaced in the foreseeable future. Therefore, discussions with relevant officers had taken place and the proposed works reflected any known plans for the assets concerned.

In particular, given future plans for Queens Hall, Newtownards, the refurbishment works had been limited to maintenance items only, rather than the more expensive facility improvements that would normally be included in the Council's refurbishments.

In addition to the condition-based works, there were a number of project works that had either been requested by the Council, the facility manager or were otherwise required to maintain the safe and effective operation of the buildings. Those "operational" works therefore needed to be completed irrespective of the overall condition of the building and were quantified within the table below.

Building Needs Outside of the Normal Programme

As noted above, the Council's programme of surveys and refurbishments allowed it to focus on different groups of buildings each year, with each building coming up for survey every 3 years. However, this year a number of more urgent matters had been raised that could not wait until the next cycle. Those items had therefore been included as operational requests, highlighted blue in the table below for budget allocation. The most expensive of those works repairs to cladding and roof at Balloo ERC. The first phase of works was recommended this coming year, with further works proposed for the year after.

Condition Scores and Costs

The condition scores and corresponding costs were shown on the table below:

Building name	Location	Condition Score 2024	% Score	Costs for Condition based works	Operational requests	Notes
Carrowdore Community Centre	Carrowdore	7.97	99.63		£ 10,000	Repainting exterior
Hamilton Road Community Hub	Bangor	7.92	99.00			
Ballyvester Cemetery	Donaghadee	7.92	99.00			
West Winds Community Centre	Newtownards	7.88	98.50			
Greyabbey (New) Cemetery	Greyabbey	7.88	98.50		£ 3,200	Path repairs
Priory Cemetery	Holywood	7.88	98.50			
Portaferry Market House	Portaferry	7.78	97.25		£ 10,670	Repaint exterior following public realm scheme
Kircubbin Cemetery	Kircubbin	7.78	97.25			
Green Road Community Centre	Conlig	7.77	97.13			
Whitechurch Cemetery	Whitechurch	7.77	97.13		£ 2,700	Repaint exterior
Donaghadee Community Centre	Donaghadee	7.75	96.88			
Clandeboyce Cemetery	Bangor	7.75	96.88			
Comber Adult Learning Centre	Comber	7.71	96.38			
Kirkistown Cemetery	Portavogie	7.71	96.38			
Kircubbin Community Centre	Kircubbin	7.69	96.13			
Bangor Cemetery House	Bangor	7.69	96.13			
Movilla Cemetery	Newtownards	7.69	96.13			
Skipperstone Community Centre	Bangor	7.68	96.00			
Glen Community Centre	Newtownards	7.68	96.00		£ 13,000	Accessibility works
Redburn Cemetery	Holywood	7.68	96.00			
Alderman George Green Community Centre	Bangor	7.68	96.00		£ 20,000	Kitchen & Toilets improvements
Comber Cemetery Old	Comber	7.68	96.00			
Groomsport Boathouse	Groomsport	7.65	95.63			
Clandeboyce Cemetery House	Bangor	7.65	95.63			
Bangor Cemetery	Bangor	7.65	95.63		£ 11,141	Path repairs
Loughview Cemetery Ballygowan Road, Comber	Comber	7.63	95.38			
Conlig Community Centre	Conlig	7.6	95.00			
Ballygowan Village Hall	Ballygowan	7.57	94.63			
Marquis Hall	Bangor	7.53	94.13			
Redburn Community Centre	Holywood	7.52	94.00			
Manor Court	Newtownards	7.48	93.50	£ 12,145		Internal & external painting, refinish floor, remove asbestos floor tiles, minor miscellaneous
Portavogie Community Centre	Portavogie	7.44	93.00	£ 4,120	£ 5,500	New doors to main hall and moved 100mm
Kilcooley Community Centre	Bangor	7.35	91.88	£ 13,505		Internal painting, repair water damage, new ironmongery, repalce damaged window, minor
Queens Hall	Newtownards	7.29	91.13	£ 29,500		repair/remove canopy, improve toilets, minor miscellaneous works.
Balloo ERC					£ 38,000	Cladding repairs.
Newtownards NRD					£ 11,000	Windows to be replaced and ventilation for offices
D'Dee Harbour Gates					£ 27,000	Listed status, hardwood gates to be replaced
<90%						
Contingency (15%)				£ -		
Total for threshold 90%				£ -	£ 152,211	£ 152,211
<92%				£ 43,005		
Contingency (15%)				£ 6,451		
Total for threshold 92%				£ 49,456	£ 152,211	£ 201,667
<94%				£ 59,270		
Contingency (15%)				£ 8,891		
Total for threshold 94%				£ 68,161	£ 152,211	£ 220,371

Options Available

Option 1

If Members opted to adopt a condition threshold for action of 90%, **no condition based works would take place and only the operational requests would be completed**. By consequence, **£152k** would be included in the 2025/26 estimates for refurbishments, resulting in a **28% reduction (£58k)** from the 2024/25 revenue allocation.

Option 2

Alternatively, Members had the option to implement a condition threshold for action of **92%**, meaning that, **in addition to the operational works, refurbishments would take place at Kilcooley Community Centre and Queens Hall, Newtownards**. By consequence, **£201.5k** would be included in the 2025/26 estimates for refurbishments, resulting in a **4% decrease (£8.5k)** over the 2024/25 revenue allocation.

Option 3

Alternatively, Members had the option to implement a threshold of **94%**, meaning that, **in addition to those refurbishments highlighted in Option 2, refurbishments would also take place at Manor Court and Portavogie Community Centres**. By consequence, **£220k** would be included in the 2025/26 estimates for refurbishments, resulting in a **4.7% increase (£10k)** over the 2024/25 revenue allocation.

RECOMMENDED that in order to replenish the depleted refurbishment budget from previous years and ease the potential for future increases it is recommended that the Council approves Option 3 above as its preferred option, subject to finalisation as part of the forthcoming 2025-26 budget estimates process.

Proposed by Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Wray had been pleased to read the report and was happy to propose Option 3 agreeing that the Council should not deplete its revenue budget for such work too much. He referred to the options for future use and control of community halls even though that area did not sit within this Directorate. The Head of Property and Assets informed Members that it would be too early to hold back on certain planned maintenance works on the premise that a decision might come to look at transferring control to the community sector at some stage in the future. Generally, there would be no significant investment in assets that did not have a long-term future in the Council's control.

Seconding the recommendation Councillor Boyle welcomed the detail of the report and was comforted by the responses that Councillor Wray had received to his earlier query. He shared the view that Option 3 was the best position and had no problem supporting it. Properties needed to receive continual investment and maintenance.

Councillor Morgan supported the strategy which she viewed as sensible but had some concern about the Council's car parks. The officer indicated that detail in relation to car parks maintenance works had been an oversight. He explained that planned maintenance of car parks came from a separate capital budget, and this report was prepared in the context of revenue estimates planning for the incoming financial year. There was a reactive repairs revenue budget, which could be deployed to carry out more minor ad hoc repairs to car park surfaces and potholes.

The Director agreed to bring a separate capital expenditure report in relation car parks maintenance at a later date.

Councillor Cathcart believed that it would be wise to clarify who legally owned certain car parks before investments were made by the Council in improving them.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. GRANT OF AN ENTERTAINMENT LICENCE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that an application had been received for the Grant of an Entertainments Licence as followed:

1. Ards Rugby Club, Hamilton Park, Newtownards

Applicant: Mr Alistair Wilson, 128 Movilla Road, Newtownards, Co Down

Days and Hours:

Monday to Sunday during the permitted hours when alcohol may be served on these premises under the Registration of Clubs (NI) Order 1996

Type of entertainment:

Dancing, singing or music or any other entertainment of a like kind.

This was a variation of the existing Entertainments Licence to include an enclosed decking area.

There had been no objections received from PSNI or NIFRS. Environmental Health had requested a Noise Management Plan which had been provided. They had no objection to the application provided the following Terms and Conditions were applied to the licence:

1. Ards Rugby Football Club shall comply with the Noise Management Plan submitted to Ards and North Down Borough Council's Environmental Health Service on 9 October 2024.

RECOMMENDED that the Council grants a variation of the Entertainments Licence for Ards Rugby Football Club, with the above noise condition included and subject to satisfactory final inspection by Licensing and Regulatory Services.

Proposed by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

Proposing the recommendation Alderman Armstrong-Cotter praised Ards Rugby Club which ran a wide variety of activities engaging well with the public and bringing visitors to the Borough. The Club was also known for abiding by the rules that were set for entertainment. Councillor Boyle agreed, knowing that the Club was well run, and he was happy to second the recommendation.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the Environment Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covered the 6-month period 1 April to 30 September 2024. The net cost of the Directorate was showing an underspend of £323k (2.3%) – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

Environment's budget performance was further analysed on page 3 into three key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£388k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£25k adverse	3
Report 4	Income	£40k adverse	3

Explanation of Variance

The Environment Directorate's overall variance could be summarised by the following table (variances over £25k): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(388)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste & Cleansing (£181k) – vacancies within Waste Collection which are being recruited.

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assets & Property (£110k) – vacancies within Property Operations and Fleet Management. Regulatory Services (£97k) – vacancies within Building Control and Neighbourhood Environment Team.
Goods & Services		
Waste & Cleansing Services	(86)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste disposal costs (£141k) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Landfill (£110k) ii. Recycled Waste £15k iii. HRC Waste (£79k) iv. Waste Haulage £33k Borough Cleansing £28k. Range of running costs over budget to date. Waste Collection £15k. Range of running costs over budget to date.
Assets & Property	130	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory and Planned maintenance £175k – Aurora pool floor repairs large part of this. Energy costs (£163k) – mainly gas and vehicle fuel. Sewerage/ trade effluent charges £49k. Other expenditure £69k – Transport running costs
Income		
Waste & Cleansing	69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trade waste income £85k. Special collections income £15k. Recycled waste income (£25k)
Assets & Property	(78)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wind Turbine (£37k). Property Maintenance (£43k)
Regulatory Services	49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building Control income (£48k). Car Park income £68k. Licensing income £16k.

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2024					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Environment					
200 Environment HQ	104,340	105,200	(860)	211,700	(0.8)
210 Waste and Cleansing Services	8,845,363	9,043,500	(198,137)	17,782,500	(2.2)
220 Assets and Property Services	4,598,615	4,656,300	(57,685)	9,764,700	(1.2)
230 Regulatory Services	187,437	253,600	(66,163)	571,900	(26.1)
Total	13,735,756	14,058,600	A (322,844)	28,330,800	(2.3)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environment - Payroll					
200 Environment HQ	87,104	87,300	(196)	174,300	(0.2)
210 Waste and Cleansing Services	4,767,299	4,948,200	(180,901)	9,971,600	(3.7)
220 Assets and Property Services	1,091,459	1,201,800	(110,341)	2,415,200	(9.2)
230 Regulatory Services	1,048,896	1,145,400	(96,504)	2,292,500	(8.4)
Total	6,994,758	7,382,700	B (387,942)	14,853,600	(5.3)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environment - Goods & Services					
200 Environment HQ	17,236	17,900	(664)	37,400	(3.7)
210 Waste and Cleansing Services	4,958,532	5,044,500	(85,968)	9,261,800	(1.7)
220 Assets and Property Services	3,705,596	3,575,100	130,496	7,542,000	3.7
230 Regulatory Services	286,772	305,300	(18,528)	582,400	(6.1)
Total	8,968,135	8,942,800	C 25,335	17,423,600	0.3
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Environment - Income					
200 Environment HQ	-	-	-	-	-
210 Waste and Cleansing Services	(880,468)	(949,200)	68,732	(1,450,900)	7.2
220 Assets and Property Services	(198,439)	(120,600)	(77,839)	(192,500)	(64.5)
230 Regulatory Services	(1,148,231)	(1,197,100)	48,869	(2,303,000)	4.1
Totals	(2,227,138)	(2,266,900)	D 39,762	(3,946,400)	1.8

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McKee questioned the range of activities which were over budget. The Director did not have the detail available, but any single significant reason for

variance was highlighted where appropriate in the report. He also agreed to provide more detail should the Member wish.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. DANGEROUS DOGS LEGISLATION

(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that 'The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024' designated a type of dog known as the XL Bully under the powers contained in the 1983 Dogs (NI) Order as a "dog bred for fighting". The effect of that designation took effect on 5 July 2024. It also set an appointed day, after which it would be illegal to possess an XL Bully type dog without a certificate of exemption. The appointed day was 31 December 2024.

The purpose of 'The Dangerous Dogs (Compensation and Exemption Schemes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024' was to provide for compensation to be paid to XL Bully dog owners who did not wish to keep their dogs; an exemption scheme for those owners who did wish to keep their dogs long term and certain other matters relevant to the operation of those schemes.

Compensation Scheme

For compensation to be payable, owners/rehoming organisations must arrange for the XL Bully type dog to be euthanised prior to 31 December 2024. Claims for compensation must be submitted to the Department (DAERA) for processing by 28 February 2024 along with the required evidence. For XL Bully dog owners £100 compensation was payable in respect of the dog and £100 towards the veterinary fees for euthanising the dog. Rehoming organisations could claim £100 towards the veterinary fees for euthanasia.

Exemption Scheme

Keepers of XL Bully type dogs may apply to their district council for an exemption from the prohibition under Article 25A from 9 August 2024, if they wished to legally keep their dogs beyond 31 December 2024. Conditions for exemption include; keeping the dog at the same address at all times (except for 30 days a year to allow for holidays etc.), to notify the relevant district council of any permanent change of address, ensure requirements for insurance, neutering and microchipping were all met, that the dog was on a lead and muzzled in a public place and that the dog was kept in secure conditions.

Non-compliance with the full list of requirements would invalidate an exemption certificate, if issued, and the dog may be seized.

A regional press campaign was arranged to ensure a uniform message was being communicated across Northern Ireland and locally the Council's Neighbourhood Environment Team had written and called with all known owners to offer support and

assistance with the exemption scheme. Details were available on the Council website and the Corporate Communications team had added additional posts on the subject to social media channels. DAERA had funded the training of one ANDBC Council officer, to date, in respect of the breed identification process.

Unexempted XL Bully Dogs remaining in the Borough after 31 December 2024 would be a prohibited breed and subject to seizure. There were significant concerns for health and safety should prohibited dogs be abandoned or require seizure. Resulting kennelling costs and legal fees for the Council may be significant. Further consideration around providing support to euthanise prohibited dogs after 31 December 2024 may be beneficial as a potential alternative to lengthy court proceedings. Any suitable mitigating measures would be brought to the Committee in due course.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the recommendation be adopted.

The Head of Regulatory Services indicated that there had been a typo error in the report and corrected it to be 'claims for compensation must be submitted to the Department (DAERA) for processing by 28 February 2025 along with the required evidence' and that would be corrected in the records.

While Councillor McKee was reluctant to propose, it was inevitable but disappointing that this legislation needed to be brought. Animal welfare needed to be taken seriously but he felt that the legislation targeted one breed. He also added that most dog owners were dog lovers and tighter regulations were needed in terms of breeding. He felt that the Department and the Minister were letting the unscrupulous off the hook and attaching blame to puppies instead of the profiteers.

Councillor Morgan was happy with the report but did not think that it was about protecting dogs. She felt sad that this legislation was necessary but considered it to be about responsible dog ownership.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter thought that it was important to stress that people could have pets and acknowledged that they were a lifeline to many, but it was also important that the public was protected. She hoped the public would work with the Council and stressed the importance of good public information in respect of this.

Councillor Irwin echoed the comments of Councillor Morgan and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter and that the profiteers should be punished but ultimately public safety was paramount.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the recommendation be adopted.

10. Q4 LICENSING ACTIVITY REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the information provided in this report covered, unless otherwise stated, the period from **1 January to 31 March 2024**. The aim of the report was to provide Members with details of some of the key activities of the Licensing Service.

Applications Received

The Service dealt with a wide range of licensing functions which required the Officers to consult with the PSNI, NIFRS and a range of other Council Services in making their assessment of an application.

	Period of Report 1 January to 31 March 2024	Same quarter last year 1 January to 31 March 2023
Entertainments Licence	46	36
Cinema Licence	0	0
Amusement Permits	2	0
Marriage and Civil Partnership Place Approval	1	4
Pavement Café Licence	6	2
Street Trading Licence	3	4
Lottery Permits	8	2

Most of the licences issued were renewals and hence the workload was constant year on year. Renewing a licence still entailed considerable work when assessing the application and consulting with the other bodies.

Regulatory Approvals

That was the number of licences, approvals and permits that had been processed and issued.

	Period of Report 1 January to 31 March 2024	Same quarter last year 1 January to 31 March 2023
Entertainment Licence	56	22
Cinema Licence	0	0
Amusement Permits	2	2

Marriage and Civil Partnership Place Approval	1	3
Pavement Café Licence	9	5
Street Trading Licence	1	2
Lottery Permits	12	10

Inspections

The Service carried out a range of inspections in connection with the grant and renewal of licences to establish if the premises were suitable. In some cases, Council officers inspected with the NIFRS.

During performance inspections were an important element in ensuring the licensees were abiding by their licence terms and conditions and that premises were safe for patrons.

	Period of Report 1 January to 31 March 2024	Same quarter last year 1 January to 31 March 2024
Initial/ renewal Entertainment Licence Inspections	34	29
During performance Inspections	0	0
Initial Inspections of Street Cafes	0	0
Initial Inspections of Places of Marriage and Civil part.	0	0

The Service had an annual planned programme of ‘during performance inspections’ which concentrated on the higher risk premises such as night clubs through the year.

High Hedges

High Hedge legislation required complainants to attempt to resolve their complaint informally, prior to lodging a formal complaint with the fee of £360. That generated a

large volume of informal queries for Officers in an advisory role, which were not reflected in those statistics.

	Period of Report 1 January to 31 March 2024	Same quarter last year 1 January to 31 March 2023
Formal Complaints	2	0

CCTV incidents

Period: 1 January to 31 March 2024

Date	Location	Incident	Action
04/01/24	Main Street Bangor	Cyclist Collides with Taxi	CCTV not requested by PSNI
20/01/24	High Street, Newtownards	Lady Falls and bangs head	Ambulance called CCTV provided
01/02/24	High Street, Bangor	Five Males fighting	CCTV not requested by PSNI
7/2/24	High Street Hollywood	Traffic	CCTV provided
9/2/24	High Street, Hollywood	Theft	CCTV requested and provided to PSNI
22/3/24	High Street, Ards	Traffic	CCTV requested and provided to PSNI

Off Street Car Parking

The Council currently operated 22 pay and display car parks in Bangor, Hollywood and Newtownards.

Table 1: Income from Ticket Sales

	Period of Report 1 January to 31 March 2024	Previous year 1 January to 31 March 2023
Income from ticket sales	£183,143	£191,937

Table 2: PCN's Issued

	Period of Report	Previous year
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	1 January to 31 March 2024	1 January to 31 March 2023
Total	1018	1025

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor Morgan, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Morgan thought that the figures were quite encouraging and that there was increased activity which was pleasing to see. Councillor Wray was in agreement and asked if it would be possible for Members of the Environment Committee to view the CCTV provision set up locally. The Director agreed that could be arranged.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted.

11. Q1 LICENSING ACTIVITY REPORT (APR TO JUN 2024)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the information provided in the report covered, unless otherwise stated, the period from **1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024**. The aim of the report was to provide Members with details of some of the key activities of the Licensing Service.

Applications Received

The Service dealt with a wide range of licensing functions which required the Officers to consult with the PSNI, NIFRS and a range of other Council Services in making their assessment of an application.

	Period of Report 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024	Same quarter last year 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023
Entertainments Licence	40	40
Cinema Licence	0	0
Amusement Permits	0	1
Marriage and Civil Partnership Place Approval	1	2
Pavement Café Licence	1	23
Street Trading Licence	1	0
Lottery Permits	2	0

Most of the licences issued were renewals and hence the workload was constant year on year. Renewing a licence still entailed considerable work when assessing the application and consulting with the other bodies.

Regulatory Approvals

This was the number of licences, approvals and permits that had been processed and issued.

	Period of Report 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024	Same quarter last year 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023
Entertainment Licence	39	24
Cinema Licence	0	0
Amusement Permits	1	0
Marriage and Civil Partnership Place Approval	1	5
Pavement Café Licence	0	10
Street Trading Licence	4	2
Lottery Permits	3	0

Inspections

The Service carried out a range of inspections in connection with the grant and renewal of licences to establish if the premises were suitable. In some cases, Council officers inspected with the NIFRS.

During performance inspections were an important element in ensuring the licensees were abiding by their licence terms and conditions and that premises were safe for patrons.

	Period of Report 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024	Same quarter last year 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023
Initial/ renewal Entertainment Licence Inspections	13	24
During performance Inspections	87	52

Initial Inspections of Street Cafes	0	23
Initial Inspections of Places of Marriage and Civil part.	0	1

The Service had an annual planned programme of ‘during performance inspections’ which concentrated on the higher risk premises such as night clubs through the year.

High Hedges

High Hedge legislation required complainants to attempt to resolve their complaint informally prior to lodging a formal complaint with the fee of £360. That generated a large volume of queries for Officers in an advisory role, which were not reflected in the statistics.

	Period of Report 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024	Same quarter last year 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023
Formal Complaints	1	1

CCTV incidents

Period: 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024

Date	Location	Incident	Action
04/01/24	Queens Parade Bangor	Man falls	Safe Zone informed and first aid administered
16/4/24	High Street, Newtownards	Theft	CCTV requested and provided to PSNI
7/5/24	Dufferin Avenue, Bangor	Traffic	CCTV requested and provided to PSNI
10/5/24	Bridge Street, Bangor	3 Males fighting	CCTV not requested by PSNI
26/5/24	High Street, Bangor	Group of males fighting	CCTV not requested by PSNI
2/6/24	High Street, Bangor	PSNI investigation	CCTV requested and provided to PSNI
8/6/24	Abbey Street. Bangor	Three females fighting	CCTV not requested by PSNI
14/6/24	High Street, Bangor	Two males fighting	CCTV not requested by PSNI
30/6/24	High Street, Bangor	Collision with CCTV post	CCTV provided

Off Street Car Parking

The Council currently operated 22 pay and display car parks in Bangor, Holywood and Newtownards.

Table 1: Income from Ticket Sales

	Period of Report 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024	Previous year 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023
Income from ticket sales	£204,355	£192,784

Table 2: PCN's Issued

There had been a decrease in the number of PCN's issued during this period compared to the same period last year. As Members would be aware, the enforcement contract changed in April 2024, which resulted in the recruitment of new staff who required training.

In addition, the condition of the car parks had been deteriorating impacting the number of enforceable tickets which could be issued by the traffic attendants. The current legislative issues, which had resulted in an inability to change the tariffs as agreed by the Council, had resulted in reduced income to carry out the necessary maintenance such as re-surfacing, line marking and tree/shrub maintenance.

	Period of Report 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024	Previous year 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023
Total	727	937

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the recommendation be adopted.

12. WINTER COAT PROJECT 2024

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the Council's Recycling had liaised with two local charities, Orchardville and ROC Northern Ireland, to deliver a winter coat reuse programme to the community.

Orchardville

Orchardville was a registered charity and social enterprise with 40+ years' experience dedicated to empowering individuals with learning disabilities or autism, to achieve their full potential. The charity believed that with the right support, any individual with a learning disability or autism could reach their full potential and achieve their employment aspirations.

Providing services in the Belfast, South Eastern and Western Health & Social Care Trust areas, Orchardville supported people with learning disability and/or autism aged 16-65 through a range of individualised services and programmes.

ROC Northern Ireland

Redeeming Our Communities (ROC) launched in Northern Ireland in May 2012. ROC's aim was 'empowering people of goodwill to work together for safer, stronger, kinder communities across Northern Ireland.' The charity sought to do that through working in partnership, responding to need, and empowering and equipping.

ROC's Northern Ireland office was based in The Vine Centre in North Belfast. There were 10 multi-agency ROC Action Groups. Those Action Groups were formed following ROC Conversations enabling the talk to move into action. Each group was locally led with representatives from churches, community and voluntary sector groups, schools and statutory agencies as well as residents, who were passionate about community transformation through partnership working.

Social enterprises formed a key part of ROC's provision, allowing participants to experience work in a real business environment with on-site support from vocational mentors.

ROC/Orchardville/ANDBC Northern Ireland Winter Coat Project 2024

Why a Winter Coat Project?

In Northern Ireland, a warm coat was essential, yet the cost could be a significant burden on families already impacted by the ongoing cost of living crisis. Christians Against Poverty NI (CAPNI) noted in their 2022 'On the Edge' client report that '65% of their clients could not afford weather-appropriate clothing for themselves or their family.'

In response, the ROC Winter Coat Project was initiated, with 14 groups across Northern Ireland distributing over 3,000 coats, along with new hats, scarves, and gloves. The initiative continued into 2023, with nine groups handing out an additional 2,000 coats in local communities.

What is the ROC Winter Coat Project?

The ROC Winter Coat Project was a pop-up event, spanning one or two days, where high-quality, gently used winter clothing such as coats, hats, scarves, and gloves that had been donated were distributed for free.

The project was also a positive environmental initiative aiming to decrease the volume of textiles discarded in landfill by promoting reuse. Most importantly, the ROC Winter Coat Project aimed to offer practical support in a dignified and respectful way.

When/Where/How?

- The venue for the pop-up shop was Bangor Elim on 21 November 2024. Opening times: 1230 – 1830.

The Council's Recycling Team:

- Had collaborated with ROC and Orchardville to actively help manage, promote and support the Winter Coat Project.

- Had liaised with the Community Centre and Halls Team and organised the following times and venues for donation drop offs (grouped by town but not in date order),
 - Bangor - Hamilton Road Hub 31 October 1000-1630 and 2000-2130
 - Bangor - Hamilton Road Hub 11 November 0930 – 1630 and 1830 – 2130
 - Donaghadee Community Centre 29 October 1030-1600 and 1830-2030
 - Donaghadee Community Centre 7 November 1000-1600 and 1900-2130
 - Kircubbin Community Centre 30 October 1100-1200 and 1730-1830
 - Kircubbin Community centre 8 November 0830-1330 and 1830-2100
 - Portaferry Market house 30 October 1200-1600 and 1900-2100
 - Portaferry Market house 6 November 1900-2130
 - Portavogie Community Centre 5 November 0900-1300 and 1700-2030
 - Portavogie Community Centre 12 November 0900-1300 and 1900-2100
 - Carrowdore Community Centre 23 October 0900-1630 and 1900-2100
 - Carrowdore Community Centre 2 November 1400-1700 and 1900-2130
 - Newtownards - Manor Court Community Centre 30 October 1000-1230 and 2000-2200
 - Newtownards - Glen Community Centre 8 November 0900-1500 and 1830-2000
 - Comber Adult Learning Centre 29 October 1400-1600 and 1730-2100
 - Comber Adult Learning centre 12 November 1000-1600 and 1730-2100
- Had worked alongside the Corporate Communications Team to promote this project, engaging with the public and Council staff via a range of channels such as,
 - Facebook (Council social media platforms)
 - Council intranet
 - Bin-ovation
 - Eco-schools' newsletter
- Would be responsible for the transportation of donated items from the drop off points to the sorting facility at Enterprise Road. Those coats would then be checked that they met the quality standards and separated into sizes etc by the volunteers at Orchardville.
- Would also support the event by attending and providing an information stall to engage with the public in relation to the three R's (reduce, reuse and recycle) within the Borough.

It was important to note that this was a project that harnessed the power of the community and created positive community spirit – engaging businesses, community groups, churches and schools where possible.

This was a great opportunity for the Council to add another dimension to its sustainable waste resource management programme, promoting the reuse of clothing (winter coats) in a way that also contributed significantly to social need in the Borough.

RECOMMENDED that this report be noted.

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McKee thought that it was positive to see the Council working with community partners to deliver the initiative, which was much needed in these difficult times and wondered about the uptake so far in terms of donations. The Director had no data on that to hand but in recent discussions with officers he was aware that there had been a lot of active engagement and activity in relation to the project. He added that this was yet another piece of the jigsaw on the path to sustainable waste resource management and helping to fulfil a social need while reusing items. A further report would follow later to keep Members updated on the outcomes from the initiative.

Councillor Kerr was happy to second the recommendation, and he was supportive of the Council working with community groups to make a positive difference.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter also welcomed this and the thought process behind it. The buzz around the initiative was encouraging and she was aware that many charities and churches were doing similar work already. People could exchange clothing that they may have outgrown and make a donation or not accordingly. She thought that it would be remiss for the Council not to thank these beacons within the community through the Council's social media platforms.

Councillor Morgan strongly supported the reuse of items and also touched on what Alderman Armstrong-Cotter had said in giving support to the organisations that were also doing this. She hoped this would be extended to the entire Borough and not simply the urban centres.

The Director clarified that this was not a Council initiative but rather the Council was giving its support to third sector organisations. He also agreed that it was undeniable that work of a similar nature was already being carried out, and that this initiative was more of a good thing. He agreed that the message the Council sent out was important.

Councillor Edmund thought that it was important that the Environment Committee encouraged the reuse of clothes which were in good condition.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Councillor Cathcart left the meeting at 8.04 pm)

13. NOTICES OF MOTION

13.1 Notice of Motion from Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Douglas

That this Council notes the 70% recycling target set out in the Climate Change Act 2022 and that the current household recycling average is 50.7%.

Further notes the aims and intentions around the consultation on “Rethinking Our Resources: Measures for Climate Action and a Circular Economy in Northern Ireland” includes the reduction in grey bin capacity by either volume of bin or three weekly collections; Further notes that nappy collection scheme was not referred to in Rethinking our Resources: Measures for Climate Action and a Circular Economy in Northern Ireland” despite around 4% of residual waste being made up of disposable nappies and other absorbent hygiene products; Further notes with concern the impact reduced grey bin capacity will have on those household disposing of nappies and/or other absorbent hygiene products as well as the amount of recyclable materials such products contain; This Council writes to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs expressing its view that there is a need for a nappy collection scheme in Northern Ireland in order to meet recycling targets and to support households in grey bin capacity is reduced as a result of any future Departmental strategy and, further that this Council would be happy to engage with the Department on how to best deliver such a scheme. And that a copy of this Motion is sent to other Councils in Northern Ireland to encourage them to write to the Minister on similar terms.

Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen introduced his Motion and thanked the Committee for the opportunity to address the meeting.

He thought that many people were aware that the issue around the collection and disposal of nappies and absorbent hygiene product waste had been a bit of a bugbear of his for the last number of years.

As a father of three children who had all been in nappies at the same time it was a matter of abject horror for him when officers in the Council were proposing moving to a four weekly grey bin collection even on a trial basis. One of the key issues he and his Party wanted was clarity on how the Council was going to address the needs of those with nappy, hygiene and medical waste. He believed that those had never been satisfactorily answered.

A Waste Consultation had recently been undertaken by the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. That was suggesting a reduction in grey bin capacity either by providing smaller grey bins or by moving to at least a three weekly grey bin collection. It was suggested that by implementing those proposals a 70% recycling target could be reached. In fact, the DAERA Minister had actually said that he wanted Councils to reach 74% recycling through the proposals set out in his Consultation.

Alderman McIlveen thought that was nonsense because there were no proposals to deal with nappy waste. It was important that that was addressed before the strategy was published and these matters were forced upon the Council.

Under the Climate Change Act which came into effect on 6 June 2022 there was, among other targets, a requirement that at least 70% of waste was to be recycled. The recycling rate between January and March 2024 was 46.4%.

While various types of reusable nappies were on the market, disposable nappies were still the most attractive option for parents. At present, the only bin that could take those disposable nappies was the grey bin, so they went straight into landfill. While reusable nappies were more environmentally friendly, it was clear that we could not ignore the fact that huge numbers of disposable nappies would still be making their way into grey bins.

It had been estimated that nappy waste equated to around 4% of the residual waste and this was either being put into landfill or incinerated – the report the Committee had dealt with earlier seemed to be quoting the lower UK figure, nearly 40,000 tonnes per year.

When his children were in nappies that meant that his grey bin was full every fortnight – smaller bins or less frequent collections would have been a practical disaster. However, it should be noted that nappies were recyclable, they could be removed from the grey bin, collected separately and they could produce a useful recycled product.

Currently, Wales was the only country in the United Kingdom to have met the 50% household recycling target. In fact Wales had reached a 59% recycling rate. Pembrokeshire being the best performing local authority reaching an amazing 73.2% (still short of the Minister's dream target of 74% even with recycled nappies).

Interestingly, Wales operated an opt-in nappy collection service through its local authorities. That extended beyond simply nappies but also included other absorbent hygiene products. That was underpinned by the promise that this waste was collected every two weeks despite grey bins being collected every three or in some cases four weeks.

Nappies contained recyclable materials which were being thrown away here in Northern Ireland, such as cellulose fibres and plastics. Members of this Council may be aware of the story a couple of years ago of a trial in Wales where nappy fibres were added to the bitumen in asphalt roads and those were shown to last twice as long as other roads. Carmarthenshire County Council was now resurfacing its roads with that product. That had been marketed as "a prime example of local circular economy in action".

He informed the Committee that nappies had been collected in Wales since 2009. They were recycled in Japan, the Netherlands and also Canada and in Italy Pampers operated a deposit bin at local supermarkets in exchange for vouchers. Northern Ireland was well behind the curve on the issue and should be drawing on best practice elsewhere.

The Alderman said that his sister, Michelle McIlveen MLA, had raised the issue of a nappy collection service with the Minister through Assembly questions who did express an interest in the suggestion however that was also reliant on local authorities expressing an interest with him and that was why the Motion was being brought to Ards and North Down Borough Council.

He felt this was an obvious step that should be taken across Northern Ireland. It was necessary for all or most local authorities to come on board with this. It would have been preferable for the Minister to have been gauging this opinion for himself but since he had passed that over to Councils they should be pushing the agenda.

He believed that this Motion was the first step and if this Council agreed other councils could be persuaded to have the conversation with the Department to see how it could be delivered.

Having a centralised policy on the matter would allow recycling businesses the assurance that there would be product to expand their services to deal with nappies. The diverted waste from one council would not be sustainable so there needed to be a take up across Northern Ireland.

As he had suggested previously in the Corporate Committee meetings, such a scheme would also present the Infrastructure Minister with an opportunity to access longer lasting and more cost-effective road surfacing at a time when there was continued chronic underinvestment in the Borough's roads. It would help the DAERA Minister to take a massive step towards diverting tens of thousands of tonnes of recyclable waste away from landfill. More importantly, it would help those with nappy and absorbent hygiene product waste with an outlet to have that waste dealt with rather than overflowing bins or wastes lying in those bins for an additional week. Lastly, it would also help the Council and region to address those targets which had been imposed by legislation.

Concluding he believed that a nappy collection and recycling scheme was the best and most effective way of addressing the problem and that case needed to be made to the Minister. He was keen that this Motion be used to encourage other councils to follow suit and that to meet the targets being imposed on them it was a necessary course of action.

He looked forward to the support of the Committee for his Motion.

Councillor Douglas was pleased to have the opportunity to second the Notice of Motion brought before the Committee.

As already mentioned earlier in the meeting there was a significant environmental impact and cost to the Council associated with disposable nappies. As the Committee was aware landfilling disposable nappies was very costly and Alderman McIlveen had described his own experience with having three children which she could relate to.

If the average child used 5 nappies per day, that was 35 per week, 1820 per year, so over the three years that would amount to 5,500 per child.

Busy lifestyles resulted in disposable nappies often being the only option for mums and dads with new babies and toddlers.

The Council was aware of the target which needed to be met regarding the Climate Change Act and she believed that the proposal offered an excellent opportunity not only to meet the target but also to be much more environmentally friendly.

As Alderman McIlveen had outlined similar schemes could work and did work and she believed it was the Council's responsibility to put its weight behind the Motion.

Finally, she fully supported that the Council write to the DAERA Minister expressing its views regarding a nappy collection scheme and that this Council was happy to engage with his Department on how to best deliver such a scheme and to send a copy of this Motion to other Councils in Northern Ireland.

Councillor McKee was happy to support the Motion believing it to be incredibly sensible to investigate and he found it quite surprising that it had not been investigated or pursued before. That, in his view, was a missed opportunity since what had been so clearly laid out made sense.

Councillor Morgan shared her support and wondered if the Motion could be improved slightly with the addition of a phrase such as 'to encourage the use of reusable nappies' in front of the call for a nappy collection scheme. She thought that would make the Motion more comprehensive and complete.

Councillor Blaney thought that this was a great idea and thanked the Members for bringing it forward. He considered that the benefits would be fantastic and he was interested in the science of strengthening roads with recycled nappy product.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter repeated that the Council's messaging should be that there was no shame in using disposable nappies and it was pleasing to see that these could be turned into something useful. She thought the ingenuity of that initiative was astonishing and she thought this could be of great benefit in protecting the environment and bringing benefits to the Borough.

Alderman McIlveen thanked Members for their comments and referred to the suggestion of an amendment which had been put forward by Councillor Morgan. He stated that he had considered that addition, but he felt that to do so would be to lose focus of the recycling and collection element of disposable nappies. The recycling companies would need the product to justify the investment that they would intend to make. He agreed that while reusable nappies should be promoted and encouraged often families needed to consider convenience. He thought that therefore disposable nappy recycling needed to be raised before Minister Muir.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

14. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

15. EXTENSION OF VARIOUS EXISTING TENDERS

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON

A report on extension of the contracts for Provision of Minor External Works and Hired Plant, Provision of Bitmacing Works, Provision of Building Repair Work, and Provision of Electrical Fittings, was considered.

It was agreed to extend the contracts for a further / final year in line with the terms set out in the original tenders.

(Councillor Blaney left the meeting at 8.21 pm)

16. TENDER FOR THE TREATMENT OF RESIDUAL WASTE – DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO APPROVE AWARD

(Appendix III)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON

A tender report for the Treatment of Residual Waste, was considered.

It was agreed to award the contract to ReGen Waste Ltd, 7 Shepherd's Drive, Carnbane Industrial Estate, Newry BT35 6JQ.

(Councillor Blaney re-entered the meeting at 8.30 pm)

17. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION – WINTER GRITTING ARRANGEMENTS

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

EC.06.11.24PM

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NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE

A report into issues around gritting of public footpaths and car parks was considered.

It was agreed not to grit public footpaths and car parks, and that Council officers will provide Members with an update report on the expansion of salt and grit provision across our Borough.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Kerr, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.55 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Place & Prosperity Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Thursday 7 November 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Gilmour

Aldermen: Adair
Armstrong-Cotter
McDowell

Councillors: Ashe McLaren
Blaney McCracken
Edmund Smart (Zoom)
Kennedy Thompson
McCollum

Officers in Attendance: Interim Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Interim Director of Place (B Dorrian), Head of Tourism (S Mahaffy), Interim Head of Economic Development (A Stobie), Interim Head of Regeneration (A Cozzo) and Democratic Services Officer (R King).

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for inability to attend was received from Councillor Hennessy and Councillor Hollywood.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest notified.

CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Chair welcomed Alison Stobie to what was her first Place and Prosperity Committee meeting in her new role as Interim Head of Economic Development.

3. NOTICE OF ANDBC WITHDRAWAL FROM EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF THE COLUMBAN WAY (2014) (FILE TO/TD11)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Prosperity detailing that in 2014, the legacy North Down Borough Council signed up to become a founding member of the European Association of the Columban Way ('the Association') at a ceremony in Bobbio, Italy.

During the period of the Covid 19 pandemic it was not possible to hold annual general meetings nor levy membership fees for the Association, these being core to the statutes of the Association for it to continue to function. As such, it was the view of most members of the Association that it had subsequently defaulted and was no longer a functioning entity.

As Council was aware, in June 2023, the then Deputy Mayor attended a ceremony in Gallen, Switzerland, marking the foundation of a replacement body to the Association through the signing of a Charter of the Via Columbani Partnership, by organisations and bodies from the nations that make up the route of the Columban Way. This new initiative had the same aim of seeing the Columban Way become recognised formally as a European Cultural Route in the near future.

Development

Whilst it was the understanding of the non-Italian signatories of the 2014 Association that it had become defunct due to the issues stated, it had become apparent that, due to the Association being under Italian law, that formal “withdrawal” should be issued by members to the authority in Bobbio, where the statutes are registered. The local authority in France had recently sent its notice, with ROI and non-local authority members across various nations currently in the process of furnishing Bobbio with formal letters.

These notices would allow for the replacement Via Columbani Partnership to proceed in moving forward to develop the work of the Columban Way, and progress toward application to the European Association of Cultural Routes.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of this report and writes to the authority in Bobbio notifying it of the formal withdrawal of ANDBC from the 2014 European Association of the Columban Way.

Proposed by Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor Ashe, welcomed the continued support for what was a growing tourism asset in the Borough and credited former Council member Deborah Girvan for her work in its development.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted.

4. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (FILE RDP112) (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Prosperity detailing that Members would be aware that in January a report went to Corporate Services Committee updating the Council on work that had been undertaken on international relations.

It was agreed to close down the formal relationships with Peoria, Arizona and Kemi, Finland, in the light of inactivity and maintain the ‘Twin’ and friendship relationship

with Bregenz and the Sister City relationship with Virginia Beach with the view to develop these relationships in a meaningful way and re-form an International Relations Sub-Committee under the Place and Prosperity Committee.

The Committee, using the recommended Assessment Framework as outlined in the report, would review the Council's current links to ensure the Council were getting the most from each relationship and identify any future Sister City or Twinning relationships. The Sub-Committee would also be tasked with developing an International Relations policy for Council consideration.

The Council also agreed the inclusion of a small international relations budget of £5,000 in the 2024/25 budget.

1. Update on International Relations

A short update was provided on actions that had taken place since January:

Sister City/Town Twinning

As agreed, Council had closed down the formal relationship with Kemi, Finland and Peoria, Arizona, USA.

US Consul General visit

On 28 August 2024 the US Consul, James Applegate visited the Borough; alongside the Mayor and the Chief Executive, he visited three local businesses that had economic ties with the United States and received a presentation from Glenlola Collegiate pupils on their 2023 visit to Tallwood High School. The visit was an opportunity to build upon the relationship that the Council had with the US Consul General's Office, in line with Council's Sister City relationship with Virginia Beach.

Glenlola Collegiate, Bangor and Tallwood High School, Virginia Beach

Following from the visit of pupils from Glenlola Collegiate to Tallwood High School in September 2023, a reciprocal visit of pupils from Tallwood High School took place in March 2024. The pupils visited the City Hall in Bangor and met with the Mayor.

At the end of September, Council received a request from Glenlola Collegiate for financial assistance ahead of the next round of their exchange programme which would contribute towards the cost of their visit to Virginia Beach in September 2025 and the hosted return visit in March 2026. The return visit would also include a hosted lunch and tour of the Council Chamber by the Mayor.

In line with what had been granted in the past, it was recommended that £1,000 was contributed. The Council provided the same amount of funding in 2018 and 2019. The exchange programme was paused during the pandemic period, restarting again in September of 2023. In September 2023, the Mayor and Chief Executive visited Virginia Beach following an invitation from the Sister Cities Association of Virginia Beach.

This cost would be taken from the small international relations budget that Council agreed to in January of this year.

Symphonicity, Virginia Beach Orchestra

Some progress had been made to further the plans to hold a concert in Bangor as part of the Orchestra's planned tour of Ireland in 2025 and it had been agreed to hold the concert on Saturday 28 June. The group would comprise of around 30-35 musicians from the Orchestra and a Compere, and they would be joined by Bangor Ladies Choir, who were Ambassadors for the City of Bangor. To accommodate the size of the group, a scoping exercise of suitable venues was undertaken, and it was proposed that the event be held in Bangor Elim Church. The cost to hire the venue would be £1500.

Council was asked to approve the costs for hiring the venue which would be taken from the International Relations budget for 2025/26. The Orchestra did not intend to charge for tickets to their events, so it was proposed that ticketing was marketed at a nominal fee of £5 per ticket, which would cover costs incurred to hire the venue and help ensure attendance. Members of the Council and VIP guests would be provided with complimentary tickets.

In addition to the concert, it was proposed that an evening event take place on Friday 27 June to help promote the event, as well as a small group performance at Bangor Castle or the Walled Garden where the Orchestra would debut a bespoke piece written for Bangor. Marketing costs to promote the event would be covered from within existing budgets.

Following the event, an 'End of Tour' reception would be hosted on Sunday 29 June by the Mayor in Coffee Cure with the group and selected guests. Costs for the Mayoral reception would be covered from within existing budgets.

2. Governance

Following further review, it was recommended to set up a Working Group, rather than a Sub-Committee to develop and oversee Council's International Relations Policy. The proposed draft Terms of Reference were included in Appendix 1.

As outlined in the report in January, the Working Group should, using an assessment matrix, review the Council's current links: Bregenz, Austria and Virginia Beach, USA, to ensure the Council were getting the most from each relationship as well as identify any new potential relationships. The Working Group would also be tasked with developing an International Relations policy for Council consideration.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the update and:

- a) Agrees to setting up a Working Group rather than a Sub-Committee, and subsequently agrees to the proposed Terms of Reference outlined in Appendix 1.
- b) Nominates 5 Members to the Working Group.
- c) Agrees to contribute £1,000 towards the cost of the Glenlola Collegiate School visit to Virginia Beach in 2025 and the hosted return visit from Tallwood High School in 2026 as part of the Sister Cities programme.

- d) Agrees to pay for hire of the Elim Church to host the 2025 Symphonicity Orchestra concert and to charge a nominal fee for ticketing the event to offset costs.

Councillor Kennedy indicated that he wished to bring an alternative proposal as follows:

“That the recommendation be adopted and further that Council writes to Donald J Trump, conveying our congratulations following his recent presidential election success and letting him know that Ards & North Down is open for business and that we issue an invitation to the Vice-President elect to visit the Borough, given his familial ties with Northern Ireland.”

This was seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter.

Councillor Kennedy felt it would be remiss not to make this gesture given the outcome of the recent US presidential election and referred to the Northern Ireland family connections of the Vice-President elect.

The seconder, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter recalled recently meeting the US Consul General in Newtownards who had noted strong local ties which had included a sticker of his local football team displayed in a passing vehicle. Alderman Armstrong-Cotter also referred to a discussion around the Vice President’s Irish family ties and Donald Trump’s Scottish connections. She felt that the proposal was important for international relations and would send a message that the Borough was open for business.

In a further matter, Councillor McLaren sought clarity on the difference between a working group and subcommittee and the Interim Director of Prosperity explained that a Working Group could be made up of elected members and relevant stakeholders and it would bring back recommendations for the Committee to agree. The nominations would be open to all members of the Council regardless of whether they sat on the Place and Prosperity Committee.

Councillor McLaren queried the reported £1,500 cost associated with venue hire of the Elim conference facilities and felt this appeared to be a substantial fee. The Interim Director of Prosperity explained that Council would only be making a contribution of £1,000 but it expected to see a return on that due to the event being ticketed.

In a final query, Councillor McLaren queried the criteria of the matrix and was cautious that some of the initiatives, whilst culturally beneficial, may not necessarily provide good economic value to the Borough and she wondered if there would be a cost analysis in that regard. The Interim Director of Prosperity explained that that was the basis for some ties having been severed, and that the purpose of the matrix was to enable the Council to assess what it wished to achieve from current relationships, as well as consider elements including governance and outputs.

In terms of twinning benefits, Alderman Adair recalled making a Mayoral visit to Virginia Beach and spoke of the strong ties he had observed between Bangor and

it's US twin city. He recalled great interest in Northern Ireland, and he had learned that the first settlers had come from this island and recalled a monument which had historical links with Groomsport.

Alderman Adair recalled that one of the highlights of the trip had been attending a Symphoncity Orchestra concert and he believed that the Borough would be in for a treat when the orchestra performed here. In response to an earlier query from Councillor McLaren, he felt that the £1,500 charge for the Elim centre was reasonable in comparison with other similar venues.

The Chair also recalled a visit to sister city Virginia Beach during her own Mayoral term and had noted agricultural ties, having learned that like Comber spuds here, strawberries were an important part of the Virginia Beach region's heritage, recalling that it was the first place that wild strawberries had been discovered. A strawberry was featured in the seal of the city.

Given the criminal convictions against Donald Trump, Councillor McCollum was opposed to writing a letter of congratulations to the US President elect or endorsing a visit by the Vice President elect given that he had been chosen by Donald Trump. As a lawyer, a feminist and long-time supporter of Women's Aid, she could not support Councillor Kennedy's addition to the officer's recommendation and felt that it would cause outrage for many of her constituents.

On being put to the meeting, with 8 voting FOR and 5 voting AGAINST, the alternative proposal was declared CARRIED.

The following nominations to the working group were proposed.

Proposed by Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that Alderman McDowell be appointed to the Working Group.

Proposed by Alderman Adair, seconded Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that Councillor Gilmour be appointed to the Working Group.

Proposed by Councillor Blaney, seconded by Alderman Adair, that Councillor McLaren be appointed to the Working Group.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor Kennedy, seconded by Alderman Armstrong Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted and further that Council writes to Donald J Trump, conveying our congratulations following his recent presidential election success and letting him know that Ards & North Down is open for business and that we issue an invitation to the Vice-President elect to visit the Borough, given his familial ties with Northern Ireland.

Further agreed that Alderman McDowell, Councillor Gilmour and Councillor McLaren be appointed to the Working Group.

5. **RENEWED AMBITION & UK REAL ESTATE INFRASTRUCTURE & INVESTMENT FORUM**

(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Prosperity and Interim Director of Place detailed as follows:

Renewed Ambition Background

Council agreed a number of years ago to be a member of the Renewed Ambition Programme (RAP). This was a joint public/private sector led initiative that aimed to work collaboratively to showcase investment and development opportunities across Belfast City Region, seeking to deliver on shared ambitions for the city region as an exciting place to work, live, visit and invest.

RAP was delivering a year-long programme focused on activities that help to ensure the place was positioned to continue to attract investment and deliver on inclusive growth. Together the Partnership would:

- continue to build collaboration and partnership in the city and wider region
- continue to promote and market the Belfast region outside Northern Ireland
- increase engagement and advocacy with all key stakeholders; in particular, investors and government
- support delivery of Belfast Region City Deal projects by attracting collaborative partners
- support delivery of our shared ambition to drive inclusive, sustainable growth

All five Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) partner Councils had invested in RAP, in partnership with Belfast City Council (BCC) since 2019 and it had been an important forum to showcase the real estate investment potential for the wider Belfast City Region and forthcoming BRCD projects.

Benefits achieved through the Programme

Through the previous RAP programme the Council had been able to promote opportunities within the Borough to investors and developers at events such as:

- UKREiif May 2024 Leeds– UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum. The interim Director Prosperity and acting Interim Director of Place attended the event, which brought together over 13,000 (an increase of 7,000 from previous year) attendees from across the public and private sectors involved in regeneration of the UK's city and regions including investors, funders, developers, housebuilders and government bodies. The Borough's investment sites were uploaded onto the UKREiif investment portal, which was accessible to all attendees. The Directors undertook 1-1 meetings with a number of potential investors including potential hotel chains/hotel management companies who were interested in learning more about the opportunities within the Borough. They also attended seminars including on 'Offices for Good' and 'At Your Leisure' (ingredients for a successful destination creation) at which examples of major redevelopment schemes were discussed, including

- Aberdeen beachfront
 - Wrexham Gateway
 - Copr Bay, Swansea
 - Marine Lakes Events Centre, Southport
- All six Council RAP partners development sites were featured in joint marketing and sales collateral, a digital version of which was promoted on the Belfast Region stand at both MIPIM and UKREiif.

Belfast City & Regional Place Partnership 2024-2025

The launch of the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership 2024-2025 programme on 18 September at Belfast Grand Central Station, highlighted how collaboration between the public and private sectors was not just beneficial – it was essential for our region's future.

The recent publication of the draft Programme for Government marked a pivotal moment for Northern Ireland, providing a clear roadmap for our region's development. The Belfast City & Region Place Partnership was well positioned to play a key role in realising those ambitions. In today's challenging economic climate, it was more important than ever that we worked together across sectors to create spaces and places that benefit all our communities.

Subject to Council approving continued partnership in RAP, it was intended to send two officers again to UKREiif which would take place again in Leeds in May 2025, as well as exploring further the examples of the redevelopment schemes referred to above, in the context of the Bangor Waterfront scheme. Flights and accommodation costs could be met from existing budgets.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves continued participation in the Renewed Ambition Programme (Belfast City & Regional Place Partnership) at a cost of £15,000 for 2024-25.

Proposed by Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McCollum asked for further information on the Leeds event in terms of response from prospective investors and the Interim Director of Prosperity explained there had been continued liaison with hoteliers around investment opportunities for the Queen's Parade development site and in addition there were intentions to progress a study visit of Aberdeen waterfront, as an invigorating example of a major redevelopment scheme that could be beneficial here. The Director also referred to discussions with the GIS coordinator in terms of mapping 3D structures to observe impacts of new development for example. Relationships had also been formed with some other Councils who had been in attendance.

Councillor McCollum was aware of the development in Aberdeen and agreed that exercise could be beneficial for the waterfront development in Bangor.

Responding to a further query from Councillor McCollum, the Director explained that UKREiif's expansion over recent years was considered to provide greater benefit to

the Council and that was the reason for no longer considering attendance at present at the MIPIM element.

Councillor McLaren spoke of the importance of highlighting and showcasing the Borough's potential to prospective investors and felt that £15,000 was a reasonable investment for insightful collaboration. She referred to the sub regional economic plan and noted figures quoted showed that weekly median wages were higher for those living in the area compared to those working in the area and that reflected the Ards and North Down's status as a major commuter area for Belfast. She noted that productivity remained lower than average in the region so she was supportive of sending representatives to these events in order to help increase outcomes for as many people as possible.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. EVENT LOCATIONS 2025 – DEFERRED FROM COUNCIL (FILE TO/EV137)

(Appendix III - V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Prosperity and Director of Corporate Services detailing that

1. Background

A number of events had been approved by Council, subject to the rates setting process for 2025/26. The forthcoming Queen's Parade development works would result in site limitations at Bangor Waterfront for direct Council events delivery during 2025. Thus a review of the programme was required, taking due consideration of existing resource. Officers had reviewed the summer programme, and in particular the events affected in this context.

Armed Forces Day 2025 - At the Place and Prosperity Committee on 9 November 2023 it was agreed that *Council accepts the honour to host the main Armed Forces Day as part of Sea Bangor on 21 June 2025 with a musical event in Newtownards on 20 June, and approves officers to liaise with the RFCA to confirm programming opportunities and to budget accordingly, subject to lead in to Estimates process for 2025/26.*

VE Day 80 – At the Corporate Committee in June 2024 it was agreed via Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Gilmour and Councillor Martin that:

*8th May 2025 will be 80 years since **VE day**- the official end of the Second World War in Europe. This council recognises the significance of this occasion and tasks officers to bring forward a report outlining potential ways this historic anniversary can be commemorated. Including any national plans for beacon lighting and with the council working with local people and local community groups to look at holding fitting events to mark this occasion so that a budget can be included in the next rate setting process.*

Veterans' Day Parade 2025 - At the Corporate Committee in September 2017 it was agreed via Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors McIlveen, Armstrong-Cotter and Kennedy that *this Council proposes reviving the Veterans' Day event (which was previously hosted by Ards Borough Council) to recognise the invaluable contribution of men and women from this Borough who have served their country at home and abroad and tasks officers to begin conversations with the Royal British Legion, relevant regimental associations and other appropriate bodies with a view to hosting the first event in June 2018.*

Pipe Bands 2025 - At the Place and Prosperity Committee in January 2023 it was agreed *that officers submit a bid for the Council's Pipe Band Championship 2023 to the RSPBANI at £14,000 with a total Council allocated budget to a maximum of £26,500, subject to the Rates Setting process and confirmation of bid by RSPBANI. It was further agreed that the Council proceeds with Option 3 to rotate the hosting of the event in Bangor and Newtownards Airfield, the event being at the Newtownards Airfield in 2023 and Bangor in 2024, subject to annual negotiations with the Ulster Flying Club and the bidding process.*

A further report was brought to Place and Prosperity Committee in February 2024 outlining the opportunity to host the UK Pipe Band Championships at Ward Park Arras, seeking an additional budget of £12,860 to deliver the event (total budget £34,360). Officers had been working on the premise that the rotation was implemented annually by Council going forward and had been scoping costs and delivery within Newtownards for the event in 2025 (as per previous further rotation arrangement approved at Regeneration and Development Committee, October 2018).

Sea Bangor (annual) - Sea Bangor was included in the annual tourism events programme as per Borough Events Strategic Direction. It was hosted annually at Eisenhower Car Park and Pier.

Other Council Direct Delivered Annual Events include:

- Hollywood May Day
- Ards Guitar Festival - April
- Comber Earlies Food Festival - last Saturday in June
- Creative Peninsula – August
- Portavogie Tide & Turf – early September
- Aspects Literary Festival – September
- Ards Puppet Festival – October
- Shorelife Celebration Festival – early October
- Bangor and Newtownards Christmas Light Switch On – November

(note Council also deliver a range of other events and activities throughout the year.)

2. Proposed event locations

Given the limited availability of suitable event space in Bangor, as a result of the Queen's Parade development for the upcoming year, it was proposed that the following locations were agreed for each relevant event to allow necessary planning with external organisations.

Event	Date	Proposal	Notes	Comments
VE Day 80	Friday 9 May 2025	Castle Park, Bangor	Concert by the Band of the Royal Irish Regiment Beacons will also be lit on 8 May in Bangor, Newtownards and Ballyhalbert	
Armed Forces Day (incorporating Veteran Parade)	Saturday 14 or 21 June (tbc) 2025	Ards Airfield/ Parade from Conway Square leading to Airfield	One day event (final date subject to ongoing liaison with RFCA) Incorporate parade into AFD to maximise audience	This will require a new Council decision due to previously agreed location for AFD at Bangor (incorporated at Sea Bangor on the Saturday). Parade subject to asking Market to relocate
Pipe Bands	Saturday 19 July 2025	Regent House, Newtownards. Grounds at Comber Road/Castlebawn	New location due to request for alternative options in Newtownards from RSPBANI.	RSPBANI have been consulted and have confirmed this site is their preferred option in Newtownards. Confirmation of the site is subject to approval by the school's Board of Governors.
NB **Comber Earlies Food Festival	Saturday 28 June 2025	Comber Leisure Centre Car Park	Part of Taste Summer Festival and annual programme	** for note only for planning/resource as event occurs in June.

The above table outlined how the events could be delivered due to the limitations of available event space at the Bangor Seafront in summer 2025. Due to the available staffing resource and other tourism events planned for June 2025 (Comber Earlies Food Festival – 28 June) Sea Bangor would be required to be paused for 2025.

Officers had considered how Bangor could be animated during June and were currently scoping an additional month of activity in Ward Park i.e. music/family activity in the Park at the weekend. The Music in Park event delivered by Open House at this venue, attracted an audience of 27,000 over an 8-week period in 2023.

It was anticipated that the additional activity of five extra weeks would be planned for Saturdays (to be confirmed) to encourage people to the city centre to eat, drink and shop. An additional passport scheme attracting footfall into local businesses could be extended to coincide with this entertainment. Offers and attractions in city centre businesses could attract families to spend the day.

Early officer discussions with Open House anticipate that Seaside Revival would take place at Ward Park and would be programmed as Summer Revival for 2025. Date and venue are to be confirmed by the organisers.

Open House Festival supported by Council would continue as normal animating key venues in the city throughout the month of August. Council had also approved the hosting of a concert in Bangor in June, subject to licence. It was anticipated this would attract a large footfall and business to the city.

3. Budgets

VE Day 80 would be funded through the Civic Events budget.

Armed Forces Day (AFD) 2025 incorporating Veteran Parade would be funded from a projected tourism budget of £115,000, subject to the rate setting process (an additional £10,000 was anticipated as a contribution from Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association) and the civic aspect from the Civic Events budget, subject to the rates setting process.

The AND Pipe Bands 2025 event had an early scoped budget of £34,000 to deliver at the new site, taking consideration of potential traffic management fees, stewarding and a bid amount to Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI, subject to the rates setting process.

An additional budget of £10,000 was required to deliver the extra summer activity in Ward Park This would be included in projected tourism budgets as part of the rates setting process and would be subject to approval.

To deliver the reconfigured programme specific to VE Day 80, Armed Forces Day incorporating the Veterans' Day Parade and the Ards and North Down Pipe Band event the overall Tourism Events Budget required an additional £50,000 in comparison to that approved in 2024. Costs to deliver events safely, aligned to corporate priorities while retaining quality programming, continues to be a challenge

for Council and increases for the delivery of other tourism events would be further brought forward as part of the rates setting process.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the following:

1. **VE Day 80** - A concert is held in Castle Park, Bangor on Friday, 9 May 2025, with beacons lit in Bangor, Newtownards and Ballyhalbert on the 8 May 2025 to mark the anniversary.
2. **Armed Forces Day 2025** is held at Ards Airfield on either 14 or 21 June 2025, incorporating the Veterans' Parade from Conway Square and further approves a tourism budget of £115,000 towards its delivery, subject to the rates setting process.
3. **AND Pipe Bands event 2025** is held at Regent House School Grounds (Comber Road/Castlebawn), Newtownards on 19 July 2025, subject to approval by the Regent House School Board of Governors and further approves a tourism budget of £34,000 towards its delivery, subject to the rates setting process.
4. Sea Bangor does not take place in 2025 due to anticipated site limitations in Bangor and an additional series of 'Family/Music in the Park' type events are held each Saturday (tbc) during June 2025 with a tourism budget of £10,000, subject to the rates setting process.

Councillor McCracken proposed, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that Sea Bangor does not take place in 2025 due to anticipated site limitations in Bangor and an additional series of 'Family/Music in the Park' type events are held each Saturday (tbc) during June 2025 with a tourism budget of £10,000, subject to the rates setting process. Further that Officers will consider an additional and properly resourced Autumn event for Bangor with the aim of driving footfall and customer spend. A report would be brought back to the December meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee.

At the outset of his alternative proposal, Councillor McCracken recalled that Sea Bangor and Armed Forces Day was approved in November 2023 and the two events were a natural fit. He understood that between November 2023 and the October 2024 Council meeting there were no written reports that indicated there would be a change to the approvals that were made by this Committee. He asked for clarity on that and the Director confirmed that was correct.

Continuing, Councillor McCracken referred to a series of delays to the start of the Marine Gardens construction by the developer from September 2023 and was aware that the logistical problems around delivering Sea Bangor in 2025 had been a known issue since April. He asked if the Director agreed that a report could have come forward much earlier in the year to allow Members to debate this more thoroughly.

The Interim Director of Prosperity agreed that in hindsight that would have been useful but explained the challenges around being held to timeframes that were set externally and out of the control of the Council. She explained the difficulties that this had caused in terms of planning for this and other external events in that location and it had left multiple Council departments on the backfoot.

While appreciating the frustration that the delays had caused, Councillor McCracken felt it was important to learn and ensure that any substantial changes to a previous approval needed to be brought to Committee at the earliest opportunity. He recalled the enthusiasm when the Sea Bangor arrangements had been agreed in the previous November and the concern this change had now caused for members and his constituents – he pointed to social media reaction and coverage in the local press. He noted a call from Bangor Chamber of Commerce for Sea Bangor to be reinstated and referred to excellent points made by the President of Bangor Chamber of Commerce that there could have been something organised in Ballyholme to retain the Naval link and to host the RAF and a display that needed to be held in a coastal location for viewing purposes. While everyone wished Newtownards well with the Armed Forces Day arrangements, those Royal Navy and RAF elements were now lost.

Given the existing circumstances and constrained capacity in the summer, he reluctantly accepted that that it was not practical to hold a Sea Bangor event in 2025 and therefore was bringing this proposal for an Autumn event in order to drive footfall and customer spend in the city centre. It would be important to help traders given the disruption that would be caused by the construction work associated with major development in the area and the loss of Sea Bangor in 2025 which brought a lot of trade so it was important to retain that. The proposed budget of £10,000 in the report was not acceptable given that the budget for Sea Bangor had been £75,000.

In closing, he explained he was not being prescriptive in terms of what the Autumn event would look like and was asking officers to look at options, although he suggested that a hospitality theme could be an option if the event was to run akin to Restaurant Week, but he hoped that a report would come back to the next Committee meeting for further discussion.

The seconder, Councillor McCollum, rose to support the proposal. She had appreciated the Director's candour in terms of the challenges that officers had faced but felt that an Autumn event, while not replacing Sea Bangor, would go some way to boosting footfall to help local traders.

Councillor Blaney agreed with the proposer and the sentiments of local traders. He appreciated the difficulties that officers had faced and believed that they had done their best with the cards that they had been dealt.

Despite the longer-term benefits of the major development, he warned that many businesses would be struggling as a result of this upcoming period of disruption so it was important the Council do what it could to offer reassurance and drive footfall.

The Chair was sympathetic to Council officers having to work with indicative timings outside of Council's control which had then slipped. There was potential that if the timelines had slipped further the Council may have been able to accommodate an Armed Forces Day in Bangor along with other activities that normally took place during that period so she could understand why there was thinking to give it as long as possible. The Chair appreciated the impacts that the disruption would have on the economy and felt there was merit in looking at what Council could do to support traders during that period. She recalled previous financial support from the NI

Executive during public realm works which had helped to drive spend during that ongoing work.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the return of the Veteran's Parade in Newtownards and thanked officers, appreciating the workload on the Events team. She appreciated the difficulties in Bangor and was supportive of assisting traders during those periods of disruption, so had no issue with the alternative proposal but sought some clarity on the anticipated cost of the alternative Autumn event.

Councillor Smart praised the wider events offering for the Borough and was very sympathetic to the proposal in terms of trying to support businesses and driving footfall given the absence of Sea Bangor regards ongoing construction work. He was a little concerned at the wording of Councillor McCracken's proposal as it hadn't included any budget, theme or any reference to an officer's report coming back to the Committee for further discussion. He felt that sort of analysis was important before taking a decision and sought reassurances that this would be part of the proposal.

The Interim Director of Prosperity sought to address what appeared to be a public perception that Sea Bangor was the only event held in Bangor, and that it had been entirely scrapped. She referred the Committee to the attached event schedule which she hoped would provide reassurance of the coverage in the area and referenced the work that was undertaken by multiple service areas across the Council in supporting events in the Borough to support the wider economy.

The Director made a further point regarding a perception that Autumn was potentially a slow period for the Events team, referring to the two-month long Autumn Taste festival with Portavogie Tide and Turf, whilst the run in to planning for Christmas switch-ons.

Councillor Thompson welcomed the wider report and the number of events across the Borough, feeling that the geographical coverage in general was fair. He was in agreement that there needed to be a proper replacement for Sea Bangor, if it was affordable for the whole Borough.

The Head of Tourism explained that the overall budget for her section's events was already challenging in terms of the existing schedule and reported projections of a 10% increase based on static programming and requirements in terms of maintaining safe and quality events. However, that budget did not include any growth development. Council had approved the Armed Forces Day with an additional budget increase so if another event was brought forward that would require further budget which would be subject to the rate setting process.

Councillor Ashe thanked officers for the report and wanted to clarify that it was not the intention to claim that Events staff were not busy during the Autumn period, but the intention was just to provide businesses with a lifeline during a difficult period of disruption.

In summing up, Councillor McCracken responded to the following points raised throughout the debate:

Autumn was traditionally a quieter period for traders in what was the shoulder season between summer and the pre-Christmas period, so the sole consideration had been around the needs of the traders rather than the wider events programme.

It was not good practice to suggest a budget at this stage given it was unclear as to what the event would look like, so he had kept it open for officers to bring a report back with estimated costs. He did not expect the budget to exceed that of the Sea Bangor event but wanted to see a properly resourced event that would generate a similar level of spend that had resulted from Sea Bangor. He understood that had previously been £471,000 for 2024.

He agreed to include within the proposal that officers would consider the event, and a report would be brought back to the December meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee. The seconder was content with that.

The Head of Tourism clarified that the budget from the last Sea Bangor event was £75,000 and she warned the scale and footprint of such an event may not be available at the time of year proposed but officers would look at what could be done and suggested that the Taste event festival, already scheduled for September/October could be expanded on.

The proposer appreciated the comments but felt that given the circumstances and the discussion, the Committee was in agreement of an additional event and that was what he was putting forward within his proposal.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor McCracken, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that Sea Bangor does not take place in 2025 due to anticipated site limitations in Bangor and an additional series of 'Family/Music in the Park' type events are held each Saturday (tbc) during June 2025 with a tourism budget of £10,000, subject to the rates setting process. Further that Officers will consider an additional and properly resourced Autumn event for Bangor with the aim of driving footfall and customer spend. A report would be brought back to the December meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee.

7. LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS - SUB REGIONAL ECONOMIC PLAN

(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Prosperity detailing that the Department for the Economy (DfE) had been developing proposals for Sub-Regional Economic Plans for a number of months as part of its vision to achieve a better regional balance across Northern Ireland.

This was highlighted in the recently published draft Programme for Government which had undergone an eight-week public consultation process, ending on 04 November.

The Minister for the Economy was now looking towards a bottom-up approach with the creation of 11 Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs). LEPS would aim to provide

increased support for businesses and to stimulate the economy in each Council area.

In order to support these LEPs, DfE plan to set aside an annual NI budget of £15 million for the next three financial years (£45 million in total). Information on how the budget would be allocated across NI from DfE is expected shortly.

It was anticipated that the fund would support, but not be limited to, the following:

- Productivity
- Business base rate
- Economic inactivity
- Collaboration across government bodies
- Weak sector activity
- Reduction of greenhouse gases/sustainability

In order to start rolling out this fund by 1st April 2025, councils were being asked to set up their own Local Economic Partnership.

The membership of these LEPs was still unclear as DfE was currently developing guidance in regard to further detail and this had not been communicated to the councils yet. (It was expected imminently.) It was, however, anticipated that the LEPs would be managed by Council and that a portion of the fund would be awarded to Council for administration and staffing.

These LEPs further reinforced the intention of the Executive to forge a meaningful partnership with councils as local partners and to encourage flexible and tailored investment that met the specific needs of each council area.

This represented a significant opportunity for councils and the areas of intervention highlighted were in line with the Corporate Plan's priorities.

It was anticipated that further guidance as outlined would be provided by the Department over the next month.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the intention of the creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships within the Department's attached Sub Regional Economic Plan, with a further report brought back to Council as the process develops and further details are received.

Proposed by Alderman McDowell, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the recommendation be adopted.

Welcoming the report and the Minister's statement, Alderman McDowell said he had always felt that local councils needed to play a greater role in economic development, and he felt that view had now been listened to. He spoke about the value of local knowledge which provided impetus to create more jobs and growth and referred to sections of the attached plan in terms of the strategic direction and a new focus on developing local economies through collaboration in terms of addressing an historic imbalance and delivering prosperity throughout the region.

That would include increased productivity, new jobs, decarbonisation – all were important factors.

He referred members to a table provided within the attached documents which was not good reading in terms of labour productivity in the Ards and North Down region. He pointed to median wages which were 44% lower here than in Belfast. The Borough was 11 percentage points below Newry, Mourne and Down in terms of export intensity. That highlighted a lack of supply of industrial land and property within the Borough. This was reflected in the Council's declining non-domestic rates base, and the Council now needed to take this opportunity and recalibrate and get ready.

Alderman McDowell added that £45m was to be allocated to councils over the next three years and he calculated this would be around £1m per year for economic development within each Council. It was important that this Council was prepared for the opportunity.

He strongly objected to some suggestions that this money should be added to Community Planning or the Labour Economic Partnerships. He felt that this approach would only dilute the Council's focus on economic development and further warned that there was no Council representation on the Local Economic Partnerships in Ards and North Down. He had discovered that was not the case in other Council areas and he pointed out that the Council was supplying funding as well as Central Government.

He reiterated concerns around the lack of industrial land and businesses slowly moving out of the Borough and how directing the additional funding away to the Local Economic Partnerships would take that extra resource away from addressing that issue. He felt that LEPs should remain as a stand-alone body and include Councillors and relevant stakeholders.

He hoped that Council would make the right choice and grasp this opportunity to help prevent a dormant economy where most people were commuting to work outside of the Borough. He felt that the Committee needed to spend time on this once the report came back.

Councillor Thompson echoed those concerns and felt that Council needed to look at how it supported its businesses. He had queries around the timetable and funding and sought reassurances as he could not see any confirmation of the funding yet.

The Interim Head of Economic Development explained that the Council was still awaiting guidance and commitment of the budget from DfE which was expected imminently. Once that was received a further report to the Committee would follow.

Councillor Blaney referred to the importance of having a two-pronged approach – one that would support existing businesses and allow them to grow and remain within the Borough and another approach to attract businesses from outside of the Borough. There was an element of risk required in terms of providing the premises beforehand to be ready for when businesses needed new premises. He felt that if the Borough was able to attract entrepreneurs that would be a winning formula, and

he referred to a success story of the founder of a body armour business that had been able to expand his business in Bangor having previously set up in Belfast. Councillor Blaney had reached out to the owner of the business and had been able to share knowledge and encourage that relocation. He felt if that could be replicated with other businesses that could make a big difference.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Alderman McDowell, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. PROSPERITY BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT (FILE FIN45)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Prosperity detailing that the Prosperity Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covered the 6-month period 1 April to 30 September 2024. The net cost of the Directorate was showing an underspend of £61k (3.7%) – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's budgetary performance was further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£29k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£105k adverse	3
Report 4	Income	£138k favourable	3

Explanation of Variance

The Prosperity Directorate's overall variance could be summarised by the following table: -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development – (£40k) vacant posts expected to be filled soon. Tourism – £12k. mainly due to extra staff costs for Tourism Events.
Goods & Services		
Economic Development	113	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go Succeed Programme grants. Offset by additional grant income.
Income		
Economic Development	(125)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional grant income for the Go Succeed Programme.

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Tourism	(13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism Experiences – (£6k). Tourism Events – (£7k).

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2024					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Prosperity					
700 Prosperity HQ	77,319	77,500	(181)	154,000	(0.2)
720 Economic Development	610,020	662,700	(52,680)	1,396,000	(7.9)
740 Tourism	883,348	891,500	(8,152)	1,868,200	(0.9)
Total	1,570,687	1,631,700	A (61,013)	3,418,200	(3.7)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Prosperity - Payroll					
700 Prosperity HQ	71,596	71,900	(304)	143,300	(0.4)
720 Economic Development	414,891	455,600	(40,709)	912,800	(8.9)
740 Tourism	513,502	501,000	12,502	987,600	2.5
Total	999,988	1,028,500	B (28,512)	2,043,700	(2.8)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Prosperity - Goods & Services					
700 Prosperity HQ	5,723	5,600	123	10,700	2.2
720 Economic Development	509,426	396,900	112,526	974,200	28.4
740 Tourism	405,844	413,100	(7,256)	916,100	(1.8)
Total	920,994	815,600	C 105,394	1,901,000	12.9
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Prosperity - Income					
700 Prosperity HQ	-	-	-	-	-
720 Economic Development	(314,297)	(189,800)	(124,497)	(491,000)	(65.6)
740 Tourism	(35,998)	(22,600)	(13,398)	(35,500)	(59.3)
Totals	(350,295)	(212,400)	D (137,895)	(526,500)	(64.9)

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Thompson, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. PLACE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT (FILE FIN45)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Place detailing that the Place Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covered the 6-month period 1 April to 30 September 2024. The net cost of the Directorate was showing an underspend of £52k (7.1%) – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Place Directorate's budget performance was further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£71k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£4k adverse	3
Report 4	Income	£16k adverse	3

Explanation of Variance

The Place Directorate's overall variance could be summarised by the following table (variances over £10k): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(71)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly vacant posts within Regeneration
Goods & Services		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No material variances.
Income		
Strategic Capital Development	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Levelling up Grant is expected to be less than budget.

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2024					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Place					
800 Place HQ	154,036	158,400	(4,364)	267,000	(2.8)
810 Regeneration	341,228	395,400	(54,172)	1,128,800	(13.7)
820 Strategic Capital Development	177,792	170,800	6,992	453,600	4.1
Total	673,056	724,600	A (51,544)	1,849,400	(7.1)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Payroll					
800 Place HQ	82,317	86,700	(4,383)	173,100	(5.1)
810 Regeneration	277,899	330,400	(52,501)	657,000	(15.9)
820 Strategic Capital Development	170,905	185,200	(14,295)	371,900	(7.7)
Total	531,120	602,300	(71,180)	1,202,000	(11.8)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Goods & Services					
800 Place HQ	71,719	71,700	19	93,900	0.0
810 Regeneration	65,668	65,000	668	471,800	1.0
820 Strategic Capital Development	6,887	3,600	3,287	206,200	91.3
Total	144,275	140,300	3,975	771,900	2.8
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Place - Income					
800 Place HQ	-	-	-	-	-
810 Regeneration	(2,339)	-	(2,339)	-	-
820 Strategic Capital Development	-	(18,000)	18,000	(124,500)	-
Totals	(2,339)	(18,000)	15,661	(124,500)	-

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

10. KINNEGAR LOGISTICS BASE UPDATE (FILE RDP37)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Place detailing that at the meeting of the Council held on 31st July 2024 Members were advised that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) had concluded the disposal process for Kinnegar Logistics Base and had agreed that the preferred bidder was the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Members were also advised that the Chief Executive had requested a meeting with the PSNI seeking information on the Organisation's plans for the site.

A meeting was held with a representative from the Estates Branch on 30th September 2024. He advised that the PSNI had now commenced the legal process for the transfer of the site. He felt this may take several months to complete. He did reiterate that the PSNI was keen to move at pace and, upon gaining the site, would be moving into occupation. He said the plans were being finalised and on completion the PSNI would be keen to come and present these to the Council. It was agreed to have a further meeting in a few months' time.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

Councillor Kennedy indicated that he wished to make an alternative proposal:

that the recommendation be adopted and further that officers bring back a report outlining the chronology of events between Council agreeing to participate in the D1 process and the decision by the MoD to suspend the process, when it was announced that the PSNI was now the preferred partner; to include the Council's submission to the questionnaire phase of the D1; to include a copy of the correspondence received by MOD notifying us of their decision; to detail what measures Council has taken to establish why our bid was not accepted; and a commitment to working with the PSNI in order to maximise the potential of the site.

This was seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter.

Speaking to his proposal, Councillor Kennedy congratulated Alderman McDowell and Councillor Blaney for their comments on a previous item which related to Council's desire for maximising the potential of the Borough for investment considering the decline in the non-domestic rates base and the need to stop Ards and North Down sliding into commuter status. He recalled Alderman McDowell's leadership in terms of Council setting out to try and establish whether it could work with third parties to develop this site. A number of third parties had been identified and had submitted plans which he imagined could have brought millions of pounds of private investment to the area but despite the best efforts of the majority of Councillors it had not been possible to have those interested parties present to them. He therefore believed that the Council, on behalf of the ratepayers, should be fully informed why its bid was rejected.

He recalled the many hours of work and great deal of ratepayers' money spent on putting together the submission and the process was brought to an abrupt end without much explanation. He was encouraged that the PSNI intended to move speedily with its plans, and he hoped that Council would work closely with them to ensure the potential of the site was maximised to the benefit of the local community and non-residential base rate of this Council.

Councillor Ashe queried if the information requested by the proposer was obtainable and if there were any legal sensitivities in sharing the information or if it could be redacted for example. The Interim Director of Place believed that most of the information had already been provided to members so it would largely be a case of collating that into one report. He suspected there would be some difficulty in providing details of the measures that the Council had taken as it was just informed that the process had finished.

Councillor McCollum noted from the Director's response that some of the information sought was already within the knowledge of the Committee and she suspected that some of the information was rightly unlikely to be accessible. She also understood that the proposer had previously declared an interest on two separate occasions on this matter and she asked for clarity on how the proposer was able to stand and propose this now given that history.

The Chair clarified that it was up to the individual member to determine if they needed to declare an interest in a matter and that they were bound by the Councillors' Code of Conduct in that regard.

In response to the earlier query, the Interim Director of Place clarified that he would need to look at what information had already been shared with members but reiterated that it was fair to say that some of that information that was accessible had already been provided to the Committee.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor Kennedy, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted and further that officers bring back a report outlining the chronology of events between Council agreeing to participate in the D1 process and the decision by the MoD to suspend the process, when it was announced that the PSNI was now the preferred partner;
to include the Council's submission to the questionnaire phase of the D1;
to include a copy of the correspondence received by the MOD notifying us of their decision;
to detail what measures Council has taken to establish why our bid was not accepted;
and a commitment to working with the PSNI in order to maximise the potential of the site.

11. REGENERATION WORKING UP PROJECTS 2024/25

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Place detailing that as Members would be aware, a budget of £200,000 (£100,000 Rural / £100,000 Urban) was allocated in this year's Regeneration Unit budgets to work up future projects. This budget provided the opportunity for Council to develop projects to the design stage and seek planning approval (where required).

A report was brought forward in May 2024 detailing the proposed Working Up Projects for the period 2024/25. At the time of the report the costs associated with each project were preliminary and required further work to refine these.

Update on Working Up Projects 2024/25

The following projects were approved to be taken forward.

Donaghadee Commons Pump Track
 Design and Planning Application

The Donaghadee Commons Pump Track had been selected as one of five final projects to be considered for PeacePlus funding under *Theme 1: Local Community Regeneration and Transformation of Ards and North Down*, offering a significant opportunity to bring this project to life and provide a unique recreational facility for the community.

The design and planning application would provide a critical foundation for the project, allowing it to move forward with the necessary approvals in place should it successfully secure funding under the PeacePlus programme.

Allocated budget: £10,000

Update: Surveys were underway, and the design was progressing. Officers were proceeding to carry out an application for a CLOPUD (Certificate of Lawfulness of Proposed Use or Development) to confirm if the pump track was considered permitted development.

The project was on track to be completed by March 2025 and no changes to the allocated budget were required.

Meetinghouse Lane, Newtownards Design and Planning Application

The project would seek to develop a design that incorporated resurfacing, improved lighting, decorative archways, and planting, enhancing the overall aesthetic and user experience of this well-used town centre location.

Allocated budget: £10,000

Update: Capital funding had been secured from the Department for Communities under the Urban Regeneration Programme to deliver this project. Due to the timescales associated with the funding package, the design would be completed inhouse.

Revised allocated budget: £2,000 (statutory consents and surveys)

Pedestrian Walkway (from Bingham Lane to Main Street), Bangor Design

The project aimed to develop a design to transform this key connecting laneway into a vibrant and inviting public space, enhancing the overall experience for both visitors and residents by creating a design that provided a welcoming atmosphere that fostered social interaction, community engagement, and a sense of place.

Allocated budget: £10,000

Update: It was proposed to increase the allocated budget to £15,000. Recent quotation exercises have indicated a trend of rising costs for similar types of work, highlighting the need to reassess budget allocations. It was noted that all

quotation exercises would include an assessment of costs to demonstrate best value for money in line with the Council's procurement procedures.

Revised allocated budget: £15,000

Community Enterprise Hub, Comber

Feasibility Study

The proposed project would conduct a feasibility study to assess the demand for a community enterprise hub and identify suitable locations. It would also involve gathering data and insights to inform the development of a vibrant and sustainable hub that met the needs of local businesses and residents.

Allocated budget: £8,000

Update: It was proposed to increase the allocated budget to £12,000. Recent quotation exercises had indicated a trend of rising costs for similar types of work, highlighting the need to reassess budget allocations.

It should be noted that all quotation exercises would include an assessment of costs to demonstrate best value for money in line with the Council's procurement procedures.

Revised allocated budget: £12,000

Urban Mapping Exercise

Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards Mapping Study

Following the recent review of the city/town advisory groups, it was highlighted the need to reinvigorate the Advisory Groups with wider representation.

The proposed project sought to appoint consultants to conduct a mapping study that will provide a comprehensive overview of the community and voluntary groups in each town and city. This would enable the Council to establish more diverse and representative Advisory Groups that reflected the needs and interests of the local community, providing a more informed and effective decision making process that better serves the community, whilst also fostering improved relationships with groups, organisations and stakeholders.

The proposed project was a direct response to the findings and recommendations of the Advisory Group reviews.

Allocated budget: £15,000

Update: It was proposed to increase the allocated budget to £20,000. Officers recently conducted a quotation exercise and invited a number of local consultants to apply. No responses were received.

It appeared that the lack of response to the quotation is primarily attributed to budget constraints that did not align with the scope of the work needed, suggesting a review of the budget was necessary to attract consultants and ensure project feasibility.

Revised allocated budget: £20,000

Dereliction/ Vacancy Study

Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards

Identification of key properties / Identification of appropriate interventions / Explore options for short and long-term use

The Masterplans for each of the towns and city acknowledged the importance of addressing dereliction and vacancy.

The proposed project sought to appoint consultants to undertake a study in each of the towns and city to identify properties, identify appropriate strategies/interventions to stimulate economic growth and explore options for short and long-term use.

Allocated budget: £40,000

Update: A tender would be issued in December 2024, with appointment of the successful supplier in January 2025. Project is on track with completion expected end of March 2025. No changes to the allocated budget.

Ballyhalbert Pathway

Design to include required surveys

Reference to NOM Request re Footpath provision at Shore Road, Ballyhalbert, 15th June 2023.

The proposed project would require officers to work with landowners and the caravan park to explore options to develop a safe pedestrian walkway at this location as a potential village renewal project.

Allocated budget: £20,000

Update: Officers continued to progress this project and were actively working to identify potential routes and research land ownership and have commenced engagement with key stakeholders to gather essential information and facilitate progress on the project.

Station Square, Helen's Bay

Revise existing Environmental Improvement Scheme and Planning Application

In 2019, the Council appointed consultants, AECOM, to complete a technical design for Station Square, this included preliminary costs. The design included new paving, lighting, planting, and improved car parking.

Given the time since the technical design was completed, it was recommended to revisit and revise the design to ensure it aligned with the current community

aspirations, incorporates updated costs reflective of the current economic climate, and submitted a planning application to secure the necessary approvals.

Allocated budget: £15,000

Update: Recent quotation exercises had indicated a trend of rising costs for similar types of work, highlighting the need to reassess budget allocations. However, by appointing the initial design team, AECOM, officers envisage this would enhance budget efficiency given their familiarity of the background information and the previous work undertaken.

There were no changes to the allocated budget at this stage.

Main Street Square, Ballywalter

Design and Planning Application

The project aimed to create a design for a vibrant public square in the heart of the village, serving as a hub for community events and activities, fostering social connections and a sense of community among locals.

Allocated budget: £15,000

Update: Officers had held discussions with representatives of Ballywalter Community Action Group and members of the public as part of the recent Village Plan engagement for Ballywalter and it had become evident that the community did not have a desire for the Square to be changed and were content with its current setup and usage. This project would therefore not proceed any further.

Environmental Improvement Scheme, A22 Killinchy Road, Lisbane (approx. 700m)

Design and Planning Application

The project aimed to explore options to design an environmental improvement scheme that addressed safety concerns through a community-led design process, involving residents in the development of a design that incorporates their ideas and prioritised safety. Key elements to be considered include widening of footpaths, adding incidental tree planting, and exploring options for a pedestrian crossing.

Allocated budget: £20,000

Update: It was proposed to increase the allocated budget to £25,000. Recent quotation exercises had indicated a trend of rising costs for similar types of work, highlighting the need to reassess budget allocations.

It should be noted that all quotation exercises would include an assessment of costs to demonstrate best value for money in line with the Council's procurement procedures.

Revised allocated budget: £25,000

Summary of Projects and Budget Allocation

Urban	
Donaghadee Commons Pump Park	£10,000
Meetinghouse Lane, Newtownards	£2,000
Pedestrian Walkway, Bangor	£15,000
Community Enterprise Hub, Comber	£12,000
Urban Mapping Exercise	£20,000
Dereliction/Vacancy Study	£40,000
TOTAL	£99,000
Rural	
Ballyhalbert Pathway	£20,000
Station Square, Helen's Bay	£15,000
Environmental Improvement Scheme, Lisbane	£25,000
TOTAL	£60,000
COMBINED TOTAL	£159,000

The budget allocated to the rural areas had not been fully utilised. Officers continued to work closely with the rural communities to identify projects and a meeting of the Ards Peninsula Village Partnership was scheduled to take place late October to identify potential projects.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Alderman Adair indicated that he wished to bring an alternative proposal as follows:

That Council notes this report and further:

That council continues with designs for an environmental improvement scheme around the centre of Main Street, Ballywalter creating an accessible vibrant and welcoming Main Street in the heart of the village.

This was seconded by Councillor Edmund.

Alderman Adair welcomed what was a good spread of projects across the Borough. It was important to have projects worked up so funding could be availed of when it became available.

He had noted that Ballywalter Main Street had been removed from the programme following community consultation which had flagged up an objection to any work being undertaken in the Square that was currently maintained by Ballywalter Community Action Group. The organisation had won an In Bloom award earlier in the week. He also referred to a mural which displayed the history of Ballywalter.

Alderman Adair was supportive of the view of the community but believed there was a hunger in the village for improvement works on the Main Street particularly around the retail area. The lighting, footpaths and bus shelter could be revitalised. He also pointed to the car park area owned by the Council. Alderman Adair did not want

Ballywalter to miss out and for the scheme to drop off, so he encouraged Members to support this.

The seconder, Councillor Edmund, gave his support and noted that an apartment block was due to be built which looked out on to the square from one side and on to the Main Street from the opposite side, he felt that showed how those areas referred to linked together and he hoped members would support the proposal.

Councillor McCracken indicated that he wished to propose the following amendment as an addition to the existing proposal:

That in relation to Bingham Lane, officers will liaise with Seacourt Print Workshop and Kilcooley Women's centre to identify if the two heritage bank buildings on either side can be included in the design and scoping, specifically in relation to repainting and exterior lighting, and if feasible to seek funding at a later stage.

Alderman Adair advised that he was content to include the amendment within his proposal.

Speaking to the amendment, Councillor McCracken welcomed the project for Bingham Lane and referred to two heritage buildings at either side which were former banks. One had been bought by Seacourt Print Workshop and the other by Kilcooley Women's Centre. He understood that Seacourt Print Workshop had put a lot of money into the interior of the building, but he was aware that its budget did not extend to the exterior and it would be a shame to undertake the work in Bingham Lane and exclude a beautiful heritage building from the project. He had reached out to Kilcooley Women's Centre as he suspected they too would be in that situation, so he hoped those buildings could be improved. His proposal was for the scoping exercise at Bingham Lane to include those two buildings.

The Chair shared some of her own knowledge of the building, explaining that it had been the old Market House of the town as well as being formerly occupied by the Council before it moved to the Castle. She explained that it was recently used as a film set for Channel 5's Ellis.

Councillor Ashe welcomed the report and was pleased that the Comber Enterprise Hub had been included. She queried the environmental improvement scheme on the Killinchy Road in Lisbane, and asked how strongly the options for a pedestrian crossing were being explored given local concerns around speeding.

The Interim Head of Regeneration explained his team was well aware of those road safety concerns as raised and he explained the additional budget would add value.

Councillor McCollum added, in relation to her former DEA of Bangor East and Donaghadee, that she welcomed the Pump Track progress. It was a critical need in Donaghadee for young people and she believed it would utilise one of Donaghadee's finest natural spaces. She asked when construction would start, and the officer explained that while there were no definitive timelines he was confident that the project would be worked up by March 2025. It was further clarified that there was no

capital available to commence with construction yet, but this was the working up element of the project.

Councillor Smart welcomed the report and thanked officers. He queried the Meeting House Lane project, and he understood that the Council was covering the design costs. He further welcomed the work around dereliction and highlighted the importance of addressing the matter which would be a difficult issue to resolve, but he felt this would be a positive start. He asked what the consultation process would look like and what role elected members would have.

The officer confirmed that the programme would meet the design costs of the Meeting House Lane project, while DfC and DfI was providing the bulk of the budget. It now meant that funding could be reallocated to the working up of other projects. He explained that the dereliction work tied in with various priorities, particularly the economic priority within the Corporate Plan. This would be a collaborative piece of work with member involvement and an update would follow once that work progressed.

Councillor Thompson welcomed the report and hoped that there would be a development on the Pump Track project with an update in January regarding PEACE PLUS funding. He agreed it was a much-needed project, and he hoped that all projects would be ready for when funding became available.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter was aware of uplifts in terms of costs on ongoing projects and asked if those were still within allocated budget on the whole, though she appreciated that DfI funding had helped to free up funds that were now reallocated. The officer explained that there was an underspend of £1,000 in the urban programme.

In summing up, Alderman Adair thanked members for their support and hoped to see Ballywalter Main Street revitalised as part of this programme.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that Council notes this report and further:

That Council continues with designs for an environmental improvement scheme around the centre of Main Street, Ballywalter creating an accessible vibrant and welcoming Main Street in the heart of the village.

Further agreed that in relation to Bingham Lane, officers will liaise with Seacourt Print Workshop and Kilcooley Women's centre to identify if the two heritage bank buildings on either side can be included in the design and scoping, specifically in relation to repainting and exterior lighting, and if feasible to seek funding at a later stage.

12. RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT SCHEME 24/24 UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Place detailing that the the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

approached the Council in July 2024 to assist with the delivery of the fifth round of the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme. The scheme was funded under DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme (TRPSI), which aimed to assist in tackling poverty and social isolation within deprived areas.

Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024/25

The Rural Business Development Grant Scheme (RBDGS) would support the sustainability and growth of rural micro-businesses (less than 10 full-time equivalent employees) through the provision of a small capital grant of up to 50% of costs for capital items up to a maximum of £4,999.

A report was brought to the Council in July 2024 outlining the proposed timescale for the delivery of the RBDGS as provided by DAERA officials:

Pre-Application Workshops and Application Call Open	Week beginning 2 nd September 2024
Letters of Offer	By 29 th November 2024
Claims from Applicant to Council	By end of February 2025
Claims from Council to DAERA	By Mid-March 2025
Completion	31 st March 2025

Due to a delay in obtaining Ministerial approval for the scheme, the opening was postponed. Officers received notification on 15th October 2024 that the scheme would be opening at 9am on 16th October 2024.

The revised timeline is as follows:

Pre-Application Workshops Application Call Open	16 th October 2024
Closing date for Applications	12noon 8 th November 2024
Letters of Offer	10 th January 2025
Claims from Applicant to Council	31 st March 2025
Claims from Council to DAERA	28 th April 2025

Pre-Application Workshops for Ards and North Down took place on:

- 10am on Wednesday 23rd October 2024
- 6pm on Monday 28th October 2024
- 2pm on Thursday 31st October 2024

A dedicated mailbox rbdgs@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk and dedicated webpage [Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024/2025 - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#) has been created.

Funding Allocation

DAERA had informed that it anticipated the total funding available to all Council's for delivery of the RBDGS across the region would be £180,000.

When the RBDGS call was closed, DAERA would:

- (a) Establish if any amendment is required to the £180,000 funding figure;
- (b) Establish the number of applications received by the Council for its area; and
- (c) Calculate the amount of funding to be made available to each Council for delivery of the RBDGS in its area based on the number of applications it received. This calculation would be 10% of the total grant aid sought from the number of applications received, divided by the total number of applications received from all Council areas, multiplied by the number of applications received in the Council area.

Councils would be paid 90% of the overall administration fee once all the grant aid claims from successful applicants had been submitted to DAERA. The remaining 10% would be paid on receipt of data collected from the survey which successful applicants will complete in March 2026. This survey would be commissioned by each of the respective Councils from the successful applicants in their Council area.

Once DAERA had carried out the steps outlined at (a)-(c) above, it would issue a formal Grant Award Letter and terms and conditions stating the amount of grant funding being offered to each Council.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

The Interim Director of Place referred to the section of the report which explained of a delay in obtaining Ministerial approval. He wanted to clarify that the delay was a result of the process involved in developing the scheme before it reached the Minister's desk for sign off and not an issue caused by the Minister delaying to act.

Proposed by Councillor Ashe, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Ashe thanked the Director for providing clarity that the delay had been due to procedural matters rather than any inaction by the Minister.

Alderman Adair welcomed the update and the opportunities that would be created and appreciated the delay was not caused by the Minister, but wondered whether DAERA would consider extending the deadline to allow more time. The Interim Head of Regeneration explained that this had been queried but DAERA had advised that this would not be possible. He advised that 42 people had attended workshops and there were 13 completed applications so far.

Alderman Adair felt the number of applications were low given the number that had attended the workshop. He wondered if the programme could re-open given that the deadline was the following day. He felt it might be necessary to revisit this at the full Council meeting later in the month.

Councillor Thompson expressed disappointment towards the delays to the process and explained the importance of the programme for rural businesses.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor Ashe, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the recommendation be adopted.

13. PEACE PLUS EBR – MINI DIGI HUB PROGRAMME (FILE DEV23)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Interim Director of Prosperity detailing that from the February 2024 report that an application was made through the East Border Region (EBR) under the Peace Plus strategic priority “Smart Towns and Villages” in March 2024 for the “Mini Digi Hubs” project.

The Mini Digi Hubs project was made up of:

- East Border Region organisation
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Ards and North Down Borough Council.
- Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon Borough Council.
- Meath County Council.
- Monaghan County Council
- Newry Mourne and Down District Council.
- Louth County Council.

This project was designed to bring in capital funding to retro-fit an existing underutilised Council asset to accommodate digital transformation hardware and software. As Members would be aware the condition of the funding dictated that only one Community Centre could be chosen, and Council agreed the Comber Community Centre would be part of the application in the Ards and North area.

Prior to the application submission, officers explored the potential to use the funding to add Smart Meters (IoT) to the Community Centre for measurement of various metrics, such as people flow, energy and carbon emissions.

This was in addition to providing support to the business community in Smart Meter technology (IoT), with a current emphasis on the agricultural community. Awareness sessions, workshops and mentoring would be primarily carried out in the Community Centre where best practice and examples could be demonstrated using the Community Centre itself as an example.

The Peace Plus Steering Committee had now confirmed that the application for the project was successful, and it was intended to issue a letter of offer (LoO) in November 2024.

Following receipt of the LoO which was expected in November and the full funding details, the partnership agreement would be agreed. The award level had not yet been received and an update would be provided. The first steps of the project commencing with ANDBC included recruitment for an additional Project Admin Officer to work alongside the existing team. This salary was accounted for as part of the funding package.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report with a further report brought back when details on the LoO and partnership agreement are known.

Proposed by Councillor Thompson, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Adair welcomed the investment for the Borough. He was aware that in recent days Comber Boxing Club had made the venue its new home and he asked if this investment would impact on that arrangement. The Interim Head of Economic Development would follow that up and report back to the member.

Alderman McDowell rose to support the project and he understood it could represent a total investment from £600,000 to £800,000. In relation to the boxing club he understood it was only a small portion required. He added that the Comber Community Centre project would attract a lot of community interest in terms of businesses and schools for example and acknowledged the work of officers in putting the bid together. He also believed there would be further announcements potentially in December in relation to the East Border Region in terms of grants for community groups and he encouraged all members to participate and encourage groups to come forward with projects for what would be a sizable amount of money ranging from £20,000 up to £100,000 for each project.

He also wondered if there were any synergies between this and the Community Enterprise Hub and if the two projects could be brought together more to maximise opportunities.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor Thompson, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

14. NOTICES OF MOTION

14.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Blaney and Councillor Hollywood

Council notes with deep concern the fraudulent activity impacting local businesses through the manipulation of bank account information on Just Eat partner centre accounts, resulting in substantial financial losses; recognises the critical role these businesses play in supporting the local economy and acknowledges the severe impact these losses have on their ability to operate and resolves to write to Just Eat, expressing our deep concern over the financial harm caused to local businesses and calling on the company to urgently engage with affected businesses to resolve this devastating issue and prevent further incidents.

Proposed by Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor McLaren, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Blaney explained that this issue had affected businesses both in this Borough and right across Northern Ireland. He had spoken to one business owner that had a small family-run restaurant, and it had cost them tens of thousands of pounds. This was a significant amount of money for any business that size. It was

always difficult to beat the big guy and to do so required the support of others and that was the aim of this motion which he hoped members could support. It was about getting on the side of local businesses and doing all Council could to help.

The Chair asked for clarity in terms of what was being asked for and Councillor Blaney confirmed that it was for a report to follow.

The seconder, Councillor McLaren, rose to support the proposal.

Councillor Edmund was supportive of the motion and he felt that small family businesses were the backbone of retail in Northern Ireland. Many of the businesses had been in operation for years and it was despicable for them to be treated this way.

Councillor McCollum commended the motion and was sure that members would have seen media coverage of the issue. It was heartbreaking to think of the devastation that the big business could cause to the small business, so it was important for elected representatives to keep this at the forefront of their minds. She would welcome some type of investigation in to how Council could help.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor McLaren, that the notice of motion be adopted.

14.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Harbinson and Councillor McCracken

That this Council should:

1. Prepare a visual map for all public sector land in Bangor City Centre and Ards Town Centre and colour code holdings that are potentially connected with future developments (even if not yet fully agreed), including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizen's Hub and the Council's Car Park Strategy. This includes public land belonging to the Council and NI Executive Departments.
2. To further identify public sector land that is currently unproductive and outside the scope of wider strategies, which could be made available for future private sector development. This includes land that is either vacant, contains empty or derelict buildings, or contains buildings that are under-utilised or dated to the point that redevelopment is required. The map should also include land that is facilitating meanwhile use.
3. Prepare a summary report to highlight how unproductive public sector land could be re-purposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive disposal policies.

Proposed by Councillor McCracken, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the notice of motion be adopted.

Proposing, Councillor McCracken stated that Ards and North Down needed to position itself as a Borough open to investment. It was not possible just to rely on public investment or locally based companies, as important as those two sectors were.

It was important to have private investment to renew urban centres, create wealth and to expand job opportunities.

Capital was mobile so it was important to work hard to attract it and make it as easy as possible to land capital and market the benefits of the Borough and deliver new opportunities. That was what the motion aimed to achieve in terms of opening the door to investment.

He referred to the underutilised land and dereliction and how much better it would be if someone could just develop it. The difficulty was that some of those sites were already earmarked for other schemes. He named some of the relevant Council-led schemes such as Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizens' Hub and the Car Park Strategy.

Officers working on those schemes would have a clear idea of the detail, but it did not bring all those schemes together on one document so wider stakeholders were not necessarily aware of what might have been vacant and what was not.

Another aspect of the motion was to take an integrated look across the public sector estate to identify opportunities. That may have taken some digging by officers as it was not just about identifying gap sites but also to identify vacant and under-used buildings along with some buildings that might be occupied but coming to the end of their natural life where the next step could be to refurbish or demolish and rebuild.

In addition, land that was allocated for other schemes, there were other constraints such as planning considerations and disposal policies. This motion was asking that all those issues be reviewed so that available land was identified and the process of taking that land to market was also articulated.

The motion looked at two major urban areas in Bangor and Newtownards. Much work had already been done for those areas, so officers were already working from extensive data that was already prepared, and the areas were urban centres so were tightly defined as opposed to some of the more geographically dispersed areas. Attracting capital was difficult so concentrating on the two largest urban areas gave the best chance of success.

That did not rule out other areas but there would be scope to look at other areas at a later stage if this was successful. This would open opportunities, new jobs and new facilities and he hoped that members could support the motion.

The seconder, Councillor McCollum, was in favour of anything that made research easier, so she welcomed the idea of a colour coded map. She felt that anything that was going to attract and make the Borough more appealing for investors was to be welcomed. It was important to carry out a very thorough audit of the public sector estate to ensure that all opportunities could be realised. While it would be good to

see this expanded across the Borough, she felt it made sense to begin with Bangor and Newtownards which could reap the most benefit.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the motion, and she credited Alderman McDowell and the work he had put in over a long number of years in this area. She welcomed the idea of a visual tool to help identify locations and she agreed with earlier comments from Councillor Blaney with regards to the amount of work required to attract and retain investment in the area; however, it was a huge piece of work and it was important to manage expectations in terms of when it would be completed.

The Chair appreciated the direction and thrust of the motion but was wary about the potential time and cost of completing the project in its entirety. She felt it would be difficult to determine the condition of buildings owned by other public sector organisations, for example, and how reliable information provided would be unless a survey was undertaken at significant cost. She hoped those details could be clarified in a follow-up report.

In summing up, Councillor McCracken hoped to provide some reassurance to the Chair and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, and explained he was aware that a lot of work had already gone into this type of work already so he hoped it would be a case of bringing those work streams together into a single document. He hoped that this work could be brought to UKREiff as it would be useful.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Councillor McCracken, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

15. PICKIE FUNPARK OPERATOR TENDER (FILE DEVP1)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Option 3 NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

The report details commercial company information which has been part of a Procurement Process to appoint an Operator for Pickie Funpark.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.10 pm.

Unclassified

ITEM 8.4.1

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Director of Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	14 November 2024
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	Matter Arising from item 4 - International Relations
Attachments	

Background

At January’s Corporate Committee it was agreed to close down formal relationships with Peoria, Arizona, and Kemi, Finland, but maintain the ‘twin’ and friendship relationship with Bregenz, and the sister city relationship with Virginia Beach, with a view to developing those relationships in a meaningful way and re-form an International Relations Sub-Committee under the Place and Prosperity Committee.

Detail

An update report (Item 4) to November’s Place and Prosperity Committee advised that it was now recommended to form a Working Group, as opposed to a Sub Committee, and included a recommendation to nominate five elected members to that Working Group.

At Committee only three members were nominated as follows: Alderman McDowell, Councillor Gilmour, and Councillor McLaren.

Not Applicable

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers whether it wishes to appoint two more elected members, or if it is content with the three places as nominated.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via zoom) of the Corporate Services Committee was held in the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Tuesday 12 November 2024 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Irwin

Aldermen: Brooks McIlveen
 McAlpine Smith
 McRandal

Councillors: Cochrane Irvine, W
 Chambers Kennedy
 Gilmour Moore
 Irvine, S Thompson

Officers: Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Head of Administration (A Curtis), Head of Human Resources & Organisational Development (R McCullough), Head of Communications and Marketing (C Jackson), Head of Finance (S Grieve) and Democratic Services Officer (J Glasgow)

1. APOLOGIES

There was a slight delay in the commencement of the meeting due to technical difficulties experienced with the live stream.

Apologies for inability to attend were received from Alderman Graham and Councillor McCracken.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest notified.

3. DEPUTATION – NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING EXECUTIVE – ANNUAL UPDATE OF THE 2023-2026 HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN
(Appendices I & II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Housing Investment Plan and presentation.

The Chair welcomed and introduced Grainia Long, Chief Executive and Eileen Thompson, Ards and North Down Area Manager.

Ms Long undertook a powerpoint presentation covering the undernoted aspects.

- Community Planning Update
- Tenure Breakdown & Total Homes
- Housing Executive Spend 23/24 – £78.87m. A large part of that was housing benefit (£31.67m) and investment in new build (£26.70m).
- New Homes on site in the last year - 120 new social homes completed and 174 new social homes under construction at end of March 2024.
- New Housing for All role - Shared Housing Programme had transferred to NIHE from DfC with plans to further develop this successful partnership for the Good Relations programme in the coming years. Within Ards & North Down Borough Council area, one Housing for All schemes had been completed and celebrated as shared, with two potential schemes at pre allocation stage.
- Waiting List Trends 2021-24 - At March 2024 3,284 households on waiting list, 2,404 in housing stress and over 500 allocations (April 23 – March 24).
- New Build/SHDP – housing needs assessments were undertaken to understand the scale of the need locally which was split between urban and rural along with the type of housing that was needed. 1,390 new homes as the strategic guidelines target for the next five years.
- Projected Spend 24/25 – One of the areas that the NIHE was committed to increasing investment in its own stock with a significant increase in the budget of £11.5m for planned maintenance and stock improvements.
- Key Housing Challenges - 599 placements in temporary accommodation in Ards & North Down Borough Council area during 2023/24. Locally, the team had been focused in ensuring the temporary accommodation was good quality and reducing the need for placement in hotels and B&B accommodation.
- Key Housing Opportunities - NIHE were very focused on low carbon, energy efficiency and net zero approaches to its stock. 1,400 'fabric first' retrofits having been completed across Northern Ireland. Along with the commencement of a programme of 300 - 400 low carbon heating installations.

The Chair thanked Ms Long for the presentation and invited questions from Members.

Alderman McIlveen referred to the specification that new homes were now being built to, low carbon homes and ensuring houses were built to the highest standard. He asked if any research had been undertaken in relation to passive housing as a possible future model for social housing. There were some examples of such already in Northern Ireland therefore the expertise was already being generated.

Ms Long stated that Housing Associations worked to building standards that were set by the Department of Finance and they must build to the Housing Association Guide. It was recognised that homes needed to be built as low carbon as possible. The Housing Executive had brought forward a proposal approximately two years ago that the Housing Executive would build a small number of low carbon homes which the Department agreed to. They had been the first new homes that the Housing

Executive had built in 26 years. Those homes were built to passive housing standard using modern methods of construction and were located in Sunningdale Gardens, Belfast. The Housing Executive were working on the findings from that pilot and would be monitoring how the tenants found the homes. Ms Long hoped that would be the start of the new standard for social housing.

Councillor W Irvine noted that the stock figure was very encouraging, and he looked forward to those homes coming on site. He referred to the gable walls at Clanmorris, Bangor, those gables walls faced out onto the carriageway opposite the industrial lands where Sainsbury's was located. Those walls displayed a lot of graffiti and residents had been voicing concern for some time. The Council's Good Relations team had been working on the matter. Councillor W Irvine asked if the NIHE had any update in that regard noting that some of the properties were owned by the Housing Executive and some were privately owned.

Mrs Thompson advised that a public meeting had been organised for after Christmas. She recognised that the site was prominent, the Housing Executive owned 4 of those gable walls and would be keen to support a reimagining project. However, the Housing Executive would like that to be a community led project and it was hoped that the public meeting would allow residents to express their views.

Councillor Moore was encouraged to hear the work being undertaken around sustainability and carbon reduction. She referred to the changes in people's accessibility needs, how those could change over time and how those were being incorporated into the housing stock. Ms Long stated that all housing association properties were built to lifetime standard which had a positive impact as people grew older. The Housing Executive also looked at its own stock as its decarbonised and invested more in sustainability. Good housing promoted good health, and the Housing Executive had a Health for Housing team that were constantly challenging to capture and monitor the health impacts. Ms Long highlighted that an area for concern was the cost of the disabled adaptations and there were important strategic decisions to be made in that regard to ensure value for money.

Alderman McAlpine was surprised to read that the private rented sector was 2.5% higher than the social rentals in the Borough. She referred to the housing executive properties that had been sold and asked if those were tracked afterwards to see if those properties were privately rented. Alderman McAlpine felt it was disappointing that stock was being lost and not replaced.

Ms Long explained highlighted that the Housing Executive had been selling its own properties since 1980. The rules around house sales had changed over time with the discount having increased. Research was undertaken to see what happened to those homes sold over time. It was the view of the Board of the Housing Executive that there was a need to suspend or pause housing sales. With the rules changing, the discount had become so large that the capital receipt received for a property did not cover close to the cost of a new build. For the first time, this year the Housing Executive were unable to retain the capital receipt from the house sale and that had been sent back to the Department to fund other programmes.

Councillor Chambers referred to the long waiting list and the difficulties finding accommodation to reflect the needs of each applicant. He asked if there was a target waiting time, and if so, was that currently being met and was it benchmarked.

Ms Thompson stated that how long an applicant remained on the waiting list was dependent on a number of factors including their specific needs, size of the accommodation required and its location. Average figures on the length of time an applicant spent on the waiting list broken down by such factors as household type could be shared with Members. There was no target figure, and the Housing Executive worked to house people as soon as it was possible.

Councillor Chambers felt it would be useful to see those figures.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their attendance, and they withdrew from the meeting.

NOTED.

4. DEPUTATION - NILGA LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR ELECTED MEMBERS

(Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy presentation

Fiona Douglas – NILGA Regional Development Manager and Tony Bovaird – Director, Governance International were admitted to the meeting from the virtual public gallery.

The Chair welcomed Ms Douglas and Mr Bovaird and invited them to commence their presentation.

Ms Douglas outlined the detail of NILGA as a representative body for Local Government. To provide context she explained that when she took up her role in 2016 it was apparent that Councillor development was happening on a reactive basis with no real understanding of the knowledge and skills that were needed for Councillors to be effective in a what was a very unique role. Elected representatives were in a strong position to really make a difference to their local areas by improving social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing of their communities. It was a demanding role in an ever challenging and complex context, and it was clear to NILGA that there was support needed to upskill and equip elected members. A tailored programme was needed to support members and Ms Douglas outlined the objectives of the leadership programme.

Mr Bovaird provided an overview of the structure and content of the programme including the modules that would be covered relating to the political skills framework and time required to complete the programme. He further outlined the key roles of a Councillor and the challenges that presented. Completing the programme would result in a CPD accreditation.

The Chair thanked Ms Douglas and Mr Bovaird for their presentation and invited questions from Members.

Alderman McRandal asked if the programme would commence in January 2025 and the number of participants required for the programme. Ms Douglas confirmed that the programme would commence in January 2025, expressions of interest would be invited from each of the Councils and the maximum number of participants would be 30.

As there were no further questions, the Chair thanked Ms Douglas and Mr Bovaird for their attendance, and they withdrew from the meeting.

NOTED.

5. ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP POLICY (FILE C&M/24/SAP24)
(Appendices IV, V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services attaching Advertising and Sponsorship Policy and Pilot scheme table. The report detailed as part of budgeting processes, advertising and sponsorship was highlighted as an opportunity Council should explore as a means of income generation.

While some sponsorship agreements already existed across the Council, there was little consistency as to how they were secured or managed. A number were based on long-standing relationships and were not necessarily delivering the value that they could, and some were one-off agreements that had the potential to be widened and extended.

To facilitate a more proactive and structured approach to advertising and sponsorship across the Council, an Advertising and Sponsorship Policy had now been developed. Extensive consultation with a wide range of service units who were currently involved in sponsorship activity, had aspirations to engage in advertising or sponsorship activity or need to support/regulate such activity was undertaken. Advice was also taken from other local authorities who had a strong track record of securing advertising and sponsorship revenue.

The Policy set out the terms upon which advertising and sponsorship may be sought and accepted by the Council. It outlined the Council's commitment to developing advertising and sponsorship opportunities that would support activities either directly or indirectly and compliment the delivery of strategic priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan.

It provided clear guidance for advertisers and sponsors who may want to engage with the Council. It also provided guidance for Council services to work to, and within, to help ensure a successful partnership for both the Council and the sponsor/advertiser.

The policy related to advertising and sponsorship opportunities connected to all of the Council's physical sites, including leased and rented spaces, (e.g. buildings, roundabouts, parks, benches, leisure facilities, pitches), publications, websites, digital platforms, vehicles, services and appropriate events, campaigns or initiatives for which it was responsible.

Supplementary guidance documents e.g. a template contract, had also been drafted to assist service areas to deliver against the policy in a consistent way.

An initial financial target had been set and following approval of the policy it was intended to run a pilot for a period of 6-9 months promoting six key advertising and sponsorship opportunities. These would come from a range of different service areas including tourism events, parks and leisure. That approach would allow officers the opportunity to test the market, the process and to gauge interest before widening the pool of opportunities further. A Media Pack was being developed to support that and would be used to engage with potential sponsors/ advertisers as part of the initial pilot.

RECOMMENDED that Members adopt the Advertising and Sponsorship Policy and note the planned pilot of 6 key opportunities in the initial period.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine referred the popularity of advertising on roundabouts, and he asked if there had been any initial interest from businesses.

The Head of Communications and Marketing advised that some people had already expressed an interest. Once the policy was approved that interest could be worked through the process. It was hoped that there would be some local businesses that would be interested in partnering with the Council.

Councillor Thompson welcomed the report highlighting the need to work hard to maximise the revenue. He was pleased to see the sites suggested within the report noting that the 6-9 months pilot would take place and assumed that a report would be brought back to Committee following that.

The Head of Communications and Marketing confirmed that would be the intention.

Councillor Gilmour welcomed the formation of the policy and felt it was important that the review was built in to look at the outworkings. She noted within the draft policy it detailed approvals for charity and community groups at designated locations and she asked if there were now a list of specific locations for advertising for charity and community groups. The Head of Communications and Marketing explained that there was a list of advertising locations some of which were well used locations. The Council were continuously carrying out advertising with a number of events and initiatives. If the pilot worked well, consideration could be given to identifying new opportunities on Council owned buildings and land to expand on the advertising providing more opportunities in the future for charity and community organisations.

Referring to the Big Plan, Alderman McAlpine noted the aims and messages within to address developing health such as tackling obesity. She was concerned that the businesses advertising would be consistent with the Council's messages and that there was no contradiction.

The Head of Communications and Marketing advised that the policy was considered extensively noting there were a lot of views around the appetite that the Council had to advertise and sponsor. It was decided that the policy would not be overly prescriptive, being attractive and possible to attract companies to approach. It was recognised and highlighted the need to engage with organisations that were in-line with Council's values. The process would evaluate each opportunity as it arose.

Alderman McAlpine expressed concern that such approach could leave the Council open to challenge.

Referring to page 6 of the draft policy, Alderman McIlveen noted the reference to the Equality Act 2010 highlighting that Act did not apply to Northern Ireland. Given that he suggested that the report be deferred to allow for the correct legislation to be reflected in the policy.

The Head of Communications and Marketing undertook to talk to the Equality Officer to amend the policy.

Councillor Chambers felt the policy was a great opportunity for the Council highlighting the long-term opportunities. He wondered if there should be inclusion that the Council could reserve the right to terminate an agreement if for example a business were to come into disrepute.

The Head of Communications and Marketing noted that there was reference to removing advertising and dissolving the relationship however Officers could look to strengthen that before bringing back the policy to Council at the end of the month.

The proposer and seconder were content for the report to be deferred.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the item be deferred to the Council meeting.

6. FERTILITY AND NEONATAL POLICIES (FILE HR60)
(Appendices VI, VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services attaching Draft Fertility Treatment Policy and Draft Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Policy. The report detailed that a notice of motion was raised in 2022, that a report be brought to Council, exploring the possibility of introducing a policy that showed commitment to supporting the wellbeing of our workforce by ensuring appropriate support was available to anyone undergoing IVF treatment.

The Director of Corporate Services and Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development met with Tiny Life, the premature baby charity for Northern Ireland, in 2023 regarding the possibility of introducing a Neonatal Leave Policy in Ards and North Down Borough Council in advance of new legislation, which

was expected to come into force, and had already been adopted by Belfast City Council.

Family related leave and pay entitlements provided support to working parents during different life events. Providing more support to working parents would help with recruitment, retention and the wellbeing of staff. It was therefore proposed that Council developed new HR policies and procedures for both Fertility Treatment and Neonatal Care.

Fertility Treatment Background

The NHS suggested that infertility affects one in seven couples.

In vitro fertilization (IVF) was demanding and involved daily medication and frequent appointments. It could be a stressful, costly, and risky process and be emotionally draining for those undergoing treatment.

Currently there was no legal right for time off work for fertility treatment. Employers often treated fertility appointments the same as any other medical or dental appointment. However, any sickness should be treated like any other sickness if unable to work.

Fertility Treatment (Employment Rights) Bill

A Private Members' Bill was brought to Parliament in to improve workplace protection for employees undergoing IVF, the Fertility Treatment (Employment Rights) Bill. A Westminster Hall debate was due to take place in November 2023 but was cancelled.

The Bill proposed employers allowed an employee to take paid time off work to attend fertility treatment appointments. In addition, an employee who had a 'qualifying relationship' with a person receiving fertility treatment would be entitled to take unpaid time off work to accompany the person to the appointments.

Given the impacts on an employee's health and wellbeing, it was considered good practice to treat requests for time off for fertility treatment sympathetically and consider adopting a procedure for dealing with such requests to give the highest chance of success as possible.

Benchmarking

A benchmarking exercise was carried out in 2023 to determine which other Councils in Northern Ireland have a Fertility Treatment policy.

Of the ten Councils contacted, seven responded, five of which said they do not have a policy in place at present. One Council advised they are currently working on a policy. Belfast City Council was the only Council to have a policy already in place.

Given so few Councils had a policy in place, further benchmarking was carried out on other organisations. Information gathered was summarised in Table 1:

Table 1: Organisations with a Fertility Treatment Policy

Organisation	Policy
Belfast City Council	<p>Paid time off for medical appointments – no limit.</p> <p>Up to ten days full pay from day one of employment if treatment is unsuccessful or miscarriage occurs. Three days bereavement leave for an employee if their partner or surrogate suffers a miscarriage.</p>
Business Services Organisation (BSO)	<p>Special leave policy is currently with trade unions for consultation. Proposal is a new IVF section with paid time off for appointments. A maximum of three days paid time off for treatment, in a twelve-month rolling period, pro-rata for part time employees. Fathers and same sex partners also to be given appropriate paid time off.</p>
Imperial College London	<p>Up to five days paid leave if an employee has worked for 12 months or more.</p>
Manchester University	<p>Up to five days leave per cycle limited to one cycle in twelve months and no more than three cycles in total.</p>
Pricewaterhouse Coopers	<p>Up to eight days paid fertility leave to any employee undergoing fertility treatment and up to two days paid leave for anyone whose Partner is undergoing fertility treatment.</p>
Lidl Northern Ireland	<p>Two days paid leave per IVF cycle which is unlimited in the number of IVF cycles will be supported through as well as support for staff undergoing egg freezing.</p>
Co-op	<p>From day one of employment, a reasonable amount of paid time off to attend appointments to prepare for or undergo treatment. As a guide, paid leave for up to ten appointments per cycle, for up to three cycles of fertility treatment but some situations may need more or less.</p>

A draft Fertility Treatment policy and procedure was attached to the report, to enable employees to take time off work for coping with fertility treatment and to provide access to support.

The financial and operational impact to the organisation was likely to be low and the benefits of introducing such a policy include Council being recognised as an Employer of Choice who support staff and their families.

Consultation had taken place with Council employees and the recognised trade unions on the introduction of the policy and procedure and all feedback had been taken into consideration. The Trade Unions and staff were supportive of the proposed policy and procedure.

Once approved, the policy and procedure can be added to the existing Family Friendly Leave Arrangements Policy which was expected to require updating in accordance with new legislation due to be introduced by the Government in the foreseeable future.

Miscarriage

Council's Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay Policy allowed up to 2 weeks leave from day one of employment for a child who has died under the age of 18 or was stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy. However, there was currently no right to time off for miscarriage - loss of a pregnancy during the first 23 weeks.

Given the proposal to provide 3 days paid leave to employees (pro-rata for part time staff) whose fertility treatment has been unsuccessful, it was recommended that up to three days paid leave (pro-rata) also be provided to pregnant employees who suffered a miscarriage. Employees whose partner or surrogate had suffered a miscarriage would also be eligible. Entitlement would be from day one of employment and given the sensitivities, time off could be recorded by Managers on CORE as 'Special Leave Paid'.

Neonatal Care Background

In Northern Ireland around one in thirteen babies born each year were admitted to neonatal care due to prematurity or sickness. Forty-five percent of babies admitted to neonatal care spend less than one week in hospital before being discharged home. Fathers and non-birthing parents had only two weeks of paid paternity leave, meaning that many return to work long before their child was well enough to leave hospital. Additionally, some mothers and adopters of premature or vulnerable babies use up much of their maternity or adoption leave while their baby was still in hospital.

The whole family's mental health could suffer following the birth of a premature or sick baby. Some employees end up signed off sick and many decide to leave work altogether to become a full-time carer for their child or children.

Legislation

Currently there was no right in Northern Ireland to leave and/or statutory pay for working parents whose newborn requires neonatal care.

The Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Act 2023 received Royal Assent in May 2023, providing parents with a right to 12 weeks leave and pay when their baby required neonatal care in addition to existing parental leave entitlements. Regulations to operationalise this entitlement were anticipated to come into force in April 2025 in England, Scotland and Wales. As employment law was a devolved matter, this legislation and supporting regulations did not apply here.

However, the Department for the Economy was currently consulting the public on the 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill which included a raft of proposed new employment rights including statutory leave and pay for eligible employees whose newborn baby enters neonatal care within 28 days of birth for a period of 7 or more days up to a period of 12 weeks.

The draft Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) policy had been written to enable employees to take additional time off work if their baby undergoes neonatal care of at least one week. The Policy had been developed around the Department's proposals. Amendments may need to be made to the Policy in the future when details of the Bill were finalised, and the legislation introduced.

Consultation had taken place on this policy and due consideration given to all feedback from staff and Trade Unions.

RECOMMENDED:- that

- Approval is given to introduce the Fertility Treatment Policy
- Approval is given to introduce the Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Policy

Proposed by Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendations be adopted.

Councillor Gilmour highlighted the impact on a family when a premature child was born, those who suffered a loss of a child or struggled with fertility. She referred to a campaign from Tinelylife who had pushed hard to highlight the difficulties for mothers bonding and managing family life when a baby was in neonatal care. She felt it was only right that the Council had the policies to provide support and she hoped it would add some comfort and assurance.

RESOLVED, on the proposal Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendations be adopted.

7. ITEM WITHDRAWN

8. CIVIC AWARDS 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that in 2015 the Council agreed to host a Civic Awards scheme and ceremonies were subsequently held in May 2016, 2017, and 2018. In November 2018, the delivery of the scheme was reviewed and the Council agreed that, given the downward trend in the number of nominations received over the preceding three-year period that the Council would not hold a Civic Awards Scheme in 2019 but instead would hold one in 2020 and every alternate year thereafter.

At that time the categories of awards were reconsidered, and nominations were invited under the following revised categories: -

- Community Award – Significant service in the field of voluntary community work.
- Good Neighbour Award– ‘Going the extra mile’ within the local community.
- Youth Award – This award recognises those aged under 18 who have achieved a great deal whether in their academic life, sport, in dealing with personal challenges or their contributions to the community.
- Arts, Culture or Heritage Award – This award recognises the contribution made by an individual or group to the arts, local culture or heritage.
- Environmental Sustainability Award – This award recognises an individual or group that has made a significant contribution to the protection/conservation of the environment.
- Mayor’s Special Civic Award – A special award will be presented by the Mayor of Ards and North Down in recognition of outstanding service or special qualities demonstrated by an individual. Nominations are not sought for this award.

While the scheme was relaunched in 2020 it was later cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. The scheme had not run since.

Update

Officers had recently reviewed the scheme and the award categories.

It was proposed that the Council launched the Civic Awards 2025 at the beginning of February 2025, in line with normal timeframes, with a view to hosting a Civic Awards Ceremony in May 2025. The categories had been updated as follows:

- Community Champion Award – This award would recognise an individual who has gone above and beyond in their efforts to support and uplift their community.
- Community Group Award – This award would recognise a group or organisation that has made outstanding contributions to the community.
- Youth Impact Award – This award would recognise an individual aged under 18 who have achieved a great deal whether in their academic life, sport, in dealing with personal challenges or their contributions to the community.
- Arts, Culture or Heritage Award – This award would recognise an individual or group who has made a significant contribution to the arts, local culture or heritage.
- Environmental Sustainability Award – This award recognises an individual or group that has made a significant contribution to the protection/conservation of the environment.
- Mayor’s Special Civic Award – A special award would be presented by the Mayor of Ards and North Down in recognition of outstanding service or special qualities demonstrated by an individual. Nominations were not sought for this award but may be awarded from the list of nominees.

In order to maximise interest and quality, it was proposed that the Civic Awards take place once each electoral term.

It was proposed that a judging panel, consisting of the Mayor and two other elected members, be appointed. The panel would be supported by officers from Democratic Services.

RECOMMENDED that the Council:

- a. launches the Civic Awards 2025 as detailed in the report; and
- b. appoints two elected members to the judging panel along with the Mayor.

Proposed by Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the recommendations, be adopted.

Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that Councillor S Irvine, be appointed to the Judging Panel.

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Moore, that Councillor Irwin, be adopted to the Judging Panel.

Councillor Gilmour welcomed the return of the awards which was a lovely opportunity to recognise people across the Borough. As detailed in the report there were multiple categories. There were unsung heroes undertaking tremendous work and the awards provided an opportunity to recognise that work.

Alderman McIlveen was delighted that the event was returning noting the sheer breadth of work that occurred across the Borough and the many people that give up their time. The awards provided the opportunity to sing the praises of those unsung heroes and publicly thank those people that give so much and so freely.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the recommendation be adopted and that Councillor S Irvine and Councillor Irwin, be adopted to the judging panel along with the Mayor.

9. RESPONSES TO NOTICE OF MOTION

(a) Deep concern at the poor state of the roads across ANDBC (Appendix VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services attaching letters from DfI. The report detailed the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Corporate Services Committee at its meeting in September 2024:

“That Council notes the response but writes back to the Minister to ask for the data on the metrics he refers to in his letter that DfI use to allocate the budget and also ask for the benchmark data from Newry, Mourne & Down, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Councils so we can assess the budget.”

A letter was sent from the Chief Executive on 9 October 2024 and a reply was received on 25 October 2024.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the response.

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that Council responds to the Minister thanking him for his response and ask again for non-commercially sensitive information to allow Council to benchmark against the comparator Councils previously indicated. Information requested would include the spend on road repairs by Council area by year over the past 5 years and the road length within the area.

Alderman Smith expressed his dissatisfaction with the response.

Alderman McIlveen recited comparative data on road maintenance expenditure by District Council, a copy of which he provided to Democratic Services for inclusion. The share was not equitable with Ards and North Down Borough Council. The general condition of the roads was incredibly poor, and it was unacceptable.

Total Structural Maintenance (Resource & Capital) by District Council Area – Financial Years 2020-21 to 2022-23 (Extract)

District Council	Structural Maintenance	Year 20-21 £m	Year 21-22 £m	Year 22-23 £m
Belfast City Council	Resource	1.8	1.7	1.8
	Capital	5.3	6.1	8.4
	Total Structural Maintenance	7.1	7.8	10.2
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	Resource	0.8	1.0	1.0
	Capital	5.1	7.9	6.5
	Total Structural Maintenance	5.9	8.9	7.5
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	Resource	1.1	1.0	0.6
	Capital	2.8	6.1	7.3
	Total Structural Maintenance	3.9	7.1	7.9
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	Resource	1.8	1.4	1.8
	Capital	7.2	10.1	8.6
	Total Structural Maintenance	9.0	11.5	10.4
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	Resource	1.2	1.3	1.1
	Capital	10.3	10.1	10.3
	Total Structural Maintenance	11.5	11.4	11.4
Derry City & Strabane District Council	Resource	1.0	1.2	1.6
	Capital	6.7	6.5	9.8
	Total Structural Maintenance	7.7	7.7	11.4
Mid Ulster District Council	Resource	2.3	1.6	1.7
	Capital	9.8	8.6	19.8
	Total Structural Maintenance	12.1	10.2	21.5
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Resource	3.1	1.7	1.6
	Capital	11.0	9.7	11.1
	Total Structural Maintenance	14.1	11.4	12.7

Ards & North Down Borough Council	Resource	0.5	0.5	0.7
	Capital	4.5	5.4	2.3
	Total Structural Maintenance	5.0	5.9	3.0
Armagh City & Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	Resource	2.7	2.5	2.4
	Capital	9.7	10.9	9.5
	Total Structural Maintenance	12.4	13.4	11.9
Newry, Mourne & Down District Council	Resource	1.9	2.2	2.1
	Capital	9.9	7.2	17.4
	Total Structural Maintenance	11.8	9.4	19.5

Councillor Chambers admired Alderman Smith's tenacity and expressed disappointment that the answers from the Minister were not being received.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that Council responds to the Minister thanking him for his response and ask again for non-commercially sensitive information to allow Council to benchmark against the comparator Councils previously indicated. Information requested would include the spend on road repairs by Council area by year over the past 5 years and the road length within the area.

10. UPDATE TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT POLICY (FILE 26051)

(Appendix IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services attaching updated Performance Management Policy. The report detailed that Members would be aware that Council had in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook (PERFORM Toolkit).

The Performance Management Policy outlined the process in place to drive continuous service improvement and performance across all areas of the organisation.

The Performance Management Policy had been updated to reflect changes in the performance management process (changes have already been agreed by Council). The updates to the Policy were as follows:

- Heads of Service would report on performance against Service Plan KPIs biannually to the relevant Standing Committee instead of quarterly (New process included in Performance Improvement Plan approved by Council in June 2024); and
- Progress against Council's Performance Improvement Plan would be reported biannually to the Corporate Services Committee; instead of quarterly to Audit Committee (New process included in Scheme of Delegation approved by Council in June 2024).

The operational Performance Management Handbook (PERFORM Toolkit) had been updated to reflect above changes.

RECOMMENDED that the Council note above update and updated Performance Management Policy.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen asked what changes had been made to the policy noting that he would have liked to see those highlighted. The Director took on board the comments to highlight changes in future policies. He advised that some of the changes made had been due to the updates to the scheme of delegation.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

11. IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM ON SERVICE DELIVERY AND COST EFFECTIVENESS

(Appendices X, XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Director of Corporate Services attaching letter from DfC and corresponding report. The report detailed that a letter was issued on 3 October 2024 to the Chief Executive by the Director of Local Government and Housing Regulation Division, DfC relating to the Impact of Local Government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness. A copy of the letter and resulting report were attached to the report.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen expressed his disappointment that after all the years the outcomes and cost efficiencies of local government reform had not yet been seen. He had highlighted his views and believed there to be too many Councillors for the size of the population. More efficiencies could be made, and things done more effectively. He expressed the view that the Council involved itself in too many things rather than focusing on its core services.

Alderman Smith noted that when local government reform was being sold many more savings were promised and that amongst other items had unfortunately not been delivered. He expressed his disappointment with the content of the report believing that it was missing some aspects.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

12. PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS & TREASURY MANAGEMENT – 2024/25 QTR 2 REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that in February 2024, Council approved its annual Capital and Treasury Management Strategies, including the setting of Prudential Indicators (PIs) for the current financial year ending 31 March 2025. Those were statutory requirements in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the PIs and treasury management activity as required by the CIPFA Codes, at the end of September 2024.

1.1 Capital - Expenditure & Financing

The PIs for capital expenditure and financing should ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of the Council were affordable, prudent and sustainable. Updates to those PIs were set out below.

	Original Forecast	Revised Forecast
Table 1.11	£M	£M
Capital Expenditure 2024/25 (Current Year)	19.41	13.39

The original estimate of £19.41M had been revised to £13.39M, reflecting the capital expenditure that was now expected to be incurred by 31 March 2025. That was consistent with the deliverability risks outlined in the 2024/25 budget strategy, where it was reported that capital ambition was not being matched by delivery due to reasons including Officer resource, business readiness and planning and funding delays. The main schemes impacted by such risks for this reporting period were Bangor Waterfront, Greenways, Ward Park Redevelopment, 3G Pitches and the Digital Innovation Hub.

The revised capital expenditure forecasts for the three-year plan, together with the capital financing implications and previous year activity were summarised below.

	Actual	Revised Forecast		
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Table 1.12	£M	£M	£M	£M
Capital Expenditure	6.51	13.39	23.54	35.50
Financed by:				
Loans	4.20	5.89	14.13	21.09
Grants	1.36	5.51	7.87	13.86

Capital Receipts	0.62	1.55	1.14	0.55
Revenue/Reserves	0.33	0.44	0.40	-

1.2 Capital – Capital Financing Requirement and External Borrowings

The Council's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance was measured by the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). That increased with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduced with MRP (minimum revenue provision). See section 1.4 for further information on MRP.

Statutory guidance was that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short term. The Council had complied and expected to continue to comply with this requirement in the medium term as shown below.

Table 1.2	Actual	Revised Forecast		
	31/03/24	31/03/25	31/03/26	31/03/27
	£M	£M	£M	£M
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	75.07	78.69	85.02	97.98
External Gross Borrowing	(59.65)	(56.88)	(60.63)	(74.46)
External Gross Debt (Leases)	-	(4.14)	(3.79)	(3.46)
Under/(Over) Borrowing Requirement	15.42	17.67	20.60	20.06
Gross Borrowing within CFR	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The difference between the CFR and the Gross Borrowing figures represented the Council's underlying need to borrow (£17.67M 31/03/25 forecast) and indicated that historic capital expenditure had been temporarily financed from internal revenue resources. That had been made possible due to an increase in the Council's cash reserves in the current and previous years. The position had been similar for several years now with the Council last taking out long-term borrowings in November 2018.

1.3 Capital - Debt and the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary

The Council was legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit each year, known as the 'Authorised Limit'. In line with statutory guidance, a lower 'operational boundary' was also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit.

The revised forecast for external gross borrowing (including leases) at 31 March 2025 was £61M (table 1.2). The Council was therefore forecast to remain well within both the Authorised Limit and the Operational Boundary set for the year as follows:

Table 1.3	2024/25
Authorised limit – borrowing	£ 88.92M

Operational boundary – borrowing	£ 83.92M
----------------------------------	----------

1.4 Capital - Revenue Budget Implications

Capital expenditure was not charged directly to the revenue budget. Instead, interest payable on borrowings and MRP (minimum revenue provision), together known as capital financing costs, were charged to revenue. Those financing costs were compared to the net revenue stream i.e. the amount funded from District Rates and general government grants, to show the proportion of the net revenue stream which was made up of capital financing costs.

Table 1.4	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Forecast	2026/27 Forecast
Financing costs (£m)	£7.9M	£9.05M	£10.09M	£11.04M
Proportion of net revenue stream (%)	12.7%	13.6%	14.1%	14.4%

The forecast financing costs for 2024/25 was in line with the budget set for the year. The increase in the proportion of financing costs to the net revenue stream was due to the inclusion of 'right of use' assets in the financing costs from 1 April 2024 following a change in accounting rules. Those costs were previously treated as operating leases and accounted for as revenue rental charges.

2.1 Treasury Management – Debt Activity

The following table summarised the position on long-term borrowings at 30 September 2024.

Table 2.1				
Lender	Balance 01/04/24	New Loans	Repayments	Balance 30/09/24
Dept of Finance	£ 53.38M	£ -	£ (1.42)M	£51.96M
Banks (LOBOs)	£ 6.27M	£ -	£ -	£ 6.27M
Totals	£ 59.65M	£ -	£ (1.42)M	£ 58.23M

The Council does not currently hold any short-term borrowings.

The revised capital financing requirement (table 1.2) showed that the Council could increase its level of external borrowings to £78.7M by 31 March 2025. However, an assessment of the Council's cashflow position forecasts that there would be adequate cash reserves to temporarily finance capital expenditure for the remainder of the current year and therefore no further borrowing was anticipated before 31 March 2025.

After repayments on existing long-term loans were made during the remainder of 2024/25, the level of external borrowings at 31 March 2025 was forecast to be £56.9M.

The average interest rate for the Council's total debt portfolio was 3.87%.

2.2 Treasury Management - Debt Related Treasury Activity Limits

The tables below show the position of all debt related treasury activity limits.

Table 2.21		
Interest rate exposures	Limit 2024/25	Actual at 30/09/24
Quantity of debt held at variable interest rates - upper limit	30%	2%
Quantity of debt held at fixed interest rates - upper limit	100%	98%

Table 2.22			
Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing	Lower Limit 2024/25	Upper Limit 2024/25	Forecast 2024/25
Under 12 months	0%	15%	4.7%
12 months to 2 years	0%	15%	6.0%
2 years to 5 years	0%	20%	13.8%
5 years to 10 years	0%	30%	27.2%
10 years and above	30%	90%	48.3%

2.3 Treasury Management - Investment Activity

The objectives of the Council's investment strategy were safeguarding the repayment of the principal and interest on its investments on time, with the investment return being a secondary objective. The current investment climate continues to be one of overriding risk consideration, particularly that of counterparty risk. In line with advice provided by treasury management consultants, officers continue to implement an operational investment strategy of placing short-term investments with approved high-quality counterparties.

For the period from 1 April to 30 September 2024, Council had earned interest of £321K on investment deals with approved financial institutions as summarised below:

Table 2.31	Average Deposit Size	Average Term	Average Interest Rate	Interest Earned
CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund	£3.0m	Call A/c	5.14%	£78,076
Invesco Investment Mgt Ltd	£2.9m	Call A/c	5.15%	£76,095

State Street Global Advisors	£3.0m	Call A/c	5.13%	£77,844
Barclays Bank	£1.6m	Call A/c	4.92%	£39,826
Bank of Scotland	£2.2m	Call A/c	5.14%	£49,114
Santander	£0.8m	Call A/c	3.35%	£897
Totals				£321,852

This compared favourably to the budget set for the same period of £273K, resulting in a favourable variance of £49K.

The total balance of funds held in investment accounts at 30 September 24 was £10.3M.

The table below showed the risk and return metrics on the Council's investments held at 30 September 2024 against other NI Councils.

	Counterparties	Investments	
Table 2.32	Credit Rating	Liquidity (< 7 days)	Rate of Return (%)
ANDBC	A+	100%	4.98%
NI Council Average	A+	54%	4.77%

Source: Arlingclose Ltd Local Authority Quarterly Investment Benchmarking report Sep-24

The Council's limit for total principal sums invested for periods longer than 364 days was £500k. The Council had not entered into any such investments.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Smith questioned how close the Council was to peak borrowing capacity. The Head of Finance advised that the Council was still a considerable way off peak borrowing capacity. A number of projects had just commenced construction, there was still an underspend in capital and that would rectify in the coming years

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

13. **STRATEGIC BUDGET REPORT SEPTEMBER 2024 (FIN23)** (Appendix XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Director of Corporate Services that this was the second budget report for the financial year. It set out the variances for expenditure and income for the first six months and showed a budgetary surplus of

£208k, thus far.

The budgeting policy agreed during the year required officers to forecast potential outturn on four occasions during the financial year – those would occur at the end of June, August, November and January. The final column on page 2 of the report showed that management were forecasting a potential surplus of around £485k which was broadly in line with budget. That forecast and the next one would feed into the estimates process and allow judgements to be made in respect of potential reserves positions at the year end.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the Strategic Budget Report for September.

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman P Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McRandal referred to page 8 which detailed recruitment costs, yet he was of the understanding that recruitment was below what had been anticipated. The Director advised that cost was largely due to the recruitment of the Chief Executive during the financial year.

Alderman Smith referenced the increase in insurance premiums and asked if that was envisaged to run forward in the years ahead. The Director noted that insurance was one of the biggest risk areas in terms of its growth in cost. A large reason for the increase was due to insurance providers leaving the market in Northern Ireland. Solace were working on commissioning a piece of work to look at this Northern Ireland wide. Self-insurance was also being explored as an option. The Director advised that the insurance renewals had come late in the financial year resulting in being over budget. Extra provision would need to be included in the budget next year.

Alderman McAlpine advised that the Education Authority self-insured all their buildings including schools and exploring their approach could be worth considering.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman P Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

The below item was brought forward in the meeting to be considered in the public domain.

20. BLAIR MAYNE BURSARY AWARDS (Appendix XIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services attaching minutes of the Blair Mayne Bursary Sub-Committee held on 7th October 2024. They included recommendations to award four bursaries in 2025 at an informal ceremony to be held in the Spring, in Londonderry Room, Ards Arts Centre, Town Hall, Newtownards.

RECOMMENDED that Council adopt the minutes and the recommendations contained therein be adopted.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Alderman P Smith, that the recommendation be adopted.

14. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of any other notified business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

15. RENEWAL OF LEASE OF FORESHORE OF STRANGFORD LOUGH AT KIRCUBBIN

(Appendices XIV, XV)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

The Council as lessee was asked to agree to renew the Lease of the foreshore of Strangford Lough in Kircubbin. It was recommended that the Council acceded to the request.

The recommendation was agreed.

16. LEASE OF FORESHORE IN BANGOR BAY AND GRANT OF LICENCE TO BANGOR MARINE TO START WORKS AT QUEENS PARADE, BANGOR

(Appendices XVI, XVII)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

The Council leases the Foreshore at Bangor Bay. The Lease to the Council provides for 5 yearly rent reviews. The Council was asked to approve the new rent that has been revised and recommended by its independent valuer. It was recommended that the Council accedes to the request.

The recommendation was agreed.

17. REQUEST TO INSTALL A WATER MONITORING BUOY - COOK STREET JETTY

(Appendices XIX, XX)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6. – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

The Council was asked to approve a request to install at water buoy at Cook Street Jetty. It was recommended that the Council acceded to the request.

The recommendation was agreed.

18. ESTIMATES UPDATE (FIN166)

(Appendix XXI)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6:4 CONSULTATIONS OR NEGOTIATIONS.

Council was asked to consider an update from officers on the major areas of expenditure for the estimates process that will set the budget for the 2025/26 financial year.

The recommendation was to note the report.

19. ANDBC ABSENCE REPORT - 1 JULY 2024 - 30 SEPTEMBER 2024

(Appendices XXII, XXIII)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6:4 CONSULTATIONS OR NEGOTIATIONS.

Council was asked to consider an update on Absence Management following a report produced by APSE was presented to Corporate Committee in June 2023 together with a proposed Absence Management Action Plan prepared by Senior

Management intended to tackle the issues raised by APSE and to ensure the recommendations suggested were put in place.

The recommendation was agreed.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.01 pm.

Unclassified

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ITEM 8.5.1

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Communications and Marketing
Date of Report	18 November 2024
File Reference	C&M/24/SAP24
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	8.5.1 Matters Arising from Item 5 - Advertising and Sponsorship Policy
Attachments	Advertising and Sponsorship Policy

As part of budgeting processes, advertising and sponsorship was highlighted as an opportunity Council should explore as a means of income generation. While some sponsorship agreements already exist across the Council, there is little consistency in how they are secured or managed.

To facilitate a more proactive and structured approach to advertising and sponsorship across the Council, a report at item 5 of the Corporate Services Committee asked Members to adopt a newly developed Advertising and Sponsorship Policy for the Council and note the planned pilot of six key opportunities in an initial period before wider roll out.

Clause 5 'Prohibited Advertisers/Sponsors' of the policy submitted to the Corporate Committee made reference to the Equality Act 2010. It was highlighted that this is not applicable in Northern Ireland and needed replaced.

Not Applicable

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This point in the Policy has now been rewritten and a clause to cover organisations involved in Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking was also added - as follows.

- organisations or businesses involved in discrimination, victimisation, harassment or other unlawful conduct that is prohibited under anti-discrimination legislation applicable in the Northern Ireland, against people on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, political opinion and belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership. This applies to employment and education as well as the provision of goods, facilities, and services. This legislation is set out on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland website here: [ECNI - The Law, Equality Legislation, Equality Commission, Northern Ireland](#)
- organisations involved or associated with [modern slavery/human trafficking](#) as outlined in [Human Trafficking and Exploitation \(Criminal Justice and Support for Victims\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#)

Furthermore, the Committee sought reassurance that Council can terminate a contract immediately should a company be deemed likely to bring the Council into disrepute. Within Clause 5 of the Policy (extract below), and to be referenced in the associated Advertising and Sponsorship Contract agreed with any organisation or business, it is made clear that:

5.3 The Council retains the right to decline advertising and/or sponsorship from any organisation or business or in respect of products that the Council, in its sole discretion considers inappropriate. Council also retains the right to decline consent for advertising or sponsorship on its land and properties if it is deemed inappropriate. The Council retains the right to terminate a contract if they believe the partner company has acted in a way to bring the Council into disrepute. The Council will ensure that any contract entered into with an advertiser or sponsor contains adequate provision for the Council to unilaterally and immediately terminate the contract at any time.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council adopt the Advertising and Sponsorship Policy.

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Advertising and Sponsorship Policy

Policy Title	Advertising and Sponsorship Policy
Policy/File Reference	
Version	1
Policy Summary	The purpose of the Policy is to set out the terms upon which advertising and sponsorship may be sought and accepted by Ards and North Down Borough Council.
Responsible Officer(s)	Jacqueline Harte, Communications and Marketing
Date of Equality Screening	15 October 2024
Next review date	November 2025, then every two years.

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Advertising and Sponsorship Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of the policy is to set out the terms upon which advertising and sponsorship may be sought and accepted by Ards and North Down Borough Council.

1.2 The Council is committed to developing appropriate advertising and sponsorship opportunities to support its activities either directly or indirectly. It will encourage commercial relationships that are in line with the delivery of its strategic priorities as laid out in the Corporate Plan.

1.3 This policy provides clear guidance to advertisers and sponsors and forms the basis for the type of advertising and sponsorship that is acceptable to the Council.

1.4 The policy relates to advertising and sponsorship opportunities connected to all Council's physical sites, including leased and rented spaces, (e.g. buildings, roundabouts, parks, benches, leisure facilities, pitches), publications, websites, digital platforms, vehicles, services and appropriate events, campaigns or initiatives for which it is responsible.

2. Definition

2.1 For the purpose of the policy, advertising is defined as: "An agreement between the Council and the advertiser or their agent, whereby the Council receives funds / a sum of money from an organisation or business in consideration for which the advertiser gains publicity in the form of an advertisement on Council controlled physical sites, leased or hired lands, publications, websites, services, appropriate events, campaigns or initiatives."

2.2 Sponsorship is defined as: "An agreement between the Council and the sponsor, whereby the Council receives money to be used or be associated with physical sites, leased or hired lands, publications, events, campaigns or initiatives or in association with the Council's activities, from an organisation or an individual in consideration of which the sponsor gains publicity or other benefits."

3. Objectives

3.1 To ensure that:

- The Council maximises opportunities to obtain commercial advertising and sponsorship for its physical sites, leased or hired lands, publications, websites, services, appropriate events, campaigns or initiatives.
- The Council's position and reputation is protected in advertising and sponsorship agreements without compromising its regulatory and enforcement status.

- The Council adopts a consistent and professional approach towards advertising and sponsorship.
- Advertising and sponsorship agreements achieve best value.
- Council Elected Members and officers are protected from allegations of inappropriate dealings or relationships with advertisers and sponsors.

4. General principles and eligibility criteria

4.1 The Council will actively seek opportunities to work with local, regional, and national organisations and businesses by identifying advertising and sponsorship opportunities of mutual benefit that are in keeping with its Corporate Plan and strategic priorities.

4.2 The Council will not be put in a position where it might be open to criticism that an advertiser or sponsor has, or might be thought to:

- have influence over the Council or its officers in carrying out functions
- gain favourable terms from the Council in any business or other agreement, e.g. planning applications or tendering processes
- conducts itself in a manner that conflicts with the Council's strategic priorities.

4.3 All advertising must:

- Fall within the guidelines laid out by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).
- Uphold the rules laid out in the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing.
- Follow the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and the Local Government Acts.
- Comply with the Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. These Regulations set out when express advertising consent is required and what falls within deemed consent, subject to restrictions. The Council will also assess any applications for advertising consent against the relevant policy within the Addendum to Planning Policy Statement 6 – Areas of Townscape Character.
- Comply with Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008, which seeks to protect consumers from unfair, misleading, or aggressive marketing practices.

All businesses interested in advertising or offering sponsorship support must also:

- Be registered with Tourism NI and certified to trade in Ards and North Down Borough (if the business is an accommodation business) for the duration of the contractual agreement.
- Be graded under the British Graded Holiday Parks Scheme (BGHPS) (if the business is a Caravan and Camping Park) for the duration of the contractual agreement. Have a Council caravan licence, be compliant with the model licensing conditions or have an exemption.
- Be Food Standards Agency (FSA) Grade 4 certified or above for the duration of the contractual agreement and be registered with the Council.

- Comply with all applicable planning, tax, insurance (including public liability insurance), transportation (including licensing), safety, consumer protection and other legal and regulatory requirements for the duration of the contractual agreement. For the avoidance of doubt compliance with this clause shall be the advertiser/sponsors sole responsibility and Ards and North Down Borough Council shall have no liability in respect of same.

4.4 In line with the codes and regulations referred to above, advertisements must be:

- legal, decent, honest, and truthful
- created with a sense of responsibility to consumers and society
- in line with the principles of fair competition generally accepted in business.

4.5 The Council will not define permitted advertising but will assume that advertising is permitted unless it falls into a prohibited category, as defined in Section 5.

4.6 Any advertising and/or sponsorship must not conflict with the Council's strategic priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan.

4.7 The Council will not enter into agreements with political organisations to advertise on Council assets or sponsor its activities. The Council actively encourages the engagement of citizens and community groups in policy-setting and other democratic processes, but it does not encourage and will not permit advertising or sponsorship from what might broadly be called 'lobby groups', who conflict with Council policies or priorities. This applies to lobby groups which may be local and temporary in nature, or those that are national or international and more permanent.

4.8 The Council will agree with the advertiser and/or sponsor the nature and content of the publicity and will retain the right to approve publicity material and also remove such material without reference to the advertiser and/or sponsor.

4.9 Where applicable, the Council's logo must be shown on all sponsorship collateral and appropriate wording shown as: "supported by (sponsors name)". The sponsors logo will also be included on all publicity material produced by Council.

5. Prohibited advertisers/sponsors

5.1 The Council will not enter into agreements for sponsorship or advertisement from:

- organisations or businesses not complying with the Council's Advertising and Sponsorship Policy
- organisations or businesses in financial or legal conflict or prosecution with the Council
- organisations or businesses run by Elected Members, Council staff and their immediate family.
- organisations or businesses involved in the production and sale of weaponry, including firearms

- organisations or businesses involved in gambling / betting services or so-called pay-day loans
- organisations or businesses involved in discrimination, victimisation, harassment or other unlawful conduct that is prohibited under anti-discrimination legislation applicable in the Northern Ireland, against people on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, political opinion and belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership. This applies to employment and education as well as the provision of goods, facilities, and services. This legislation is set out on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland website here: [ECNI - The Law, Equality Legislation, Equality Commission, Northern Ireland](#)
- organisations involved or associated with [modern slavery/human trafficking](#) as outlined in [Human Trafficking and Exploitation \(Criminal Justice and Support for Victims\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#).
- advertising that contradicts with the Council's legal functions and duties.

5.2 In addition to the categories listed above, there may also be some specific controls and policies associated with individual placements, which will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, if advertising or sponsorship is sought for leased, hired or rented land, space or venue, consent must be granted by Council before any agreement can be made. The sponsor/advertiser must meet the eligibility criteria outlined in clause 4 & 5 of this Policy.

5.3 The above list is not exhaustive, and the Council retains the right to decline advertising and/or sponsorship from any organisation or business or in respect of products that the Council, in its sole discretion considers inappropriate. Council also retains the right to decline consent for advertising or sponsorship on its land and properties if it is deemed inappropriate. The Council retains the right to terminate a contract with immediate effect if they believe the partner company has acted in a way that brings the Council into disrepute.

5.4 The Council will ensure that any contract entered into with an advertiser or sponsor contains adequate provision for the Council to unilaterally and immediately terminate the contract at any time.

6. Expressions of Interest and Evaluation

6.1 Each advertising and/or sponsorship proposal will be subject to an evaluation. Council will present an Expression of Interest tailored to each sponsorship opportunity with a minimum starting bid figure. Interested parties must meet the eligibility criteria as laid out in the Policy. Advertising opportunities will be promoted with a set cost. Whether advertising and/or sponsorship is suitable will be decided on a case-by-case basis on the merits of each opportunity or request. This includes assessing that:

- the company meets the eligibility criteria as outlined in the Policy
- the benefits to the organisation or business are proportionate to the level of advertising and/or sponsorship

- the type or form of advertising and/or sponsorship is consistent with the strategic objectives or requirements of the Council (e.g. accepting free products simply because they are free, but not of any perceivable benefit to the Council)
- the type or form of advertising and/or sponsorship is not at all detrimental to the local or global environment. Sustainable advertising and/or sponsorship that contributes to economic development, environmental protection, biodiversity and corporate social responsibility will be encouraged
- any advertising and/or sponsorship proposal does not anticipate explicit endorsement of the organisation or business's products and services, as this form of proposal is not acceptable to the Council
- no conflict of interest arises from the arrangement, e.g. where the association with the organisation or business may compromise the work or reputation of the Council
- the capacity of the Council to provide adequate resources and appropriate locations to meet the terms of the proposed agreement.

7. Procedure

7.1 Before seeking Expressions of Interest for advertising or sponsorship, Council officers must refer to the Council's Sponsorship and Advertising Policy and consult with the Council's Communications and Marketing Service and Regulatory/Environmental teams from the outset before any advertising and sponsorship opportunities are listed.

7.2 Once Expressions of Interest/interest in advertising have been received the applicant(s) must be screened by a working group comprising representatives from Planning, Environmental Health, Finance, Lands and Compliance and Communications and Marketing. Should any business seeking to advertise/sponsor be under legal investigation, subject to enforcement or is known to be non-compliant (ref. clause 4.3 & 5.1), the group would advise that the advertiser/sponsor proposal could not proceed.

7.2 All media information produced by the advertiser and/or sponsor must be approved by the Council's Communications and Marketing Service before entering into any agreement. Where applicable, the use of an advertiser or sponsor's logo or other branding must not interfere or conflict with the Council's own corporate identity.

7.3 All advertising and sponsorship opportunities will be progressed in accordance with relevant legislation.

7.4 The Council will maintain an advertising and sponsorship register – it will be the responsibility of each Directorate to hold their own record of agreements and contracts. Details of all advertising and sponsorship opportunities and completed agreements and contracts will be kept.

8. Approvals

8.1 Charities and Community groups will be provided with opportunities for banner advertising on designated Council locations, free of charge for a maximum of 28 days subject to the space being available, and subject to the eligibility criteria. The

Charity/Community group will be responsible for installation and removal. Paying clients and Council campaigns and initiatives will take priority in these spaces.

8.2 Advertising and/or sponsorship proposals must be circulated to a Service Unit Manager/Head of Service as well as the Sponsorship and Advertising Working group for review before being agreed or contract signed. Should any business seeking to advertise/sponsor be under legal investigation, subject to enforcement or is known to be non-compliant (ref. clause 4.3 & 5.1), the advertiser/sponsor would be advised the proposal could not proceed

8.1 Advertising and/or sponsorship agreements valued at £1,000 or under (and relating to only one financial year or event) may be agreed by the relevant cost centre manager (unless there are any special circumstances which make a second authorisation desirable, e.g. if the issue might be politically sensitive or the sponsor has requested unusual conditions).

8.2 Advertising and/or sponsorship agreements valued at between £1,000 and £30,000 (or covering more than one financial year with an aggregate total of between £1,000 and £30,000) must be agreed by the relevant Head of Service (unless there are any special circumstances when it should be agreed by the relevant Director).

8.3 Advertising and/or sponsorship agreements valued at more than £30,000 (or covering more than one financial year with an aggregate total of more than £30,000) must be agreed and countersigned by the relevant Head of Service or Director.

9. Disclaimer

9.1 Acceptance of advertising or sponsorship does not imply endorsement of products and services by the Council. In order to make this clear, a statement will be published on a bespoke Sponsorship/Advertising section of the Council website making it clear that “Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of advertisements, Ards and North Down Borough Council cannot accept any liability for errors and omissions nor can the Council accept any responsibility for claims made by advertisers and their advert or sponsorship should not be taken as an endorsement by Ards and North Down Borough Council.”

10. Policy review

10.1 This Policy will be reviewed after the first year of the pilot scheme. Subject to approvals, the Policy will then be reviewed every two years or in response to changes in relevant legislation or the Council’s strategic objectives.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) meeting of the Community and Wellbeing Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, and via Zoom, on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman Brooks

Alderman: Adair McRandal
 Cummings

Councillors: Ashe S Irvine
 Boyle W Irvine
 Chambers Kendall
 Cochrane McBurney
 Douglas McClean
 Hollywood Moore

Officers in Attendance: Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Community and Culture (N Dorrian), Head of Leisure Services (I O'Neill), Head of Parks and Cemeteries (S Daye) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

Also in Attendance: Councillor Wray

1. APOLOGIES AND CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman (Alderman Brooks) sought apologies at this stage and noted none had been received.

At this stage the Chairman welcomed Councillor McBurney to the Committee and wished her well.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest at this stage.

The following declarations of interest were notified:

Councillor Chambers - Items 10 & 11
Councillor W Irvine – Item 11

NOTED.

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

3. NEW LIFE ORGAN DONATION GARDEN AT KILTONGA (FILE PCA 130)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in August 2024 the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council.

“This Council notes the importance of organ donation in saving lives and improving the quality of life of resident of this Borough. This Council further notes that there are plans for the production and installation in the Borough, of a bench celebrating organ donation. This project began in 2013 and is supported by a number of organ transplant charities. Council resolves to work with the charities involved to finalise the detailed design and expedite installation of this bench in a prominent place in the Borough. A fund to cover all the manufacturing costs and any necessary support structures has already been raised. The hope is that this will be a place for people to engage in conversations about and spark interest in this important issue and somewhere to reflect and remember loved ones.”

A New Life Organ Donation Garden was created at Kiltonga in Newtownards in 2011 through a collaboration with Ards Borough Council, the Charities of the Northern Ireland Transplant Forum and was supported by the Northern Ireland Kidney Patients Association (NIKPA). The idea of developing a commemorative Organ Donation Garden originated from a play entitled, “G.O.D. Gift Of Donation”, written by a patient whilst on dialysis in 2009. The purpose of the garden was to create a space in which donor families could remember their loved ones who gave the Gift of Life, transplant recipients could give thanks to their donor, their donors families, as well as those waiting for a transplant could visit to gain strength in the knowledge that there are people willing to give the Gift of Life.

The garden was officially opened on 21 June 2011, with it being the longest and lightest day of the year. The New Life Garden provided a floral celebration of Organ Donation in a tranquil setting and had been visited many times by donor families and patients throughout the years. In 2018, the NIKPA 25 Years Anniversary Stone was erected. This came from the Circle of Life National Organ Donation Garden in Salthill, Galway.

Since the installation of the garden, Council had supported numerous activities, in collaboration with volunteers who were organ donor recipients, to promote and enhance the area in and around the garden. More recently, in 2021, an Erskine tree was planted at the garden, by transplant recipients and Council, to mark the beginning of Organ Donation Week. The aim of Organ Donation Week was to encourage conversations across generations, to get everyone talking about organ donation and to inspire new registrations to the sign the Organ Donor Register.

The Erskine tree was a direct descendant of the ‘Plane Tree of Kos’, a famous oriental tree under which Hippocrates, the Father of Modern Medicine, was said to have first taught, on the island of Kos in 500BC. An Erskine tree was first planted in

Northern Ireland at Belfast City Hospital in 1966. The seeds were gifted by Greek physician, Dr Dimitrios Oreopoulos, while undertaking kidney research at Queens University. Dr Oreopoulos made many contributions to the treatment of renal disease and went on to develop Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis.

In September 2024 the garden was re-invigorated by volunteers, assisted by Parks and Cemeteries Service staff, who undertook to plant the area in flowers. The day of celebration consisted of songs and readings to mark the occasion. The volunteers now planned to use the area for continual volunteer activities and would continue to have the support of Council staff.

The installation of a bench would be a welcome addition to the garden however Council had an approved policy that was required to be followed on the Provision of Memorial Benches which was agreed in 2021 in order for this to proceed.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the activities in relation to the New Life Garden and recognition given to the importance of organ donation. It is further recommended that Council notes the plans to produce a park bench celebrating organ donation and the requirement for the application to follow the policy for the Provision of Memorial Benches and asks the interested parties to proceed in accordance with it.

Councillor Moore proposed, seconded by Councillor McBurney, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Councillor Moore welcomed the report and acknowledged the work which had been carried out to date, thanking those Council officers who had assisted with that. She noted that currently the existing bench was unable to be used under current Council policy and as such she asked that the group was made aware of that. Continuing she asked if consideration could be given to if there was anywhere else that bench could be used.

The seconder Councillor McBurney indicated that she concurred with her colleagues comments.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor McBurney, that the recommendation be adopted.

4. GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (FILE PCA129)

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in February 2019 Council declared a Climate Emergency and agreed to note the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on the impacts of climate breakdown, agreeing that drastic and far-reaching measures must be taken across society to try and mitigate the risks.

Council was required to demonstrate compliance with the Duty for Sustainable Development, any future Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill or sustainability and environmental legislation and its Biodiversity Duty. Its biodiversity duty was a

statutory requirement under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Act required public bodies to take reasonable steps to further the conservation of priority habitats and species or to promote such actions by others.

The Borough's second Biodiversity Action Plan was approved and adopted in April 2023 and had helped to coordinate efforts to protect and enhance biodiversity across the Borough. The development of the plan was an important step in recognising the importance of local biodiversity. It aimed to ensure that international, national, regional and local biodiversity objectives were achieved through a range of partnerships.

A total of 84 actions were proposed across four themes in the LBAP, the actions were to help protect, conserve, and enhance those priority habitats and species within the Borough identified through the audit.

Within those themes specific actions were attributed to Grassland Management, including the creation of the attached and proposed Strategy. Other actions linked to this Strategy include but were not limited to:

- Reduce the frequency of amenity grassland cutting per year at selected Council amenity areas including around sports facilities.
- Continue to manage and monitor lowland meadows under the council rewilding initiative and increase the extent of species-rich wildflower meadow habitat by creating new meadows and expanding the area of existing meadows, in both urban and rural locations.
- Promote semi-natural grassland biodiversity through local events, and Council publicity, hold lowland meadow identification and management training courses
- Inform the public where land was being managed for biodiversity
- Encourage the public to get involved in practical activities and habitat restoration projects to increase the numbers of our priority species

Suitably managed grasslands were vital for biodiversity, nature conservation and carbon storage, holding approximately one-third of global terrestrial carbon stocks. Grasslands provided crucial resilience in the face of climate change, including In Northern Ireland where disruption to business, services and people's daily lives would increase if adverse changes occurred. UK Climate Projections (UKCP) presented an increased risk of flooding and coastal erosion putting pressure on drainage, sewage, roads, water and habitats. Increased temperatures, more pollution and a reduction in air quality could bring discomfort to vulnerable people and further endanger species of animals and crops.

Grasslands used less water, reduced soil erosion and kept carbon stored in the ground. A diverse mixture of grass and wildflower species created an array of habitats that supported a diversity of insects and pollinators, a multitude of bird species and other mammals. Healthy grasslands had been proven to improve water quality and increase water quantity and storage for communities, reducing downstream flooding events by regulating runoff, and ensuring high-quality water supplies for future generations.

Unfortunately given their clear importance, grasslands were some of the most threatened and least protected ecosystems in the world. Action was required to suitably manage Council grasslands for wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and for the benefit of future generations in the face of the urgent climate and biodiversity crisis.

This Grassland Management Strategy recognised the importance of grasslands, the many benefits they afford, the increasingly important role they could play in mitigating the effects of climate change and the essential habitat they provide. This strategy was required to ensure the Council's limited budget was focused on delivering effective, efficient and environmentally focussed grassland management.

RECOMMENDED that Council adopts the attached Grassland Management Strategy 2024-2032.

Councillor Kendall proposed, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Councillor Kendall welcomed the Grassland Management Strategy, noting the opening paragraph where "drastic and far-reaching measures must be taken across society to try and mitigate the risks" of climate breakdown. Taking into consideration Strategic Aim 4 which related to community education and engagement she asked how the results from biodiversity audits would be shared with the people of the Borough, particularly those interested local conservation groups. She was aware that many were interested in, and proud of, the actions the Council had taken so far and as such biodiversity information would be welcome. Continuing Councillor Kendall also asked if information about the Council's grasslands could be added to the tree map tool for example. She sought further clarity around how many engagement events were planned with regards to grassland management and how that would be shared with people, as well as Councillors to promote across the Borough. She added that she was aware this was happening now, and many appreciated the wild areas for example in her own DEA in Ballymenoch park. In light of that she asked how the Council could continue to harness the local friends groups and local community to remain supportive of positive grassland management.

In response the Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that many of the events planned would not take place until the Policy had been formally approved. Members were advised that the majority of those events would be based upon Citizen Science events similar to the 'bioblitz' one recently held in Whitespots Country Park which had been very successful and had attracted a wide range of people. He added that the re wilding projects undertaken to date had been very well received.

Councillor Kendall advised that she had recently received notification of the destruction of native hedgerow habitat in a development in Newtownards, which was potentially linked to a planning condition. She asked how the Council's Parks section would engage with the Planning department as mentioned in the Strategy. Continuing she asked if grassland development was not specifically mentioned in Planning policy, what would the LDP or planners be expected to do differently from regional planning policy that would promote grasslands and native hedgerows. Continuing Councillor Kendall asked if engagement beyond the Council

was planned, for example with the Housing Executive which owned land in the Borough and the identification of areas that they owned which could be managed similarly to form nature corridors, which were crucially important.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries referred to the Local Development Plan which was still under development and which included contributions from a variety of Council teams and he would expect grassland management to be considered in future planning applications. In respect of external bodies he confirmed that Council currently worked with a number of Government agencies and third sector organisations to push forwards projects that promoted grassland management such as wildlife corridors and the Greenways.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor Ashe expressed her support for the recommendation but asked if consideration had been given to supporting pollinators through conversations with Translink around the installation of pollinator friendly bus shelters.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries indicated that while he had not had such conversations with Translink to date he would be keen to do so going forward.

Alderman Adair commended officers for the report and acknowledged that bio-diversity was a very important issue adding that the wild flower meadows introduced throughout the Borough had been very well received. Continuing he indicated that there was one section of the report which he could not support and as such he wished to propose an amendment.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the recommendation be agreed and furthermore that the section be removed to reduce the frequency of amenity grassland cutting per year at selected Council amenity areas including around sports facilities.

The proposer Alderman Adair stated that while supportive of the Strategy he believed that it was necessary to remove the sports facilities aspect of that. Quite often when spectators attended sports matches they watched from the periphery and his concern was that if those areas were not maintained that could create issues at football pitches.

The seconder Alderman Cummings indicated that he had nothing further to add at this stage.

Councillor Boyle expressed his thanks to officers for the report and the swift responses to any queries he had submitted via email. Continuing he asked for further clarity around what was actually meant by a reduction in grass cutting at selected Council amenities and sports facilities.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that the Strategy which had been produced covered many things that were already common practise and what was being proposed was done for example so as to improve drainage at certain areas, and with full consultation and agreement of all affected.

Councillor Boyle asked if the Strategy was agreed what the next course of action would be.

In response the Head of Parks and Cemeteries indicated that an annual report had already been submitted in respect of rewilding and members would be updated in due course on any consultation which had been carried out on extending that. He added that the Strategy formalised what was already being done and would be included as part of a policy format. It was noted officers would report back to the Committee on what works were being planned.

Alderman McRandal sought clarification that the Strategy formalised what was already being carried out by the Council.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries confirmed that the Strategy formalised many current working practises and set out how the Council would proceed into the future following consultation with local people.

Continuing Alderman McRandal referred to Sea Park at Hollywood where part of the park boundary had been left uncut and the Head of Parks and Cemeteries agreed that was a good example of what had been done following consultation. Referring to cemeteries Alderman McRandal noted the policy to cut and drop and he asked where that was carried out. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries confirmed that took place in all cemeteries with the exception of one in the Ards Peninsula. He advised that had been done as a test a number of years ago with the agreement of the Council. Referring to Page 14 of the Strategy Alderman McRandal noted reference made to volunteer involvement and he sought clarity around to what extent volunteers were involved with the monitoring of plants and animals. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries gave an example of this and referred to the recent Bio Blitz event and a variety of Citizen Science events which were held alongside events such as the Big Butterfly Count.

At this stage Councillor W Irvine rose to welcome the report and referred to an email which members had received earlier that day from an organisation called Greenspaces which had raised a number of different points including consultation. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries reassured the member that consultation would be undertaken on the application of the strategy. Continuing Councillor Irvine noted one of the suggestions made around Tier 4 was that wildflower meadows should include short flower meadows and be cut every four to six weeks, with all cuttings removed. He suggested that may be something which could be included within the Strategy.

By way of summing up Councillor Kendall commented that to an extent she agreed with Alderman Adair but she was of the opinion that was not what was being proposed within the Strategy. As such she would not be in a position to support the amendment.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman Cummings, with 9 voting For and 5 Voting Against, that that the recommendation be agreed and furthermore that the section be removed to

reduce the frequency of amenity grassland cutting per year at selected Council amenity areas including around sports facilities.

5. BOROUGH OF SANCTUARY (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Council previously agreed the following Notice of Motion:

In light of recent events that have seen a number of refugees seeking sanctuary in the Borough, and building upon this Council's good relations work in the community, this cross-party motion proposes that this Council takes the following actions:

- 1. That officers return to us at their earliest convenience a proposal for a refugee "strategy" (later clarified as a protocol), outlining amongst other issues the cross directorate working that would be required*
- 2. That officers compile a report detailing necessary considerations, benefits, and costs if any in Ards and North Down acquiring "Borough of Sanctuary" status as recently attained by Belfast City Council.*

Update on current position with Notice of Motion.

1. Members may be aware of a Draft Refugee and Integration Strategy 2021 – 2026 which The Executive Office was leading on. Prior to the publication of a Strategy, the Council continued to use Home Office funding to support and assist the Refugee and Asylum Forum to:
 - Encourage participation in sporting and cultural activities with the provision of materials and equipment for example football boots, celebratory events.
 - Build local integration capacity with workshops on increasing their knowledge of local customs.
 - Increase the knowledge and capacity of local communities to aide integration by providing workshops and real-life scenarios.
 - Deliver programmes/ workshops to encourage refugee employment.
 - Support the wraparound services provided by YMCA, The Link, and Forum Members including churches and local facilitators.
 - Source providers for any specific identified needs.
 - Support eligible individuals with business plans and sources of funding through the Council Go Succeed programme.
2. The Good Relations Team had been working with the City of Sanctuary team in England to explore how the Council could become a Borough of Sanctuary, and had established that to become a "Borough" of Sanctuary, Council must first become a "Council" of Sanctuary.

Background

Introduction

City of Sanctuary UK held the vision that the UK would be a welcoming place of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution. In order to realise this vision, City of Sanctuary UK supported a network of groups,

which included cities, towns, villages, boroughs and regions across the UK, and others engaged in Streams of Sanctuary, Sanctuary Awards and activities intended to welcome people seeking sanctuary.

What is City of Sanctuary?

City of Sanctuary (CoS) was an umbrella organisation working with over 125 local grassroots groups to create communities welcoming to people fleeing violence and persecution.

By fostering local partnerships between City of Sanctuary groups (where they exist), refugee and community sector organisations, people with lived experience, and mainstream organisations, CoS supported the development of local refugee frameworks that are joined-up, coherent, and effective in supporting people to rebuild their lives from day one.

What are Sanctuary Awards?

The Sanctuary Award process was strategic framework for cultural and institutional change within local organisations (councils, schools, universities, colleges, libraries etc.) which ensured that they contributed to the creation of a welcoming environment for people seeking sanctuary in local communities, and that they played an active role in the wider movement for safeguarding and promoting the rights of people in need of sanctuary in the UK.

Councils, as anchor institutions, played an important role in promoting inclusion within their own institutions, the wider community, and with other local statutory and voluntary sector stakeholders. The 'Council of Sanctuary' award process and minimum criteria for recognition were therefore tailored to the specific contextual challenges and opportunities within local government, and the role they played in welcoming and supporting people seeking sanctuary.

The award process

In June 2020 the City of Sanctuary Network voted at its AGM to dispense with the city-wide recognition process and to establish the Local Authority Network and the related Council of Sanctuary Accreditation. Any local authority could become a formal member of this network, following a public commitment.

Steps to be taken to become a Council of Sanctuary

Step 1 – The council publicly commits to joining the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network, and to work towards recognition as a 'Council of Sanctuary'.

Step 2 – The council becomes a member of the Local Authority Network by signing the membership form. In joining the network the council is committing to work towards the 'Council of Sanctuary' award.

Step 3 – The council engages with the City of Sanctuary local group (if one exists), local refugee organisations, and people with lived experience. Councils usually do this via existing partnership/multi-agency (Sanctuary) forums, or where

such don't exist or don't undertake strategic work the council can set one up.

Step 4 - The council develops a strategy/framework for supporting people seeking sanctuary in the community by embedding 'Sanctuary' principles across council services and works to promote inclusion and welcome across the wider community.

Step 5 – The council reviews the learn, embed and share criteria set out below and ensures it meets them, and when ready, applies for recognition by submitting the council specific application form.

Step 6 – The application will be appraised by a panel which will normally include members of the local City of Sanctuary group (if one exists), people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, representatives from local refugee supporting organisations, and members of the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Steering Group.

Step 7 - When a local authority is able to demonstrate that all of the minimum criteria are met, the council will be awarded a 'Council of Sanctuary' for a 3 year period, and will be given the right to use the 'Council of Sanctuary' logo to recognise their commitment accompanied by the wording:

"X....is a recognised County/District/Borough/City/Unitary/Parish/Town [deleted as appropriate] Council of Sanctuary.

Step 8 – A plan should be made for the Award presentation to include an event/ media statement etc. to celebrate the achievement of the council (and local partners) in including and supporting people seeking sanctuary. An application fee of £450 must be paid before the Award is made public.

Step 9 –The recommendations agreed during the appraisal process should be discussed and, where possible, taken forward during the three-year award period. This will inform a review (re-accreditation) at the end of the three years. A new application has to be submitted to renew the award after three years and if successful an updated certificate of recognition can be issued.

Minimum Criteria

This guidance aimed to outline the minimum criteria required for the award.

Criterion 1: Pass a council motion setting out commitment to being a place of sanctuary, joining the Local authority Network and working toward the 'Council of Sanctuary' award at some point in the future.

Criterion 2: Join the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network which includes a pledge to support the vision of City of Sanctuary and an endorsement of its charter.

Criterion 3: Commit to working with the local City of Sanctuary group and/or other refugee supporting organisations and/or networks.

Criterion 4: Show evidence of the work with the local City of Sanctuary group (and/or other refugee organisations/networks) and receive the endorsement from those groups for the award application.

In addition to the **above criteria** all Sanctuary Awards followed the Learn, Embed and Share principles:

- **Learn:** learning about what it means to be seeking sanctuary, both in general, and specifically.
- **Embed:** taking positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion and ensuring this progress remains sustainable.
- **Share:** sharing your vision, achievements, what you have learned, and good practice with other local authorities, the local community and beyond.

The 'Learn, Embed and Share' criteria specific to Councils were outlined below:

Learn Criteria

The LEARN element encompassed any activity that sought to improve awareness of the sanctuary-seeking community and the reasons why people were forced to migrate. Knowledge of the asylum system or of the many challenges and institutional barriers which face people seeking sanctuary could help officers and members to reflect on how they might help and better focus their efforts. This was often best achieved by including people seeking sanctuary and finding ways to learn from them as well as about refugee issues more broadly

Criterion 5: Awareness raising opportunities were provided, and opportunities for discussion around the theme of welcome and sanctuary were facilitated on a community level. This could be via partnership/multi-agency forums

Criterion 6: Evidence of refugee/asylum/migration awareness raising was included into everyday business of the local authority e.g. staff induction/training.

Criterion 7: Commitment to platform and amplify the voices of people seeking sanctuary. This can be by including people with lived experience on 'sanctuary forums' or by ensuring meaningful engagement on strategy development.

Embed Criteria

For City of Sanctuary UK, 'embedding' meant that the local authority was taking positive action to implement welcome, safety and inclusion within services and beyond. City of Sanctuary UK would like details on how the local authority would ensure a continuation of support for sanctuary on an ongoing basis. To receive an award, the local authority must meet the 'embed' criteria.

Criterion 8: Produce a written strategy (either a standalone strategy or as part of a broader strategy e.g. equality, migration etc.) which is publicly available and sets out commitment of the council for at least three years. This should be co-produced as far as possible with people seeking sanctuary and organisations representing them.

Criterion 9: The local authority must **demonstrate how it has embedded the concepts of welcome and inclusion across the organisation.** This should show how the local authority will continue to develop and sustain a culture of welcome beyond the award.

Criterion 10: The council is able to demonstrate a commitment to being an anti-racist organisation and has policies and practice in place that align to their work to become a 'Council of Sanctuary'.

Share Criteria

City of Sanctuary UK would be seeking evidence that the Council shared its experience of sanctuary and welcome with the wider community, local organisations and spreading the word about their welcoming efforts. To receive an award, the local authority must meet the following criteria:

Criterion 11: The local authority publicly highlights its work in support of welcome and inclusion by making it visible on its website and noticeboards NB. Once the sanctuary award is received, we would expect the logo and a link to the webpage on the website.

Criterion 12: Commitment to supporting initiatives that embeds welcome and fosters solidarity between receiving communities and people seeking sanctuary e.g. participation in Refugee Week or other cultural events. As well as promoting sanctuary principles among local statutory and voluntary sector partners.

Criterion 13: Commitment to on-going engagement with the City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network. This may include sharing resources, ideas and achievements via the network and City of Sanctuary UK website.

Criterion 14: Work with the national Local Authority network and local partners to identify national policy issues in order to make collective representations to the government to encourage and enable change via contributing to consultations, position statements etc.

A draft application was submitted to a Council of Sanctuary panel (Appendix 1) outlining the ongoing work in the Borough.

A further follow up meeting was held the Good Relations Officer to discuss the draft application where it was confirmed that Ards and North Down could be the first Council in Northern Ireland to be formally awarded a Council of Sanctuary status, subject to:

- an online meeting between City of Sanctuary and a number of Councillors, to discuss the application and confirm Council was in agreement to proceed,
- Council agrees to join the network City of Sanctuary
- An [application fee](#) of £450 be paid to obtain the three year award.

Following the meeting, a list of recommendations for Council to consider over the next three years was forwarded and was attached at Appendix 2.

Funding obtained from the Home Office to help and support refugees in the Borough would be used to cover the application fee of £450 which ensured there was no cost to Council.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees to:

1. Participate in an online meeting (date and time to be arranged) with representatives from the City of Sanctuary UK and appoints a number of councillors to join the meeting to support the application,
2. agrees to join the network City of Sanctuary, and
3. Use Refugee support funding to pay an [application fee](#) of £450 to obtain the 3 year award.

At this stage both the Director and Head of Community and Culture provided members with a brief background to the matter and overview of the report.

Councillor Cochrane took the opportunity to acknowledge the intention behind the Notice of Motion but recalled that at the time the DUP Group had been unable to support this due to uncertainty around the implications of it. He stated that remained the case and referring to the Charter noted that it stated that that one of its objectives was "People can seek safety in the UK, no matter how they came here". In his view it was not clear if that would include those who entered the country illegally. Continuing Councillor Cochrane proceeded to ask the following questions:

1. Whether signing up to the Charter places any additional statutory obligations on Council or otherwise represents a formal position in immigration policy.
2. Whether there has been engagement with the Executive Office on how the proposed course of action in the report by Council interacts with the content of the upcoming Refugee Integration Strategy

In response to the first question the Director replied that there were no legal obligations on Council if the recommendation was agreed. Instead it was an agreement by choice which the Council would sign up to and from which it could leave at any time.

In response to the second question the Head of Community and Culture confirmed that conversations had taken place with representatives of The Executive Office (TEO) and they were content for the Council to proceed.

Councillor Cochrane proposed, seconded by Councillor McClean, that this Council defers this decision to the next Community and Wellbeing Committee Meeting so that officers can fully brief Councillors on the potential implications this may or may not have on Council immigration policy.

Commenting as seconder Councillor McClean sought clarification around whether signing up to this implied that Council was taking a formal position on immigration policy.

The Director suggested that some may interpret agreement to the proposal in that way but added that the Council had not made a formal policy decision that he was aware of. Officers were asked to bring back information concerning what was before them and that was the stage that the matter was at.

The Head of Community and Culture confirmed that the Council did not have a policy on its position in relation to immigration.

Councillor McClean stated that in part of the two steps of the procedure as detailed in the report there was an organisational pledge which referred to signing up to the Sanctuary Charter. He believed that encouraged illegal immigration to the UK and the human trafficking which followed from that. As such he believed members needed to have clear information before them before being asked to make a decision on this matter. He agreed that a deferral as suggested would be helpful. Continuing Councillor McClean referred to his Motion brought in 2021 which had aimed to provide help for people but added that the organisation being referred to here was essentially about seeking a UK wide policy change around asylum and immigration. He indicated that he was not entirely comfortable signing up to this and as such a deferral as requested may be appropriate.

At this stage Councillor Ashe stated that she would be interested to learn how people thought those seeking asylum from persecution actually arrived in the UK. She stated that the ethos behind this was to provide a sanctuary for those people escaping from persecution and as such she believed the Council should be signing up to this and taking pride in doing so. She added that she felt the comments from members around the matter being deferred were an attempt to set the matter to one side. Councillor Ashe stated that she had found some of the comments which had been made quite repulsive. She thanked officers for the work they had carried out to date and offered her support to them.

Concurring with those comments Councillor Moore suggested there was clearly some confusion around asylum seekers, refugees and migrants adding that it was not illegal to arrive into the UK on a boat. Instead what was being looked at was specifically those people who were fleeing persecution and at a recent event hosted by the Council clarity had been offered around the status of those who travel here from other countries. As such she expressed her support for the original recommendation.

Alderman Adair indicated that he would be supporting the deferral as in his opinion there were serious questions to be answered. He stated that he did not agree with the Alliance Party members comments that it was just an attempt to put the matter to the side. The deferral instead was to ensure members had all of the relevant information to enable them to make an informed decision on the matter. As such he asked members to support the proposal to defer the matter.

At this stage Councillor Boyle suggested that this was a situation where there was potentially 'double speak' by some members. As such he indicated that he supported the recommendation but added that he was equally happy to support a deferral if that would provide members with some additional reassurance prior to making a decision on the matter. Continuing Councillor Boyle sought clarity that the only other

Council signed up to this was Belfast City Council. The Head of Community and Culture confirmed that was the case adding that officers had met with their counterparts from Belfast City Council as well as the City of Sanctuary Group. Members were further advised that if the Council paid the membership fee of £450 the Council could use the logo and that would be for a period of three years. It was noted the fee of £450 would be paid out of funding received from the Home Office. After three years the matter would be reported back to the Committee with a view to be taken on renewal and consideration given to the views of the Council at that time.

Alderman McRandal noted the DUP's request for a deferral to enable it to get crystal clear answers to its questions but he was somewhat confused as he had heard them get those answers to its questions. As such he asked for the proposer to clarify that when summing up.

Councillor Kendall asked if it was the case that there was a requirement for the Council to comply with the UK Immigration Policy. She also reminded members that Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights document did say that everyone had the right to seek and enjoy another country's asylum from persecution. Continuing she encouraged members to remember that there were rights which were enshrined that everyone would wish to be supportive of. As such while she appreciated the request for a deferral she believed there was not much left which was unanswered.

By way of summing up Councillor Cochrane stated that he believed there was no harm in seeking further information on the matter adding that he would happily welcome people with open arms into the country. He added that he took issue with the Alliance party's suggestion that this was an attempt to set the matter aside. At this stage he read out the Charter and reiterated that there was no harm seeking further information on the matter.

The proposal was put to the vote and with 7 voting For an 8 voting Against, it was declared LOST.

Councillor Ashe proposed, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted.

At this stage nominations were sought for members to participate in an online meeting (date and time to be arranged) with representatives from the City of Sanctuary UK. The following nominations were made:

Councillor Ashe proposed, seconded by Councillor Moore, that Councillors Ashe and McBurney be nominated.

Councillor Kendall proposed, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that Councillor McKee be nominated.

Councillor Hollywood proposed, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that Councillors Hollywood and Wray be nominated.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor Moore, with 8 voting For, 6 voting Against and 2 Abstentions, that the recommendation be adopted. Furthermore that the Councillors Ashe, McBurney, McKee, Hollywood and Wray be nominated to participate in an online meeting (date and time to be arranged) with representatives from the City of Sanctuary UK.

6. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN SPORTS FORUM GRANTS, WG OCTOBER 2024 (FILE SD151) (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that on the 26 August 2015 Council delegated authority to the Ards and North Down Sports Forum, to allow it to administer sports grants funding on behalf of the Council up to £250. £45,000 had been allocated within the 2024/2025 revenue budget for this purpose.

Further to this, Council approved the new Corporate Grant policy on 25 September 2024, effective from 1 October 2024, authorising Ards and North Down Sports Forum to continue to administer and award grants. Officers had attached Appendix 7 – Ards and North Down Sports Forum Grant Guidance, for approval under this policy.

Delegated powers above £250 no longer required Council approval however officers would continue to submit reports for noting purposes.

During September 2024, the Forum received a total of 15 applications: 1 Coach Education, 1 Equipment, 1 Event, 4 Goldcard and 8 Individual Travel/Accommodation Grants. A summary of the 13 successful applications were detailed in the attached Successful Coach Education, Successful Equipment, Successful Event, Successful Goldcard and Successful Individual Travel/Accommodation Appendices.

2024/25 Budget £45,000	Annual Budget	Proposed Funding Awarded September 2024	Remaining Budget
Anniversary	£1,000	£0	*-£1,999.90
Coach Education	£3,000	*£243.75	£1,395.00
Equipment	£14,000	*£300	£2,820.74
Events	£6,000	*£780	£869.46
Seeding	£500	£0	£500
Travel and Accommodation	£14,500	*£760	-£5,099.57
Discretionary	£1,000	£0	£1,000
Schools/Sports Club Pathway	£5,000	£0	£5,000
3 Goldcards Awarded in September (36 Goldcards in total during 2024/25)			

*The proposed remaining budget for Anniversary of -£1,999.90 was based on a withdrawn costs of £750.

*The proposed remaining budget for Coach Education of £1,395.00 was based on a proposed award this month of £243.75.

*The proposed remaining budget for Equipment of £2,820.74 was based on a proposed award this month of £300 and withdrawn costs of £1,000.

*The proposed remaining budget for Event of £869.46 was based on a proposed award this month of £780.

*The proposed remaining budget for Travel and Accommodation of -£5,099.57 was based on a proposed award this month of £760 and withdrawn costs of £150.

The proposed remaining budget for 2024/25 was £4,485.73 (90% of the 2024/25 budget spent).

The additional £11,000 (up to) reassigned from ABMWLC income above target would be utilised by Sport Development as required going forward and future reports will reflect this.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the attached applications for up to £250, approved by the ANDBC Sports Forum, and approves those over £250, for financial assistance for sporting purposes. Further, that Council approves the Sports Forum Grants Scheme going forward as required by the Corporate Grants policy as detailed in Appendix 7.

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Councillor Boyle welcomed the reports noting the additional £11,000 which had been reassigned from ABMWLC. Continuing he referred to Appendix 6 which detailed those Unsuccessful Applications and sought further comment around the fact that both sports were not recognised by their respective Sports governing bodies.

The Head of Leisure Services reminded members that the Ards and North Down Sports Forum operated on the Council's behalf and added that this very same matter had arisen a number of years ago. It was noted both Governing bodies had a list of prescribed organisations which was used by the Council as a template. Subsequently discretionary opportunities were introduced to deal with situations such as this to enable decisions to be made outside the remit of those governing sports bodies. In this case of Pickleball he felt that as it was a new sport it could be considered under those discretionary measures however further guidance was required from Sport NI on the matter and he had tasked officers to undertake those enquiries.

Commenting as seconder Councillor S Irvine welcomed the use of those discretionary powers adding that he felt the Sports Forum did great work. So much so that he anticipated a lot more funding would be required in 2025 stating that it was one of the most successful Grant schemes operated by the Council.

Referring to Appendix 7 which detailed Anniversary Grants, Alderman Mc Randal asked if any changes had been made from the current year.

In response the Head of Leisure advised that what was before members was the current process and added that it was likely following the rates setting process an update would be brought forward for members attention. He added that it was a requirement for those details to be presented to members for consideration.

Alderman McRandal noted that it was a lengthy document and as such he asked if going forwards a brief summary could instead be provided to members. The Head of Leisure Services indicated that would be taken into consideration.

At this stage Councillor W Irvine welcomed the officer's comments around the Pickleball application however he sought further comment around the Gold Card application for Karate.

The Head of Leisure Services reminded members that Sport NI and Martial Arts had always had significant issues over this matter and therefore in order to protect itself that was why the Council had dealt with it in this manner.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. LEISURE STRATEGY UPDATE (FILE LEI 20) (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Council was in the process of developing a new Leisure Strategy for the Borough 2025 – 2035.

To ensure the strategy was developed and delivered in line with the Council's strategic direction and governance procedures a project team and a steering committee were established, which reported to the Corporate Leadership Team and Council through Community and Wellbeing Committee.

Following a competitive tender process a consultant was appointed in May 2024 to develop a new Leisure Strategy for the Borough. The brief was to develop a 10-year Leisure Strategy with a three year action plan. The consultant was asked to work on the basis of Leisure meaning "active leisure" and "anything that includes exercise".

To establish a baseline and to get a sense of the leisure in the Borough the consultant carried out the following in person consultations between July and September 2024.

- ANDBC Officers
- ANDBC and SERCO/NCLT Leisure Officers
- Elected Members workshops (x 2)
- Stakeholders
- Activity providers (x 3)

The consultant also carried out surveys between July and September 2024 the public, providers of Leisure and the education sector. The findings of the in-person workshop and the surveys informed the development of the draft strategy.

In September the consultant provided an interim report detailing the findings from the research and the proposed Vision, Objectives, Themes and Outcomes. The interim report was reviewed by the project team, the project steering group, elected members and CLT, and feedback was provided to the consultant.

As a result, a draft strategy was produced. This was entitled “Getting Active, Staying Active” and was attached.

The next stage of the process was to carry out online public consultation of the draft strategy. The online consultation was scheduled for the 15 November – 6 December and would be promoted via local newspaper adverts, social media, emails to those who participated in the process to date and members of Council leisure and SERCO leisure. The consultant and the Council would review the findings, and the consultant would present the final strategy to the Council in January 2024.

The final strategy would be presented to Council for consideration and approval.

RECOMMENDED that the Council note the update and consider the draft strategy and action plan.

Councillor Kendall proposed, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted and furthermore that Council undertakes further community engagement to share information and to address the questions raised at the community event, via open dialogue, ensuring that this opportunity is communicated with plenty of advance notice to local groups and residents via email and social media to ensure engagement. Furthermore, Council agrees to work together with those local groups and residents in Holywood to agree the scope and carry out a feasibility study as soon as practical, that will then be brought back to Council for consideration.

The proposer Councillor Kendall welcomed the Leisure Strategy and particularly the revised 'strapline' "where everyone can enjoy an active life", following feedback from the workshop. Continuing she indicated that she had a number of comments to make. The first was in relation to the Gender Gap in Community Sports Groups and Clubs and the second was around the success of female volunteers. In respect of that she expressed concern that could appear as though they were being encouraged to participate in what could be considered as unpaid work. As such she queried if there was room for improvement with respect to women's outcomes rather than aiming for volunteering, for example more opportunities for women to participate for their own benefit.

Within the Strategy she also noted reference made to money and lack of facilities and activities as significant barriers to participating in leisure activities and as such she felt the Strategy had not covered how it could suit people's economic status. She encouraged officers to consider that further by looking at how the Council could deliver opportunities that were costed to ensure that people's economic

circumstances, particularly those on low incomes, were considered and how the Strategy would commit to reducing the costs associated with getting active. Continuing she also commented on the Council's relationship with other Clubs in respect of co-design, co-production and co-operation. As such she believed there was scope to strengthen that further and asked for consideration to be given to how the Council would ensure that Clubs also felt that they were equal partners and had "ownership" in respect of the Active Partnerships strand. In summing up she stated that she looked forward to the seeing the next steps and the results of the consultation, which she noted was only being undertaken for three weeks. She asked if the Council would consider extending this for a further few weeks.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman W Irvine welcomed the progress made to date and the strapline which had been chosen. He stated that the workshops recently held had been excellent adding that he too would support an extension to the consultation period.

Also welcoming the Strategy, Alderman McRandal indicated that he too had found the Workshops beneficial and turning to the monitoring and reporting section of the Strategy he sought further information around timelines.

The Head of Leisure Services advised that there were two documents attached with the report adding that if members had any comments on the draft document to email them through to him and he would ensure that they are collated as part of the consultation and respond to any other queries.

Councillor McClean welcomed the Strategy stating that he too had attended one of the Workshops at which the presenter had clearly taken on board the comments and some of the frustrations which had been made by members. Continuing he recalled that he had expressed disappointment on learning that no attempt would be made to consider the best practices undertaken by other Councils across the UK. Referring to the KPIs he believed some of those would be very helpful and as such he was encouraged by the content of the Strategy.

Referring to the Consultation, Councillor Boyle asked if the 95 Groups who sat on the Sports Forum would be consulted.

The Head of Leisure advised that there was a significant amount of other consultations ongoing and all of those involved including the sports forum would be invited to participate.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Kendall, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. PARSONAGE ROAD PLAY PARK, KIRCUBBIN – RESPONSE TO RESCINDING NOTICE OF MOTION (FILE CW4)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in March 2024 a rescinding Notice of Motion was agreed by Council to rescind part of the resolution in relation to the decision made at the

meeting of Community and Wellbeing Committee in October 2023 and subsequently ratified at the October Council meeting. The October 2023 decision read as follows:

That the recommendation be adopted and that Council proceed with:

- *The delivery of the upgrade to the play park at The Green Kircubbin (shore).*
- *Close Parsonage Road and explore the alternative uses as suggested by the consultation and the possibility of turning the site into a sensory garden for the Ards Peninsula.*
- *The delivery of a Multi-Use Games Area at The Green Kircubbin.”*

The March 2024 full decision read as follows:

We wish to rescind the following portion of this decision: ‘Close Parsonage Road (playpark) and explore the alternative uses as suggested by the consultation and the possibility of turning the site into a sensory garden for the Ards Peninsula.’ We propose that Council agree to replace this with the following:

“Work on upgrading the playpark at Kircubbin Green should continue as planned. Council defers plans to demolish the Parsonage Road Playpark in Kircubbin until an officer’s report is brought to the Community and Wellbeing Committee for consideration and debate. This report should detail costs attributed to the demolition of the park, and both the installation and maintenance of the Sensory Garden. The report should also detail costs attributed to the maintenance of the Parsonage Road playpark in its current form.”

The above Rescinding Notice of Motion was ratified at the Council meeting in March 2024.

A workshop was held in relation to play parks and the way forward on 30 May 2024 and a subsequent report was presented to Council in June 2024 which addressed the associated costs of retaining all play parks. A business case was being finalised regarding options arising from that discussion and would be submitted into the estimates process.

Update on Kircubbin facilities

The Green (Shore) Play Park & MUGA: The work on the Tier 1 play park at The Green (Shore) had now been completed and the play park was officially opened on 10 August with the Mayor in attendance. The installation of the Multi Use Games Area at The Green was currently underway.

Parsonage Road Play Park: The play park at Parsonage Road remained in situ. As it featured on the 2023 Independent Inspector Annual Report as needing refurbishment, which then triggered the public consultation in line with the Play Strategy, it therefore remained in need of refurbishment. Following the outcome of the play park workshop and subsequent report in June 2024, members agreed not to close any play parks in the current year. As Parsonage Road had not been removed and it was still considered to need refurbishment. The next list of play park refurbishments for the 2025/2026 Financial Year would be presented to Council in early 2025. Furthermore, it was not then possible to consult on the possibility to

develop a Sensory Garden in that location as that would only have been an option if the play park had been removed. Until this report was received and decisions had been made, it was not possible to estimate the cost of refurbishing the Parsonage Road Play Park.

An application to the Peace Plus funding stream had been submitted to develop Community/Sensory Gardens across the Borough, if that funding application was successful then a range of gardens would be delivered. Officers would also continue to investigate other potential funding sources for Community/Sensory Garden delivery throughout the Borough.

RECOMMENDED that Council await the outcome of the estimates process which will determine the budgets available in relation to the implementation of the play strategy, and the report on play park refurbishments in early 2025 to guide a future decision on Parsonage Road play park. It is further recommended that Council continue to investigate funding sources to deliver Community/Sensory Gardens across the Borough.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Alderman Adair welcomed the recommendation particularly given the potential upgrade for those play parks. He took the opportunity to express his thanks to all of those who had been involved with the campaign to deliver those play park upgrades in the village of Kircubbin, including those Council officers and Ards Peninsula DEA members who had all worked well together to reach this successful conclusion. He added that this news would be well received by all within the local community.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor Boyle stated that those living in Kircubbin were never in favour of a sensory garden and instead they had indicated that they would be content to retain the play park which they already had. He added that they were particularly keen to retain this as it meant local children would not have to cross a main road to reach a play park. Continuing he recalled numerous meetings which had taken place on site adding that everyone involved was keen to secure the same outcome for those local residents. He agreed that the recommendation was potentially a win win for all with the residents having their play park remain intact.

At this stage the proposer Alderman Adair reminded members that a sensory garden had been proposed after he had been approached by a number of residents who felt there was a need for it. In doing so at that time he felt that would help to retain the facility which had previously been recommended for closure and disposal. He added at that at that time all members had been supportive of his proposal and as such he encouraged members to continue to work together rather than trying to score points in the Council Chamber.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. COMMUNICATION BOARDS IN PLAY PARKS – RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION (FILE PCA132)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that In May 2024 the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council:

“That this council recognises the importance of ensuring our parks and open spaces are inclusive and accessible to those with speech, language, and communication needs and that it recognises the positive role of communication boards in achieving this. That it commits to working with relevant organisations to bring back a report regarding communication boards considering, but not limited to, the following points; How communication boards would integrate with the required existing signage; Identifying possible locations for the communication boards, such as a specific tier of park; and an indicative budget.”

Council prides itself on the provision of parks and open spaces across Ards and North Down and recognised the importance of these facilities being inclusive and accessible, so that all users could reap the many social, physical and environmental; benefits they provided.

A communication board was a composition of images specifically selected to support communication by pointing to or touching one or multiple images. Children with limited verbal communication, such as Autistic children or children with multiple disabilities, could communicate with their caregivers and other children using the boards. The boards were created through the careful selection of vocabulary, symbols, colour coding and the inclusion of relevant shapes and sizes.

Communication boards could enhance the visitor experience in play parks. They served as a platform to share essential information, promoting events and activities, and fostered a sense of community. The detail provided helped visitors make the most of their time in the park, providing a centralised source of information and creating a more enjoyable and memorable experience.

Inclusive communication boards could significantly impact the lives of users with special needs, especially in play park settings. Those boards could help break down communication barriers and foster social interaction for children who may need a more structured approach to communication, such as those with autism. By offering vocabulary prompts and a structured format, inclusive communication boards empowered children to initiate conversations and engage with their peers, promoting a sense of belonging and social connection. Installation of inclusive communication boards within parks provided a range of benefits to the user, including but not limited to:

Inclusion: Children could use the communication board to interact with play areas and to communicate and connect with other children on the playground.

Communication: Children could communicate with their caregivers and peers using picture symbols.

Awareness: Boards could include language to promote public awareness of speech and language evaluations and services, and special education services.

Learning: Like many other accessibility designs, communication boards would also facilitate young children’s learning of new vocabulary and reading.



Sample Communication Board

Integration of communication boards would be challenging. Communication boards were designed so that they accurately reflected the characteristics and preferences of their community and the facility in which they were placed. They incorporated relevant visuals, core vocabulary, and location-based symbols that were reflective of local culture and values and resonate with the users.

Initially installation of inclusive communication boards would be best suited to new play parks (new installations and refurbishments) that meet the Tier 1 standard and above. Those play parks provided a large recreational facility within key population areas and attract tourists. Installation at those facilities would ensure they benefit the most users within the initial stages of the scheme commencing.

Including the inclusive communication boards within new installations of Tier 1 and above, would ensure the board was designed in conjunction with the play parks and the information provided was relevant to each specific area. The cost for new installations was subject to an annual Business Case, considered through the budget setting process. No specific budget allocation would be required for communication boards.

RECOMMENDED that Council supports the inclusion of communication boards at new play parks (new installations and refurbishments) that meet the Tier 1 standard and above subject to the rates setting process.

Councillor Ashe proposed, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Councillor Ashe thanked officers for the report stating that she had brought forward the Notice of Motion after it had been raised with her by a

constituent. She asked if officers had any idea of potential timelines for their installation.

In response the Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that the intention would be to install those into the new play parks planned at Londonderry Park, Newtownards and Ward Park, Bangor.

Commenting as seconder Councillor Douglas also thanked officers for the report adding that she fully supported the recommendation within it. She stated that she believed that many children and young people would benefit from the installation of the Boards and she would look forward to seeing them in place.

Councillor Boyle congratulated Councillor Ashe for bringing this matter forward and continuing he asked if officers had any idea of the costings involved with the Boards.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries indicated that each Board would cost approximately £1,500 and that was money which would be spent on signage regardless.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Having declared an interest in the next item, Councillor Chambers left the Chamber at this stage – 8.22pm)

10. QUEENS LEISURE COMPLEX, HOLYWOOD – RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the following Notice of Motion was previously agreed by Council:

“That this Council recognises the opportunity that a return to Council management of the Queen’s Leisure Complex, Holywood presents to develop the potential for a revitalised local asset that benefits the whole community, - a space for health, arts, culture, recreation, events and learning.

In light of this opportunity, this Council resolves to facilitate engagement with relevant community stakeholders, the purpose of which will be to ascertain community need and desires in respect of the Queen’s Leisure Complex asset. A report, to include a costed plan, should be presented to Council before the end of 2022”.

In order to progress the matter, the Head of Community and Culture was asked to facilitate engagement with relevant community stakeholders to ascertain community need and desires in respect of the Queen’s Leisure Complex asset.

Community engagement was held on 24 September 2024 in Queens Leisure Centre at 7pm.

Relevant community stakeholders invited were:

Hollywood Shared Town
 Hollywood Players
 Hollywood Family Trust / Youth Centre
 Hollywood Primary School
 St Patricks Primary School
 Priory College
 Sullivan Upper School & Sullivan Prep
 Rudolph Steiner School
 Hollywood Chamber of Commerce
 Hollywood District U3A
 Hollywood Music Festival
 Hollywood Community Council
 Hollywood Residents Association
 First Hollywood Presbyterian Church
 St Phillip and St James Church of Ireland
 Hollywood Methodist Church
 High Street Presbyterian Church
 First Hollywood (Non-subscribing) Presbyterian Church
 St Colmcilles Catholic Church
 Hollywood Baptist Church
 Coastlands Church
 Hollywood Football Club – Senior Men, Women and Juniors
 Hollywood Rugby Club
 St Pauls GAC
 Hollywood Cricket Club
 Hollywood Bowling Club – Men and Women
 Over 55s Club
 Woven (previously Habinteg)
 Probus – Men and Women
 Redburn Loughview Community Forum
 2nd Hollywood Scouts
 Hollywood Girl Guides
 Hollywood Town Advisory Group members
 Councillors from the Hollywood DEA

Staff from Leisure Services, Regeneration, Community Development and Arts and Heritage and Tourism sections were also invited to attend.

Chris Kelly attended on behalf of SERCO who were contracted by Council to manage the Queens Leisure complex.

The engagement was facilitated by Lorraine McCourt, Lorraine McCourt Consulting and the following questions were asked, and responses collated:

Q1 What types of community activity / services do you believe the centre should offer?

- Spaces need to be available for community bookings – the centre should not just be about the Council / managing company delivering activities to people
- Events (e.g. flower shows)
- Music
- Tea dances
- Drama activities
- Youth activity
- School activities e.g. bookings for holding school plays
- U3A / older peoples activities
- Women’s activities
- Bowling
- Creche / early years provision
- Health clinics (e.g. flu jab delivery, blood donation etc.)
- It was commented there is no other comparable performance space in the locality in terms of the scale and size of space available.
- There needs to be better community awareness that the centre is open and available for external bookings
- The town master plan makes a number of recommendations including number 11 which recommends the development of a heritage / town information centre, there’s also a need for training facilities (e.g. employability / life skills activities).
- The centre used to be availed of for May Day celebrations, but now the centre is closed on bank holidays and unavailable.

**Q2 Do you / have you used the centre previously – if not why not?
If yes – why did you choose it?**

Why Chosen	Why Not Chosen
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Size of spaces available – particularly the big hall• Parking• Public transport links• Cost• Accessible central location• Allows outreach because of location• Welcoming staff• Lift available – disability accessible• Disabled toilet provision• Potential mixture of uses – leisure / community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Property condition• Lack of kitchen facilities• Needs enhancement to toilets (condition)• Needs better heating• Question around why it has been left without adequate maintenance and upgrade• Doesn’t feel like it’s an open door – centre is more leisure oriented (as reflected in the name / branding)• Perception rooms are booked out and unavailable for others• Equipment is left in situ by other users and fear of damage / need to work around it• Cost

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking – restricted • Awareness of the spaces and communication on its availability – you can't see by on-line search whether the space is bookable on specific dates / times • Booking times flexibility • Building condition leaves the impression the centre is being progressively de-comissioned e.g. staging, kitchens etc. • Refuse site proximity – of-putting and restricts parking.
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Q3 What are the barriers to using the facility for community activity delivery?

- Awareness of spaces available / those which can be booked
- Lack of on-line booking facility
- Costs
- Condition
- Lack of education / heritage focus / information point
- Needs encouragement for community based activities (beyond leisure focus)
- Seeing other people making bookings in the centre would raise awareness and drive interest
- Operating hours and lack of bank holiday availability
- Multi-disciplinary focus needed to drive footfall
- Competition for community spaces – e.g. churches offer spaces free of charge for community activities
- Need to offer free access to space for groups trying to get started
- Cost of £10 per hour for established groups was considered feasible.
- There was a question on what spaces can be used beyond their regular booking e.g. CAB spaces?

Q4 What would you want to book the facilities for / type of facility you would want to access?

- It would be an incentive if the centre offered a discount for block bookings / charities similar to that offered by the library
- Getting over 55s activities back
- Local history group / local heritage information point
- Performance and events space
- Youth / employability and life skills training
- Church use
- Music / tea dances
- Activities which offer a multi-generational ethos / feel
- Bank holiday availability
- Ability to use the centre as a meeting venue e.g. Remembrance Sunday

The Director of Community and Wellbeing thanked all those who had taken the time to attend and input into the event.

After the meeting the following comments were received from Councillor Kendall:

1. People have joined the gym and found that it has not been open on a Sunday in the middle of the afternoon, closed at 3pm when other facilities are open until 9pm.
2. Tennis courts in Holywood require repair.
3. When contacted, Council did not know who was responsible for making the bookings to access the tennis courts or other sports facilities - this should be improved or maybe handled all together in Council.
4. Holywood Festival Irish Dancing used the main hall for 20+ years. Nowhere else available in Holywood area so sadly doesn't happen anymore. The 'old' building was always a space available for community use.
5. I would definitely love to see the dancing back. I do ballroom dancing and have to travel to Jordanstown and Lisburn for social dances in the evenings. I would also love to see more community courses run both there and in Redburn community centre. I used to work in Redburn and it was always busy- then it was taken over by Bangor and everything disappeared, now it's almost always closed. Such a shame!
6. The QIC used to have some fantastic clubs .There was a girls group on a Monday, A boys group on a Wednesday...Christmas pantomimes every year for all Holywood groups ,cubs ,scouts etc and other groups from the borough attended. It was packed every year .The over 55's had the tea dance every May Day for years and it was well attended. We were all pushed out when Serco took the reins!
7. Over 55s stopped due to COVID and then an attempt was made to start it up again when the centre reopened and COVID restrictions allowed for it unfortunately it wasn't successful
8. The May day tea dance !!it stopped many years ago , well before covid
9. Why has coastlands church been given use of the complex? - are they paying the full rental rates? Should this not have been put to a vote by councillors as it now seems to be their full time home and business address if you check their Web page. Is the centre manager a member of this church?
10. It's a shame that local facilities are not there for the local community. Several centres in another council area were very welcoming to private functions which I attended. These could have been held in QLC if it had been available.
11. Community theatre groups find the price of hiring the venue prohibitively expensive. Subsidised prices for players groups may attract local productions.
12. As a member of a local community group I find the pricing to hire the hall for any community event is atrocious, this would very well put people off using queens
13. What about night classes in languages Spanish and health and well being
14. Pricing so the community will use the facilities to booked out capacity every day for the foreseeable future!! If it continues without money coming through the doors will Holywood lose it?
15. I know Holywood has numerous coffee shops, but what about a coffee station, one of the Costa or Barista bar coffee machines for people to sit and have a chat after their workout, or while waiting for the kids to finish their classes. I

think the upstairs rooms need a revamp. I know it is all about budget but compared to Bangor, the Holywood site needs some modernisation. Some more classes on the time table would be great. Someone else mentioned about foreign language classes which would be a great idea. Maybe art classes could be held there. I think there is a great opportunity to bring the centre back to a place the community uses more regularly and in turn that will generate more revenue for the centre. Someone else mentioned that the costs to hire the centre were inhibitive but perhaps if it was used more regularly the prices could come down and still generate a profit.

16. The ability to run music events with the ability to sell alcohol. I contacted a few years back about hiring it for these type of events, it was a very short phone call unfortunately.
17. Well it's big enough to turn into a swimming pool for the community but as it's been stated we are the poor relations, I won't pay the prices to rent a room for a group I have actually many times went to Bangor as QLC and Redburn community centre are either too dear or booked for dog events in Redburn then you arrive for your booking the place is covered in dog hairs and stinks & QLC dear and facilities are very poor.

Next steps

The facility was owned by the Council and managed by SERCO. This agreement was in place until March 2028. Council was responsible for maintenance of the centre.

The Arts and Heritage section would further consider potential use of the Centre and report back to Committee before the end of the financial year.

Council to undertake a feasibility study on the centre which would look at costed options and a potential works action plan, (to include the stage area and adjacent kitchen and toilet facilities).

RECOMMENDED that Council note the report and agrees to produce a feasibility study that will be brought back to Council for consideration, subject to budget availability/rate setting process.

Councillor Kendall proposed, seconded by McRandal that the recommendation be agreed and furthermore Council undertakes further community engagement to share information and to address the questions raised at the community event, via open dialogue, ensuring that this opportunity is communicated with plenty of advance notice to local groups and residents via email and social media to ensure engagement. Furthermore, Council agrees to work together with those local groups and residents in Holywood to agree the scope and carry out a feasibility study as soon as practical, that will then be brought back to Council for consideration.

The proposer Councillor Kendall thanked officers for including the feedback she had shared, which had been gathered via Holywood based social media channels. This feedback was gathered after less than 24 hours of the post being up on Facebook. She felt this reflected the significant high engagement from the community in respect of QLC adding that there was a significant level of community interest in the future of QLC. Continuing Councillor Kendall commented however that it had been reflected

to her that some of those who were invited were unable to attend and/or did not fully understand the purpose of the exercise. She added that some groups who were noted as invited had not received the invitation. Many questions had been raised for example how the stage and the kitchen were condemned, who condemned them and those questions had not been answered. The manager of the Centre claimed that it was Council, there was a rumour that it was Health and Safety, although whether it was Council's Health and Safety or another body or person was not known.

Continuing Councillor Kendall commented that whilst she wanted to see positive steps and movement forward, and crucially to see the Council and community work together to shape a positive, prosperous and vibrant future for the QLC. She was not sure that this could be done without an understanding of the factors that led to its deterioration. At present no one (neither Council nor the current operator NCLT) was accepting responsibility for any of the deterioration in the condition or use of this vital community asset. She hoped that through further engagement the Council would have a community asset and space that was used for many purposes, culture and leisure, and meets the needs of the community.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman McRandal thanked officers for the report and the work which had been undertaken to date, adding that it was a very important issue for the residents of Hollywood. He welcomed the event which had taken place on 24 September 2024 but noted some concerns around those in attendance, how it was advertised and the late notice. Continuing he advised that a number of organisations had been in touch with him to say they had been unable to attend while those in attendance had many differing views. He asked what the scope was for the consultant who had ran the event.

In response the Head of Community and Culture advised that the consultants role had been to facilitate the event.

Alderman McRandal stated that the demand for this had come from the community in Hollywood and as such Hollywood Shared Town had expressed an interest in running a collaborative event in collaboration with the Council. This would enable the residents of Hollywood to ensure their views were appropriately heard and considered.

The Head of Community and Culture advised that the Notice of Motion had asked for the event to be held with all relevant stakeholders and members of the Town Advisory Group had also been invited.

At this stage the Director sympathised with what had been proposed and agreed that it was important for the Council to engage as much as possible. However that did pose a problem in respect of bringing forward a feasibility study by the end of the financial year. The original recommendation was subject to budget and that would need to be in place, furthermore, to carry out the necessary community engagement in advance there quite simply would not be enough time.

By way of summing up Councillor Kendall indicated that she would be content to amend her proposal but sought clarification on what would be a reasonable time for a feasibility study.

The Director advised that a Business Case would need to be written in order to secure the funding for the feasibility study and it would then take at least six months to procure the services to write the study up.

Councillor Kendall indicated that she would be happy to amend her proposal to “that we would engage by the end of the financial year and a feasibility study brought forward as soon as was practically possible”. The Director suggested that the words by the end of the financial year were removed.

Commenting as seconder Alderman McRandal sought clarification around funding for the feasibility study and works to be carried out within the facility.

The Director referred to the proposal which had been made commenting that he did not believe there were any funds available in the Community and Culture budget, adding that the real issue was around the timing.

Alderman McRandal indicated that he would take the matter up with the Chief Executive as she had informed that funding had been secured for this.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Kendall, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be agreed and furthermore Council undertakes further community engagement to share information and to address the questions raised at the community event, via open dialogue, ensuring that this opportunity is communicated with plenty of advance notice to local groups and residents via email and social media to ensure engagement. Furthermore, Council agrees to work together with those local groups and residents in Holywood to agree the scope and carry out a feasibility study as soon as practical, that will then be brought back to Council for consideration.

(Councillor W Irvine having declared an interest in the next item, left the Council Chamber at this stage – 8.49pm)

11. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN LEISURE PRICING POLICY 2024 2026 (FILE SD151) (Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Council agreed that annual price increases in line with or below inflation were brought to Committee for awareness and that only in the event of significant increase above this level was Council authorisation required.

This report brought to members attention the price increase that would be applied by both Leisure Ards (appendix 1) and NCLT/Serco (appendix 2) for the coming year.

Appendix one detailed the process that would be applied to customers across the service at the directly managed sites at ABMWLC, Comber, Portaferry and Londonderry Park. As well as at other outdoor tennis courts and bowling greens. Details of the price increase for Sport Development were also included. Those prices detailed an approximate 2.5% increase to reflect that officers believed activity pricing was close to the maximum that the market would take, rounded to a more workable figure in terms of cash handling and /or facility subdivision, for example if a hall was divided into courts etc.

Appendix two detailed the prices NCLT would be charging its customers from 1 January 2025. This was for information only as elected members would be aware that Council had no authority to set prices as per the current contract with NCLT/Serco. However, the majority of the proposals from Serco were in line with Councils directly managed sites.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the price increases being applied by Serco from 1st January 2025. Furthermore, Council notes the impact of the application of the price increases of approximately 2.5% being applied to charges across Council directly managed sites from 1st April 2025 and approves those prices in excess of this amount as recommended by the leisure team.

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor Boyle, stated that the reality was this was a matter which required consideration on an annual basis, with increases being made in line with inflation. Ultimately the Council had to deliver services while keeping the doors open and the lights on.

Concurring with those comments the seconder, Alderman Adair commented that no one liked to increase prices but the reality was that it was unavoidable.

Alderman McRandal asked if it could be confirmed that Council had no control over SERCO pricing.

The Head of Leisure Services advised that Council had ability to agree some core prices which could only be changed with its permission, but the prices in front of the committee were a matter for the Serco to decide.

Continuing Alderman McRandal noted the Council year on year price increases were approximately 2.5% and he asked what the SERCO year on year increase was. The Head of Leisure Services advised that he did not have that information to hand.

Alderman McRandal indicated that from what he could gather SERCO increases were around 5%. Finally he asked if the average cost to those using Serco managed facilities was higher than for those using Council directly managed facilities.

The Head of Leisure Services advised that Council would not measure that or indeed monitor that. As such he indicated that he would be unable to answer that question.

Alderman McRandal proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that Council notes the price increases being applied by Serco effective from 1st January 2025. Furthermore that Council notes the impact of the application of the price increases of approximately 2.5% being applied to charges across Council directly managed sites from 1st April 2025 and approves those prices in excess of this amount as recommended by the Leisure team, and that a report is brought back to Committee detailing:

- Differentials in 2025 proposed pricing between Serco and Council directly managed sites. What is the comparative cost to the average user?
- What is the approximate overall price increase being applied by Serco effective 1st January 2025?
- If it is the case that users of Serco managed facilities are, on average, paying more than users of Council directly managed facilities, then Council Officers should detail what benefit those users get from the outsourcing of their leisure services.

Alderman McRandal stated that whether outsourced or not, those were services which Council offered to its residents and for which it had a responsibility for the quality and cost of the service. He suggested there needed to be transparency around that, particularly as the report only provided the detailed pricing structures. Members were advised what overall increase was applied to Council directly managed services, however what was missing was a comparison of the average costs between Council managed and Serco managed services. Also missing was the overall increase in cost applied by Serco. He commented that members needed to be satisfied that its residents were getting value for money and were being treated equitably, regardless of who delivered leisure services. Alderman McRandal suggested that if it were the case that those living in North Down and using Serco managed services were paying on average more than those using Council directly managed services then he would want to be satisfied that there was good reason why they paid more. He added that the current leisure services contract expired in 2028 and important decisions would have to be made in advance of that.

The seconder Councillor Ashe indicated that she had nothing further to add at this stage.

Thanking Alderman McRandal for his proposal Alderman Cummings agreed that it was important to be sure what was actually being delivered. He added that he was aware of many residents in the Borough who had memberships with facilities outside the Borough purely because more competitive packages were on offer. As such he sought further comment around potential impacts on membership the proposed increase in prices could bring. He also suggested there could be benefits around specifically targeting families.

In response the Head of Leisure Services stated that the Council had an extremely effective Leisure Management Team who over the past twelve years and to date looked for the best value for customers. He noted the comments around comparators with the SERCO element and the Ards Leisure element reminding members that was how it was previously presented up until members complained

that it was too much information. He added that he would agree that it would be useful to have the SERCO percentage figures to include within the report.

In terms of marketing by the Leisure Team, he indicated that he would be very happy to have that debate and spend some time defending the Council's Leisure Marketing Team. They were he stated extremely successful in what they did as reflected in the budget figures elsewhere in the report and he believed a wide range of packages where currently on offer to entice all into the Council's leisure facilities. Continuing he informed members that he was confident particularly as the facility at Newtownards was almost at capacity adding that at Comber investment had been made there with the installation of a new gym, shortly to be completed with new spin bikes.

Members were also advised that swimming lessons had almost doubled since the opening of the new facility at Newtownards and as such that proved that something was being done to attract people through the doors. Therefore he believed what was being offered was competitive and he was very happy with the range of options which were available to customers. He added that his challenge was making the facility operate as efficiently as possible in comparison to outsourcing options and as such while it was a difficult balance he was of the opinion that they had just about got it right.

At this stage Councillor Boyle indicated that he could support the amendment particularly if it brought back further information that could provide further comfort and certainty for members.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that Council notes the price increases being applied by Serco effective from 1st January 2025. Furthermore that Council notes the impact of the application of the price increases of approximately 2.5% being applied to charges across Council directly managed sites from 1st April 2025 and approves those prices in excess of this amount as recommended by the Leisure team. That a report is brought back to Committee detailing:

- **Differentials in 2025 proposed pricing between Serco and Council directly managed sites. What is the comparative cost to the average user?**
- **What is the approximate overall price increase being applied by Serco effective 1st January 2025?**
- **If it is the case that users of Serco managed facilities are, on average, paying more than users of Council directly managed facilities, then Council Officers should detail what benefit those users get from the outsourcing of their leisure services.**

(Councillors Chambers and W Irvine returned to the Chamber at this stage – 8.50pm)

REPORTS FOR NOTING

12. MAINTENANCE OF GRASS SPORTS PITCHES (FILE PCA131)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that In September 2024 the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council.

“That Council notes the increasing complaints from local sports clubs regarding the poor annual summer maintenance of football pitches across the Borough and tasks officers to bring forward a report on options to improve the maintenance of our football pitches to ensure our pitches are maintained to a high standard to meet the sporting needs of local clubs and league requirements.”

This report would outline the current state of the sports pitches, assess maintenance strategies, and propose actions aligned with the Council’s commitment to sustainability and community needs. Through this, it was aimed to ensure that the sports infrastructure continued to serve as a valuable resource for all residents, supporting a healthy, inclusive, and sustainable future for the Borough.

Service Overview

The Parks and Cemeteries Service had responsibility for the maintenance and development of approximately 292 hectares of Parks and other open spaces including sports pitches.

The Council currently maintained thirty-three grass pitches across the Borough, serving a wide range of sports such as football, rugby, cricket, and GAA. Annual pitch maintenance across those sites comes at cost to council of £310,000 with an additional expenditure of £120,000 to supplement larger schemes to remedy drainage issues or refurbish pitches.

The following measures were currently in place for sports pitch maintenance:

- Routine Inspections: Staff conduct regular inspections to assess pitch conditions, including drainage, grass quality, and potential hazards.
- Annual renovation works: At a cost of £2,000 per pitch as agreed by council Summer and Autumn renovation works were conducted annually by a contractor through a tender process.
- Maintenance Schedule: Grass cutting, pitch marking, and playing surface repairs were performed throughout the season by Council staff. This schedule varied seasonally depending on usage and weather conditions.
- Drainage Management: Pitches were regularly assessed by staff for drainage issues, and remedial works were conducted as necessary to prevent waterlogging such as Verti draining.
- Fertilisation and Aeration: Periodic aeration and fertilisation were undertaken by Parks staff to ensure grass health and improve playability.
- Current investment in machinery: Actual: 2021/22 £178,943; 2022/23 £506,316 & 2023/24 £219,891.

- Estimates for future investment in machinery: 2024/25 £225,000; 2025/26 £225,000; 2026/27 £225,000 & 2027/28 £250,000.
- Pitch rest periods: Certain pitches should be closed either during summer months or winter months to allow rest periods and continued play for other sports.

Identified Challenges

Despite the efforts made, several challenges had been identified that affect the overall quality and usability of the sports pitches:

- **Weather-Related Damage:** Persistent rainfall in certain locations could cause waterlogging, thus potentially reducing the number of playable days during the season or reducing maintenance capabilities for staff and contractors. This had been remedied at significant cost (£82,000) to Council recently in Crommelin, Donaghadee. There were locations where mitigation may not be possible due to the impact of rising sea levels. This had been identified at Islandview Road, Greyabbey. It had been suggested that this site might not be available in 10-15 years due to coastal erosion and another location for that pitch would be required.
- **Resource Limitations:** Cost pressures could limit the frequency of maintenance, resulting in occasional delays in maintenance works. Those pressures were arising from rapidly increasing material costs and requirement for enhanced maintenance works.
- **Unofficial Use:** non booked users could put additional pressure on existing facilities, leading to accelerated wear and tear. This effect of this was most detrimental during closed periods where dog walkers/golfers/people were using the ground while pitch renovations were taking place which had a detrimental effect on the establishment of seed. Although pitches were being closed for bookings in summer for maintenance schedules, unofficial use of pitches took place despite efforts from staff and other stakeholders including clubs to enforce.
- **Infrastructure Age:** Some pitches were older and could be more difficult to maintain.
- **Contractors Delaying Works:** If annual renovation works were delayed through adverse weather or other environmental factors this could increase the risk of poor establishment or being further delayed with re-opening times.
- **Increased demand:** The success and popularity of sports in the Borough has brought about an Increase in the number of clubs requesting use of Council pitches. With that came the challenge of increased usage and reduction of rest time for pitches. Three teams sharing pitch seven at Londonderry Park was being used both morning and afternoon. Where clubs were shared by a first and second team, pitches were in use most weekends with alternating home/away matches. The welcome growth of Women's football (playing throughout summer months) when pitches historically were closed for maintenance. This was managed through having summer and winter play pitches.

Proposed Actions for Service Improvements

To address the above challenges and improve the quality of sports pitches for residents and community groups, the following actions would be implemented:

- **Remove Elements of External Contractors:** It was proposed that Parks staff would carry out seeding at the end of season rather than to rely on contractor. This would ensure the best chance of establishment. This would be possible through the acquisition of new seeding equipment.
- **Capital Improvements:** Officers would, through business cases required during the rates setting process, continue to request additional funds towards refurbishing older pitches.
- **Increased Inspections:** Officers would subject to securing the necessary resources conduct more frequent recorded inspections, particularly during periods of heavy usage and adverse weather conditions, to identify issues early and conduct timely repairs. Those would be recorded through use of PSS Ultimate site management software due to be implemented early 2025.
- **Pitch Maintenance Specifications:** A review of pitch maintenance specifications had been undertaken to provide guidance for maintenance requirements and playable hours.
- **Collaboration:** Ensure effective communication around bookings, maintenance, managing expectations of sites. Pitches were managed currently by two Council Services, Parks, and Leisure. Currently both services met monthly along with the delivery partners in the Northern Community Leisure Trust to ensure a collaborative approach to pitch provision and maintenance across the Borough.
- **Community Engagement and Feedback:** Officers would strengthen collaboration with local sports clubs to ensure issues were identified early and conduct regular surveys of pitch users to gather feedback on the quality of facilities and identify areas for improvement.
- **Eco-Friendly Practices:** Implement environmentally sustainable practices such as the use of organic fertilisers, water conservation techniques, and electric maintenance equipment to reduce the Council's carbon footprint. Tree Planting around pitches improves drainage and were natural barriers to reduce wind exposure.

Monitoring and Reporting

To ensure that the proposed actions led to tangible improvements, officers would provide updates to Council detailing progress on maintenance improvements, capital projects, and community engagement efforts. In addition, Key Performance Indicators would be established for half yearly reporting

RECOMMENDED that the Council note the contents of the report.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Alderman Cummings that the recommendation be agreed and furthermore that a review of progress is carried out in June 2025.

The proposer Alderman Adair thanked officers for the report and for attending numerous meetings to discuss the matter further. He stated that many of the problems with football pitches had arisen due to a lack of maintenance being carried out by external contractors. As such he welcomed that much of that work would now be undertaken by the Council's own staff. Continuing he stated that the reason he had asked for a review to be undertaken in June 2025 was because the

maintenance schedule was due to commence in May and this year that in some cases had not taken place until July. The review would hopefully ensure that there would be no further issues with contractors and ensure the Council's pitches became centres of excellence.

The seconder, Alderman Cummings also thanked officers for the report and added his support for the recommendation. He noted within the report reference to a specific rest period throughout the summer adding that he was aware there had been some issues with the enforcement of that. He asked if signage had been used to reinforce this. Continuing Alderman Cummings also recognised the growing popularity of women's football and asked how many pitches would be made available to them during the summer period.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that while women's football was a leisure function, as far as he was aware there were approximately five pitches available for that purpose. Continuing he stated that the unofficial use of Council pitches was very difficult to manage and as such he was not sure how effective signage would be as a deterrent. Instead he indicated that it was intended to install fencing were there were persistent issues with this.

Councillor Boyle thanked officers for the report and noted the paragraph detailing that the Council currently maintained thirty-three grass pitches across the Borough, serving a wide range of sports such as football, rugby, cricket, and GAA. He asked where the GAA pitch was. He was advised that GAA used the Council pitch in Hollywood but the Council did not own or maintain any GAA facilities. Continuing Councillor Boyle raised a number of queries around annual pitch maintenance and annual renovation works.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that the £120,000 referred to in the report was additional and used through a Business Case which was successful in promoting further use of pitches which required additional drainage works to be undertaken. At this stage the officer provided Councillor Boyle with a brief breakdown of those maintenance figures referred to in the report and maintenance work which would then be carried out. Councillor Boyle was then provided with some clarity around the work carried out by contractors and jobs which were undertaken inhouse by Council staff. Continuing Councillor Boyle asked if Council staff held any sports turf management skills. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that Council staff were very highly qualified with Level 5 Sports Turf qualifications.

By way of summing up Alderman Adair reminded members that if they had any queries to take the opportunity to raise them with officers prior to the meeting as the Council Chamber was where debate should take place rather than questioning.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that recommendation be agreed and furthermore that a review of progress is carried out in June 2025.

RECESS

The meeting went into recess at this stage 9.05pm and recommenced at 9.20pm.

NOTED.

13. BALLYHALBERT PUBLIC OPEN SPACES – RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION (FILE CW4)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in March 2024 the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council.

“That Council note the increasing growing population in the village of Ballyhalbert and the current lack of public open spaces in the village and task officers to bring forward a report on options to provide a public green open space to promote health and wellbeing of the local community and further tasks officers to engage with developer to ensure the new play park planned for Saint Andrews is delivered in line with our Council play strategy.”

The Play Strategy stated the following in relation to Ballyhalbert:

*“7.1.7 Ballyhalbert (Population 1,026): The play facility in Ballyhalbert will undergo an upgrade to a Tier 1 facility to serve the entire settlement and increase the tourism
 “7.1.7 Ballyhalbert (Population 1,026): The play facility in Ballyhalbert will undergo an upgrade to a Tier 1 facility to serve the entire settlement and increase the tourism*

potential of the area. It should be noted that in April 2018 decision was taken at the Regeneration and Development Committee not to proceed with a MUGA in Ballyhalbert as part of the Village Renewal funding proposals. It was agreed that consultation would be undertaken as part of the development of the Play Strategy. A total of 1.5% of all respondents to the online survey were from Ballyhalbert and some residents attended the public consultation event held in Portavogie. No request for a MUGA in Ballyhalbert was submitted. It is not proposed as part of this Play Strategy to recommend delivery of a MUGA in Ballyhalbert as there are many other locations which are considered a priority for the development of older children provision as identified in Section 6.9 above.

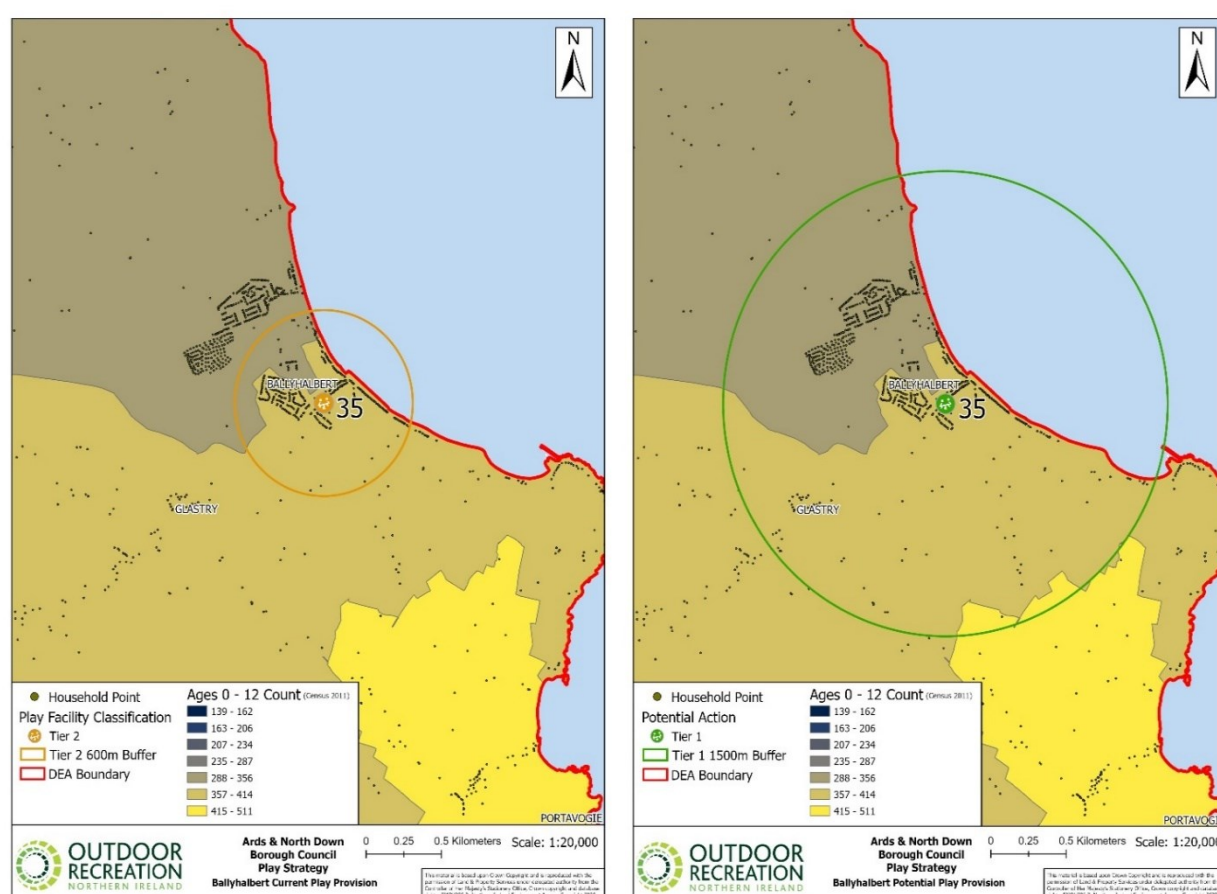
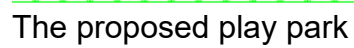


Figure 11: Ballyhalbert Current and Potential Play Provision

Note: The 2021 updated census records the population in Ballyhalbert at 1,271.

St Andrews Point Housing Development Play Park: Under planning application Reference LA06/2021/0118/F Boland Reilly Homes received planning permission on 13 February 2024 for a 'Housing development of 98 units, detached garages (site nos. 175 to 272 inclusive), extension to footpath on Shore Road and playpark.'



This play park design was completed by a designer on behalf of Boland Reilly as part of the planning application process. The proposed play park would be considered as a Tier 3 when the Design Guidelines as outlined in Section 6.1 of the Councils Play Strategy were applied with one omission notable that a second access gate had not been detailed.

Following the granting of planning approval for the above, another play park designer was in contact with Boland Reilly Homes, with regard to delivering the play park in the new housing development. However, Boland Reilly had since ceased construction on the site and despite repeated attempts at contacting them, no reply had been received.

Therefore, currently it was not possible to progress the development of any play park in the St Andrews Point housing development at this time. In line with the proposals for Ballyhalbert as outlined in the Play Strategy, a Tier 1 play park was to be developed at the current play park site in front of the Victoria Primary School.

The timing of the delivery of the Tier 1 play park would be determined by the Independent Inspectors Annual Report, which highlighted those play parks across the Borough which should be prioritised for refurbishment. A separate report would be brought to Council in due course outlining the refurbishment list for 2025/2026 within available budgets, it was not yet known if Ballyhalbert would be identified as part of that process.

In relation to the enhancement of recreation and sports facilities for the village and surrounding area, officers would, subject to the rates setting process regarding the required budget, progress a feasibility study in financial year 2025/2026. If a budget was approved, the study would assess availability of land in the area that could be used for sport and recreation. It would furthermore consider the practicality of any proposals, analysing their viability and potential cost implications. Once the feasibility report was complete, a further report would be made to members on the findings.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the above report, and that officers will consider the delivery of a Tier 1 play park at the current location in front of the Victoria Primary School when it is identified for refurbishment in the Independent Inspectors Annual Report, subject to the rates setting process in line with available budgets.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted and furthermore that Council welcome UK prosperity funding to upgrade play parks at Ward Park and Sea Park (previously budgeted for in the 2024/2025 rates year). That the surplus budget be allocated to upgrade play parks currently on the Council's refreshment and upgrade list.

The proposer Alderman Adair welcomed the report particularly as the play park in Ballyhalbert was in dire need of refurbishment having been in situ for quite some time. He welcomed that it would be upgraded to a Tier 1 play park particularly given the growing population in the village which was in need of investment throughout. Continuing he advised that the reason behind his alternative proposal was that both the upgrades at Ward Park and Sea Park had previously been agreed to be funded as part of the rates setting process and there were many play parks throughout the

Borough which were in dire need of refurbishment. He added that he had not been content with the comments made at the recent Council meeting in relation to this matter. As such he believed that any money left over should be spent on those play parks on the Council's refreshment and upgrade list.

The seconder Councillor Boyle concurred with the comments made by the proposer adding that while the recommendation looked positive there were a number of hoops to go through and therefore he was supportive of the amendment as put forward. He sought further clarification around the potential funding which may become available.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that not all invoices had been received however a projected saving of £10,000 had been indicated at this stage. He added that more detail on the figures referred to in the report could be provided to the member if necessary. He added that realistically it was not envisaged that anything further could take place other than what had already been planned. In response to a further query from Councillor Boyle, the officer reiterated that there would only be up to £10,000 available. He added that it was normal practice for any surplus monies to be put into the following years budget. Continuing he provided Councillor Boyle with a brief synopsis of the overall budget spend for the year to date reiterating that at this stage there was no other money available.

By way of summing up Alderman Adair commented that he found the entire situation baffling particularly as the Committee had previously been presented with a report detailing those projects which were to be funded with budgets allocated. He recalled how at that time there had been no mention of external funding and instead it had all been allocated through rates money. As such he asked where the funding for the two play parks had now gone.

In response the Head of Parks and Cemeteries stated that Sea Park had not been on the list this year and as such it would not have been delivered otherwise. In the case of Ward Park he reminded members that it had been agreed to pay for that over two financial years. In essence he stated that money had not been in the budget for either Sea Park or part of Ward Park.

Alderman Adair acknowledged the officers comments and suggested that going forwards in the future that any lists presented to members had the necessary finances in place to deliver those projects. He took the opportunity at this stage to commend officers on their success with securing funding through a variety of initiatives for these important projects.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted and furthermore that Council welcome UK prosperity funding to upgrade play parks at Ward Park and Sea Park (previously budgeted for in the 2024/2025 rates year). That the surplus budget be allocated to upgrade play parks currently on the Council's refreshment and upgrade list.

14. HUNTS PARK – RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION (FILE PCA133)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that In October 2020 the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council.

“That officers are tasked to produce a report to consider what could be a more environmentally friendly and benefit the wellbeing of the community for the use of the disused putting green on the Commons and play park at Hunts park in Donaghadee. Following the success of the Dog park in Bangor and the demand for a Dementia Garden, both should be considered as options in the report. The process should involve consultation with the local community”

Parks and Cemeteries Service enjoy a close working relationship with Volunteers, Community and ‘Friends of’ groups from across the Borough. This partnership had seen several key successes that encourage and assist all stakeholders in the Borough to increase their civic pride by enhancing the natural resources of the Borough. Donaghadee had played a central role in that success in recent years achieving multiple local and national awards, notably through the Ulster in Bloom, (winner 2021, 2022 and 2023) also winning Gold at Britain in Bloom 2023. Hunts Park provided residents with an essential green space to exercise, socialise and opportunity to reap the array of benefits having access to greenspace provides. Hunts Park was surrounded by large residential areas and acted as a link between those homes and the town, through other beautiful greenspaces and the Donaghadee shoreline.

A Friends of Hunts Park group was now established through the Council policy agreed in December 2022. Since the establishment of the group, in 2024, the Parks Service had assisted volunteers to implement a series of environmental improvements within the park, including the establishment of a community orchard and hedgerow planting, supporting the key actions within the Tree and Woodland Strategy. Those activities had not only improved the aesthetics and environmental value of the park, but they had also further enhanced community cohesion and promoted the town as a location of partnership working.

Council was conscious of the need to reduce, replace, and where possible, eliminate the use of herbicides (and rarely used pesticides) due to the potential risk to the environment and human health increasingly highlighted in research and media. A key aim of the agreed Herbicide Reduction Policy was to designate herbicide free zones. Since the implementation of the policy in 2022, Hunts Park had been a herbicide free zone, making the park much more environmentally friendly and complimenting the environmental improvements carried out in partnership with Council and local volunteers.

Through financial year 2023/24 a business case was approved to upgrade some of the path network within the park, much of which had become damaged and tired, diminishing the aesthetics of the park and invited weed growth along walkways. Work on the worst section of path would be completed before the end of this

financial year. Completion of all remaining paths would be undertaken through 2024/25, subject to further budget approval.

The 'Ards and North Down Play Strategy 2021-2023' recommended that the play park within Hunts Park was to be retained but recognised that this area may be subject to regeneration in the future, as proposed in local masterplan. The Play Strategy would be reviewed in 2025, and recommendations would be considered following this. Parks and Cemeteries staff would continue to work with the Friends of Hunts Park group to ascertain the next steps and build on the success of the group.

The Commons was a key asset within Donaghadee and presented an amazing opportunity for the town to be seen as a successful sustainable growth town with a contemporary mix of live, work, visit, play and study opportunities. In 2022, Council, supported by external consultants, developed a concept plan with commercial study for Donaghadee Commons Park. The concept plan, which was non-statutory, provided a framework for the promotion, implementation and timing of urban regeneration, recreation, tourism and leisure initiatives in Donaghadee.

The Donaghadee Commons Masterplan included alternative uses for the disused putting green. At this stage, the implementation of the plan would determine the use of this area. However, Parks and Cemeteries staff had engaged with representatives' form Donaghadee Community Development Association to discuss the viability of a community garden at the site, should any of the concept plans change and opportunity arise to progress such a facility, including the possibility of a dementia friendly community garden.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the above report and actions undertaken.

Councillor Cochrane proposed, seconded by Councillor Chambers that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Councillor Cochrane commended those members who had brought forward the Notice of Motion as well as former elected member Jancie MacArthur. He welcomed the report which acknowledged the potential there was and the work to be undertaken in respect of the pathways. He noted reference made in the report to a meeting which had taken place with DCDA around a potential community garden at the Commons in Donaghadee and sought an update on that.

In response the Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that funding applications had been submitted for a number of dementia friendly community gardens around the Borough and as such officers were awaiting the outcome of that.

Commenting as seconder Councillor Chambers also welcomed the report and the good working relationships which had been established which had resulted in some great work being undertaken. He added however that it was a shame to see the putting green left in a derelict state and was hopeful that something could be done in the future.

Alderman McRandal at this stage took the opportunity to commend a number of his colleagues for their work undertaken in respect of this, those being Councillors McCollum and Hennessy and Andrew Muir MLA.

The Chairman commented that one thing Hunts Park was renowned for was its water tower which commanded tremendous views far and wide. He added that Donaghadee already had a community garden operating successfully in the vicinity of the Moat.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the recommendation be adopted.

15. BI-MONTHLY UPDATE REPORT ON PORTAVOGIE 3G, PENINSULA & PORTAFERRY SPORTS CENTRE FLOOR (FILE CW74) (Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in February 2024, Council agreed to the following, “that Council notes the closure of the training area at Portavogie Football Pitch due to health and safety concerns, recognises the negative impact this has on local provision and sports development and tasks Officers to bring forward a report on options to provide temporary training facilities in the village in the short term and repairs to the pitch in the long term. As a matter of urgency Council tasks Officers to bring forward a bimonthly progress report on the development of the Portavogie 3G Pitch, Portaferry Sports Centre and Portaferry 3G Pitch to this committee.”

The two reports on the capital projects, were in a ‘RAG’ format as requested by the proposer in May 2024.

1. The project update report for the Portavogie 3G project is attached at appendix 1.
2. The project update report for the Portaferry 3G project is attached at appendix 2.
3. The status update report in relation to the completion of the repairs to the sports hall floor in Portaferry Sports Centre is attached at appendix 3.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the update reports attached.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Councillor McBurney left the Chamber at this stage – 9.39pm)

The proposer, Alderman Adair welcomed the report noting that resolutions had been reached with NIW and the EA which would enable some progress. He noted however that several issues had been raised by DfI which he felt was disappointing at this stage in the project and he asked if the Council had received any communication from DfI.

The Director of Community and Wellbeing advised that this matter had been raised after the report had been circulated and the objection raised by Dfl was around the size of the entrance. It was noted conversations had been ongoing between the Planners and Dfl and a meeting sought.

Alderman Adair advised that he had known about the situation for almost three weeks and as such he asked that in future all reports were as up to date as they could be. In response the Director advised that the reports were produced once a month on the second week and circulated to all relevant stakeholders. The Committee got the most up to date report which was available at that time the agenda was produced.

Alderman Adair reiterated the need for the Committee to be provided with the most up to date and accurate information.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor Boyle acknowledged Alderman Adair's frustrations however ultimately regardless of the will of the people something would not be done if the application was not correct or approved. His understanding was that Dfl was not up to date with its documentation and the issues were around intensification on a site. As such planning forms would need to be resubmitted and he appealed to all involved to work together in order to get the matter resolved.

Continuing Councillor Boyle referred to a recent meeting which had taken place with a variety of stakeholders concerning the Portaferry Sports Hall floor including representatives from the Department of Education during which a number of useful conversations had taken place. Commitments had been made to move the project forward at Portaferry and as such he expressed his thanks to all of those who had been in attendance.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

16. REPORT ON TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF GROOMSPORT TENNIS COURTS AND BOROUGH WIDE MAINTENANCE AND PROMOTION

The Chairman advised that the item had been withdrawn.

NOTED.

17. COMMUNITY & WELLBEING DIRECTORATE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT SEPTEMBER 2024 (FIN45)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that The Community & Wellbeing Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covers the six month period 1 April to 30 September 2024. The net cost of the Directorate was showing an underspend of £660k (10.8%) – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

Community & Wellbeing's budget performance was further analysed on page four into three key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£375k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£28k favourable	3
Report 4	Income	£257k favourable	3

Explanation of Variance

The Community & Wellbeing Directorate's overall variance could be summarised by the following table (variances over £15k): -

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(375)	Payroll underspends throughout the Directorate mainly due to vacant posts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Health (£108k). Community & Culture (£84k). Parks & Cemeteries (£81k). Leisure (£106k).
Goods & Services		
Environmental Health	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal case which involved a judicial review.
Parks & Cemeteries	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Running costs slightly higher than budget but offset by payroll and income favourable variances.
Leisure	(36)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of small underspends within Leisure.
Community & Culture	(41)	Small underspends within: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Development (£17k) External Funded Projects (£17k)
Income		
Parks & Cemeteries	(77)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cemeteries income (£64k). Franchise income (£17k).
Community & Culture	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Development £11k – offset by underspends in payroll and goods & services.
Leisure	(187)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leisure Centres & Londonderry Park – (£143k) Community Centres – (£18k).

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2024					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	120,451	112,400	8,051	221,500	7.2
110 Environmental Health	1,142,705	1,236,400	(93,695)	2,333,500	(7.6)
120 Community and Culture	1,182,356	1,290,200	(107,844)	2,529,800	(8.4)
140 Parks & Cemeteries	2,229,858	2,366,600	(136,742)	5,246,800	(5.8)
150 Leisure Services	759,567	1,089,100	(329,533)	2,567,300	(30.3)
Total	5,434,937	6,094,700	A (659,763)	12,898,900	(10.8)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Payroll					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	90,921	87,300	3,621	174,300	4.1
110 Environmental Health	1,239,408	1,347,000	(107,592)	2,692,500	(8.0)
120 Community and Culture	891,014	975,200	(84,186)	1,949,700	(8.6)
140 Parks & Cemeteries	1,987,875	2,068,500	(80,625)	4,142,900	(3.9)
150 Leisure	2,447,938	2,553,900	(105,962)	5,225,900	(4.1)
Total	6,657,155	7,031,900	(374,745)	14,185,300	(5.3)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Goods & Services					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	31,168	26,800	4,368	48,900	16.3
110 Environmental Health	131,296	106,500	24,796	290,700	23.3
120 Community and Culture	556,700	598,000	(41,300)	1,916,100	(6.9)
140 Parks & Cemeteries	631,376	610,700	20,676	1,632,600	3.4
150 Leisure	306,654	343,000	(36,346)	1,008,100	(10.6)
Total	1,657,194	1,685,000	(27,806)	4,896,400	(1.7)
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Income					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	(1,638)	(1,700)	62	(1,700)	3.7
110 Environmental Health	(227,998)	(217,100)	(10,898)	(649,700)	(5.0)
120 Community and Culture	(265,358)	(283,000)	17,642	(1,336,000)	6.2
140 Parks & Cemeteries	(389,393)	(312,600)	(76,793)	(528,700)	(24.6)
150 Leisure	(1,995,025)	(1,807,800)	(187,225)	(3,666,700)	(10.4)
Totals	(2,879,412)	(2,622,200)	(257,212)	(6,182,800)	(9.8)

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the recommendation be adopted.

18. NOTICES OF MOTION

18.1. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS BOYLE AND WRAY

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Councillor Wray, that officers bring back a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the huge success of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Options would include a Civic Reception to celebrate 6 years of the huge success of the facility in 2025.

The proposer Councillor Boyle stated at the outset that he wished to dedicate the Notice of Motion to the late Alderman Jimmy Menagh, adding that some would recall how passionate he had been about not only about this facility but all things sports and leisure related across the entire Borough. He stated that while at times they had held differing opinions on many things they always came together to agree on all things leisure and sporting related. He added that he knew he would have liked to have been involved and contributed to this proposal this evening.

As one of two remaining serving legacy Ards Borough Council members, he stated that Alderman McDowell would recall the many discussions which had taken place around the delivery of a new Leisure Centre in Newtownards to replace the then tiring facility at William Street, which had served the legacy Council so well. Following a period of time the Council finally agreed on 29 October 2008 to build a state of the art facility on the site formerly known as Dairy Hall at a cost of £20 million pounds. Those costs he noted had escalated in the intervening years to above £30 million pounds once the facility was opened to the public on 2 January 2019, some eleven years after it had been agreed to be built. Interest in membership soared as well as income increasing by 132% in comparison to the former centre at William Street, Newtownards, during the five years since opening the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. The Complex had over 7,500 members, delivered 2,900,000 sessions in its gym and spa and delivered over 10,000 fitness classes.

During the Covid 19 Pandemic Councillor Boyle reminded members that the Leisure Complex had operated as hub for the delivery of over 10,000 support packages to the vulnerable throughout the Borough with Centre staff also making weekly support calls. Online fitness classes were also delivered at this time with views peaking at 10,000 per week. He added that the centre was also used as a vaccination hub to deliver Covid vaccines to the local community.

Members were further advised that the Operations Manager of the leisure facility had been awarded the NILGA Staff Member of the Year 2019 being successful out of some nine thousand employees across the eleven Council areas in Northern Ireland. Councillor Boyle commented that this was a reflection of how well leisure staff had been supported and transitioned from the old centre at William Street to the new one at Ards Blair Mayne. The Operations Manager continued in his role there to this day and alongside his staff, the Head of Leisure Services and the Director of Community and Wellbeing to deliver excellent leisure services for all.

By way of summary Councillor Boyle sought members support for his Notice of Motion which sought to celebrate the success of this facility rather than an official opening. The event would be to acknowledge the amazing staff, management and all of those involved with the delivery of such a wide ranging choice for residents, ratepayers and visitors to the Borough.

Commenting as seconder Councillor Wray echoed those sentiments including the facts and figures covered by the proposer. This facility and its staff were one of the biggest assets in Ards and North Down and as such the statistics spoke for themselves. He stated that people from across the Borough and indeed outside of it came to use this facility adding that his own family used it as part of their weekly routine. Continuing he commented that he often criticized some of the Community Centres for not being so much Community Centres but more like Council buildings within the community, with a lack of community ownership. Anyone who had been to Ards Blair Mayne knew that this was not the case at this Leisure Centre. The welcoming atmosphere was created by the wonderful staff and therefore he agreed that it was correct to acknowledge the work they did.

Referring to the thirty-million-pound investment made by the Council, the facility opened in 2019, and he felt it was important to mark its success to date, by holding an event next year, on what would be its sixth year. This event he suggested should celebrate everything which had been achieved in those six years and would also look towards the future to encouraging more residents to get involved with the tremendous leisure facilities. Councillor Wray indicated that there were four reasons why he felt members should request a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the success of Ards Blair Mayne:

- The first reason was to acknowledge the staff. Their level of expertise and customer service along with that special atmosphere they create should not be taken for granted. He knew team were doing their best to incentivize staff and keep the morale at a high level, however he felt a clear message from elected representatives was required. To date the message, they had received had been mixed and resulted in uncertainty around their future as Council employees, particularly around decisions and discussions held around the future of Leisure Provision. This had had an impact on the staff and as such he could understand how it may feel demoralizing and deflating, also bringing anxiety around their future employment. As such that decision had been put on hold until 2027 and he was keen to ensure that staff were made aware how much they were valued in the role they would continue to play.
- The second reason was to send a message across Northern Ireland that Ards and North Down was a premier Borough, with premier facilities, and an excellent place to visit. Visitors should be encouraged to Ards and North Down to help stimulate the economy and an event with appropriate publicity would help to do just that.

- Thirdly he suggested that any event was held was to promote what was a good news story. The last five to six years had been difficult for the people of the Borough. Covid had had an impact, as had the cost-of-living crisis and other events and challenges more specific to the Borough. While this Centre was undoubtedly top quality in terms of the facilities, services, and staff, what made it was the people who used it. One of the best events the Borough had held in terms of connecting with the community was the homecoming for the Olympic hero's which demonstrated there was an appetite to celebrate the sporting achievements. He added that was in the fabric of the Borough. A celebration event for Ards Blair Mayne would have the support of the community, and it would be welcomed.
- Finally, this would link to the upcoming Leisure Strategy as the numbers of members of and visitors to Ards Blair Mayne was incredible. An event which highlighted this would encourage others to 'Get Active' and that was what the 'Leisure Strategy' for 2025 -2035 was all about and engage residents talking about leisure services.

By way of summing up Councillor Wray commented that he hoped members would agree with those points, and those of his colleague Councillor Boyle. He added that they both had held discussions with the Community and Wellbeing and Leisure Team (as was required before bringing a Notice of Motion) and the fact that it was now being discussed should indicate there was a willingness on all sides to make this happen. He asked members for their support to task officers to bring the report.

Commending both the proposer and seconder Alderman Adair agreed that the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex was one of the premier leisure centres in Northern Ireland. He added that it was undoubtedly a huge success story and as such should be celebrated. While an official opening of the facility had not been mentioned he believed that could provide a feel good factor for the not only the town but also the facility itself. Alderman Adair stated that he was very proud to have the facility within the Borough and asked members to support his suggestion for an official opening ceremony.

Councillor S Irvine welcomed the proposers comments around the former late Alderman Jimmy Menagh particularly as he recalled the numerous debates which had been held around naming the facility. In respect of the proposal for an official opening he expressed the view that too much time had elapsed for that to take place and agreed that any event should instead be about the staff, the centres success and safeguarding that for the future.

Rising in support of the Notice of Motion Councillor Chambers noted the poignancy of the proposers comments made in relation to the late Jimmy Menagh. Continuing he acknowledged the challenges faced by the centre which had ably been dealt with by Management. Councillor Chambers also acknowledged the high quality of staff within the centre and agreed that any event should be to celebrate those successes rather than an official opening.

Also rising in support Councillor Moore commented that she felt lucky to have such a great facility within the Borough run by an amazing team of staff. She also agreed that a celebration event of this nature would provide a great opportunity to further promote the Council's Leisure Strategy.

Councillor Kendall recalled that the late Jimmy Menagh had very much been an advocate for sports and leisure and as such she very much welcomed the proposal for a celebratory event agreeing that it would tie in well with the Council's Leisure Strategy.

By way of summing up Councillor Boyle thanked members for their comments and particularly acknowledged those of his seconder Councillor Wray. He added that while he had not always seen eye to eye with the late Jimmy Menagh they always had held the utmost respect for one and other. As such he was delighted to have been able put forward this Notice of Motion adding that he did not feel an official opening ceremony at this time would be appropriate. Instead he was of the opinion that it would be much more appropriate to celebrate and capture all that had been good throughout the past six years.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Wray, that officers bring back a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the huge success of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Options would include a Civic Reception to celebrate six years of the huge success of the facility in 2025.

18.2. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED COUNCILLOR W IRVINE AND COUNCILLOR S IRVINE

Councillor S Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor W Irvine that this Council agrees to consider as part of the upcoming rates setting process sufficient support to the cultural expression programme. Subject to this process, consideration should be given to committing funds from Council which are sufficient to meet the costs of planning activities without the uncertainty of funding coming from other sources, as has been the case for the last two years. Should in year funding become available from other sources, Council's contribution would be adjusted accordingly. This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives in an attempt to ensure that groups can prepare for their events. This will guarantee that each group agreeing to abide by the cultural expression agreement will receive a letter of offer in advance of 31st May, regardless of whether external funding is available via the Good Relations Action Plan, or any other third-party source. This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives, ensuring that all the participating community groups can prepare for their activities without uncertainty regarding funding.

The proposer Councillor S Irvine commented that his Notice of Motion demonstrated the Council's commitment to supporting local cultural initiatives ensuring community groups had the stability and confidence needed to enable them to plan meaningful cultural events. Securing dedicated funding would enable the Council to recognise and invest in the hard work those Groups did to enrich the cultural life of many local communities. Continuing he stated that the motion would also set a foundation of

reliability and security for cultural groups. By eliminating any uncertainty the Council would empower them to focus on planning impactful events without the stress of unpredictable funding. Guaranteed support from the Council until other funding sources were confirmed would allow for better quality and more ambitious cultural programming.

Continuing Councillor S Irvine stated that cultural programmes brought people together to celebrate the diversity of the community and fostered unity. By committing to this, cultural expression could be celebrated and that in turn would actively encourage inclusivity. He added that cultural events enabled shared experiences which built gaps across demographics which in turn helped to strengthen the bonds with local communities. Councillor Irvine expressed the view that his motion reflected the belief in the value of cultural initiatives by providing the resources to help local organisations to thrive. It was often the case that those Groups were run by dedicated volunteers and community leaders many of which invested substantial time and effort. By supporting them financially would acknowledge their contributions and ensure they were recognised as an essential part of the community fabric. As such he urged members to support his proposal.

Commenting as seconder Councillor W Irvine stated that cultural events drew people from both within and outside the community and brought many economic benefits to local businesses. Visitors attending such events contributed to the local economy, and residents gained a sense of pride and belonging. As such he suggested that this investment had both immediate and long-term benefits, increasing the visibility and appeal of the community while fostering a lively cultural scene.

Continuing Councillor W Irvine commented that early, guaranteed funding allowed community groups to plan their events with confidence and quality in mind. Securing resources ahead of time would lead to better organization, enhanced participation, and the potential to scale events to meet a growing audience. Knowing they would receive a letter of offer in advance of 31 May would also allow them to make necessary preparations without delay. He added that importantly, this motion would allow for financial flexibility, should other funding sources, like the Good Relations Action Plan provide contributions, and the Council's funding could then be adjusted accordingly. Councillor W Irvine indicated that this responsive approach would ensure the Council remained fiscally responsible while still fully supporting cultural expression.

Expressing his support Councillor Boyle noted the many cultural activities which took place across the Borough. He noted that achieving funding was often an issue and as such he sought clarification around whether or not this was workable.

In response the Head of Community and Culture advised that if agreed money could be sought from a variety of sources although there would be an element of risk associated with that as there would be no guarantees. The Director of Community and Wellbeing added that the matter would still need to be agreed as part of the rates setting process.

Councillor Boyle raised further queries around money potentially received which officers would then work with and the Head of Community and Culture advised that

for this year officers had funded for what had been received. It was noted that some additional funding had been received from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive which had enabled Groups to get slightly more funding. She added that officers were not made aware of the funding available until the letters of offer had been received.

At this stage Alderman McRandal indicated that he was unclear what the ask was by Councillor S Irvine and sought clarity around whether it was a report or that the money was ringfenced. Councillor S Irvine confirmed that it was for the funding to be ringfenced. Alderman McRandal then asked what the implications of this would be in terms of cost.

In response the Head of Community and Culture advised that in 2022/23 £170,000 had been received from The Executive Office (TEO). That had reduced to £90,000 in 2023/24 and this year she advised that £110,000 had been received. It was noted that £95,000 was required in respect of staff costs to run the Programme. As such if the proposal was agreed she would be required to write a Business Case for £60,000 to cover the costs associated with the Cultural Expression Festivals. At this stage the Director also reiterated that this would be subject to the rate setting process.

Alderman McRandal indicated that he had reservations about this matter particularly given the financial pressures the Council was under as outlined at the recent meeting of the Corporate Services Committee. He added however that he would have no issue with a report coming back at this stage but reminded members that the Alliance Party group did have issues with the Cultural Expressions Programme as is it currently stood. As reported to the Committee at its June 2024 meeting members had been advised that the Cultural Expressions agreement was outdated and would require updating in the near future.

The Head of Community and Culture indicated that following the conclusion of the currently ongoing consultation with groups a report would be brought back to the Committee for consideration.

At this stage Councillor Kendall expressed some concern about the implications of this particularly in considering other funding pots such as the Hardship Fund and as such suggested that to proceed with what was being proposed could open the floodgates.

In response the Head of Community and Culture advised that this issue had arisen with the Events and Festival Funds and subsequently a decision was made to split the community side from the events side due to a number of timing issues around funding.

In summing up Councillor S Irvine advised that his proposal was that through the rates setting process the funding would be guaranteed if by chance a lesser amount of money was received from TEO. He further noted comments made around the rules of the Cultural Expressions Programme and confirmed that everyone was aware of the need to abide by those rules. He added that there would be no new Groups added to the Programme.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor S Irvine, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, with 10 voting For, 3 voting Against and 2 Abstentions, that this Council agrees to consider as part of the upcoming rates setting process sufficient support to the cultural expression programme. Subject to this process, consideration should be given to committing funds from Council which are sufficient to meet the costs of planning activities without the uncertainty of funding coming from other sources, as has been the case for the last two years. Should in year funding become available from other sources, Council's contribution would be adjusted accordingly. This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives in an attempt to ensure that groups can prepare for their events. This will guarantee that each group agreeing to abide by the cultural expression agreement will receive a letter of offer in advance of 31st May, regardless of whether external funding is available via the Good Relations Action Plan, or any other third-party source. This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives, ensuring that all the participating community groups can prepare for their activities without uncertainty regarding funding.

19. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that there were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Ashe the public/press be excluded from the meeting.

20. PEACEPLUS MINTUES PARTNERSHIP - MINUTES (FILE PEACV1) (Appendix VII)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – EXEMPTION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS IF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON.

A report was presented to Community and Wellbeing including minutes from the PEACEPLUS meeting on 7th March 2024.

The Report recommended that Council note the minutes.

The recommendation was agreed.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Kendall, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 10.38pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Planning Committee was held in the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Monday 18th November 2024 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman McIlveen

Aldermen: Graham
McDowell
Smith

Councillors: Harbinson (Zoom) McKee (Zoom)
Kendal (Zoom) Morgan
McClean Smart
McCollum (Zoom) Wray

Officers: Interim Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Acting Head of Planning (G Kerr), Principal Planner (L Maginn) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend were received from Councillors Cathcart, Hennessey, Kerr and McBurney.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made, but Members were reminded that they could declare at any time throughout the meeting.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED:- on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the public and press be excluded from the undernoted items of business.

3. LDP – UPDATED APPROACH TO DRAFT COASTAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

Option 3 NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

SUMMARY

A report from the Director of Prosperity setting out 'policy in development' pertaining to options for Members' consideration and agreement in respect of a draft policy relating to the Coast within the future Local Development Plan (LDP).

4. LDP – DRAFT TOWN CENTRE AND RETAILING UPDATE

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

Option 3: NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

SUMMARY

A report from the Director of Prosperity setting out 'policy in development' pertaining to options for Members' consideration and agreement in respect of a draft policy relating to the Town Centre and Retailing policy within the future Local Development Plan (LDP).

READMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Proposed by Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor McClean that the public and press be readmitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8:41 pm.

Unclassified

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ITEM 9.1

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development
Date of Report	08 November 2024
File Reference	CW 175
Legislation	Environment Act 2021
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: N/A
Subject	Consultation response to the Draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement for Northern Ireland.
Attachments	Appendix 1. Draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement for Northern Ireland - Consultation Version Appendix 2. Draft Consultation response

DAERA has launched a consultation seeking views and comments on an Environmental Principles Policy Statement for Northern Ireland. Under Schedule 2 to the Environment Act 2021, DAERA has a statutory duty to prepare and publish a policy statement, which is defined in the Act as, "...a statement explaining how the environmental principles should be interpreted and proportionately applied: (a) by Northern Ireland departments when making policy; and (b) by Ministers of the Crown when making policy so far as relating to Northern Ireland."

The 'Environmental Principles' are:

1. the principle that environmental protection should be integrated into the making of policies;
2. the principle of preventative action to avert environmental damage;

Not Applicable

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3. the precautionary principle, so far as relating to the environment;
4. the principle that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source; and
5. the polluter pays principle

A draft response has been prepared by the Environmental Health Protection and Development department in consultation with other key services across the Council.

The closing date for responses is 9th December 2024 which will fall before the call in period. Therefore, the response will be submitted following agreement at Council with the caveat that it may be subject to amendment.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the draft response.

Draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement for Northern Ireland – Consultation Version



30 September 2024

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2022 the Assembly approved the elements of the Environment Act 2021 (“the Act”) relating to Northern Ireland devolved matters, including a statutory duty on DAERA (“the Department”) to publish a policy statement on environmental principles, defined as: *“a statement explaining how the environmental principles should be interpreted and proportionately applied by: (a) Northern Ireland departments when making policy; and (b) Ministers of the Crown when making policy so far as relating to Northern Ireland.”* NI departments and UK Government Ministers, making policy for Northern Ireland, will have a statutory duty to have due regard to the statement.

The 5 environmental principles set out in the Act cover fundamental aspects of environmental protection but are not new – they have guided our environmental laws for many years as an integral part of the policy framework we operated under as members of the EU. Leaving the EU removed that framework in most environmental areas. The NI Assembly, by approving the relevant provisions of the Act, has agreed that these principles should provide a framework in domestic legislation for our environment. The policy statement will help guide policy makers across Northern Ireland Departments in developing measures to meet the Executive’s climate change, environmental and overarching Green Growth agendas. The new Northern Ireland Climate Change Act passed by the Assembly in 2022, sets challenging goals to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. The Executive’s multi-decade draft Green Growth strategy promotes a shift to a low carbon society to improve people’s quality of life through green jobs and a clean environment. Our first Environmental Improvement Plan frames Northern Ireland’s response to our environmental challenges for the coming decades setting out our ambition and the pathway to achieving that vision under 6 strategic environmental outcomes:

1. Excellent air, water, land and neighbourhood quality;
2. Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy;
3. Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife;
4. Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea;
5. Zero waste and highly developed circular economy;
6. Fair contribution to UK net zero GHG emissions and improved climate resilience & adaptability.

Annual progress reports will be the key measure of what we have done to implement the EIP and whether our environment has, in fact, improved. The appropriate application of this policy statement across all policy areas will have a key role to play in supporting and driving that improvement.

We all have a responsibility in meeting these challenges and we all have a part to play in the protection and improvement of our local environment as we strive to preserve our planet for future generations.

BACKGROUND: AN OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Since the 1970s, a range of environmental principles have been recognised internationally. These principles offer a framework for the protection for our natural world as well as guidance to judges and decision makers to give laws shape and meaning.

In 1992, the UK signed up to the Rio Declaration, which set out 27 principles to guide countries in future efforts to achieve sustainable development and aimed to link long term economic progress with environmental protection.

The principles included in this statement are also embedded in EU treaties. Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) contains these 4 core environmental principles (in the order they appear):

- (a) the precautionary principle;
- (b) that preventive action should be taken;
- (c) that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source; and
- (d) the polluter should pay.

In addition, Article 11 of the TFEU includes the integration principle, which requires environmental protection measures to be integrated into the definition and implementation of all EU policies and activities.

The UK is also a signatory to a number of international agreements which embrace these principles. After withdrawal from the EU, the UK Government and the devolved administrations have all committed to ensuring these environmental principles will

continue to influence future domestic policy making. However, in order to achieve that a new framework in domestic law was required.

In November 2021, the Environment Bill received Royal Assent and formally became the Environment Act 2021. [Schedule 2](#) to the Act requires a policy statement on environmental principles to be published by the Department after scrutiny by the Northern Ireland Assembly. As per Schedule 2 to the Act, this statement is required to incorporate five core environmental principles (in the order set out in the Act):

- (a) the principle that environmental protection should be integrated into the making of policies;
- (b) the principle of preventative action to avert environmental damage;
- (c) the precautionary principle, so far as relating to the environment;
- (d) the principle that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source; and
- (e) the polluter pays principle.

THE PURPOSE OF THE POLICY STATEMENT

This statement will be used by NI departments and UK Government ministers when making policy decisions for Northern Ireland. In accordance with paragraph 6(2) of Schedule 2 to the Act, it explains how the principles should be interpreted and proportionately applied by relevant policymakers, with a view to ensuring they are equipped to meet their statutory duties, and with greater practical effect.

The desired outcomes of the policy statement are:

- policymakers are assisted to make policy that will contribute to the improvement of environmental protection and the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland;
- policies that will support environmental improvement, or that will at least avoid or prevent environmental damage are promoted;
- where environmental damage cannot be avoided, its original cause is targeted and rectification of the damage at source favoured;
- the associated costs are allocated to those who cause pollution or other environmental damage or give rise to need for action to prevent or rectify it;

- policymakers favour acting in a precautionary manner to protect the environment in the absence of full scientific certainty where there are credible threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage; and
- that the above outcomes and wider environmental objectives prevail across the development of all government policy by ensuring the integration of environmental protection and sustainable development aims and requirements in all departments' policies and activities.

IMPROVEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Schedule 2 to the Act requires the Department to be satisfied that the policy statement, when it comes into effect, will contribute to the improvement of both environmental protection and sustainable development.

While “environmental protection” is defined in the Act (and elsewhere in this document), “sustainable development” is not. Sustainable development seeks to balance the 3 conceptual pillars of social inclusion, environmental protection and economic growth, although there is no single agreed definition. However, the original definition provided by the World Commission on Environment and Development’s *Brundtland Report*, ‘*Our Common Future*’¹ is:

“Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The global agenda for change formulated in that document was bolstered in 2015 by the adoption of 17 sustainable development goals clearly articulated in the UN document, ‘*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*’². The principles of sustainable development have been integrated into the work of all departments through the NI Executive’s draft Programme for Government and the NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan.

This policy statement sets out how ministers should interpret and proportionately apply the principles, so that they are used effectively to shape policy to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. This aligns with section 25 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, which places a statutory duty

¹ [The Brundtland Report: ‘Our Common Future’, 1987](#)

² [Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

on NI departments and district councils to promote the achievement of sustainable development in the exercise of their functions.

This document aims to empower ministers and those working on their behalf to think creatively and use environmental principles in an innovative and forward-thinking way. It does not seek to dictate a set formula for how environmental principles should be applied to policymaking.

The Department is confident that the guidance and measures included in the policy statement will contribute to both environmental protection and sustainable development.

UNDERSTANDING THE STATEMENT

In order to apply the statement, it is important to have an understanding of key definitions within the Act. Listed below are some of the key terms for policymakers to be aware of when applying the statement.

What does 'Natural Environment' mean?

All references to the environment in this statement relate to the 'Natural Environment' which is defined in the legislation as:

- plants, wild animals and other living organisms;
- their habitats;
- land (except buildings or other structures), air and water, and the natural systems, cycles and processes through which they interact.

What does 'Environmental Protection' mean?

This is defined in the Act as:

- protection of the natural environment from the effects of human activity;
- protection of people from the effects of human activity on the natural environment;
- maintenance, restoration or enhancement of the natural environment;
- monitoring, assessing, considering, advising or reporting on anything in the above paragraphs.

What is 'Environmental Impact'?

An environmental impact has been widely defined as any effect caused by a given activity on the environment, including human health and safety, flora, fauna, soil, air, water, climate, resulting from activities, products, or services, or the effect that the activities of people and businesses have on the environment. It is important to note that environmental impacts are not necessarily negative – they can be extremely positive. This statement is not only about reducing or avoiding negative impacts – it is very much seeking to achieve positive impacts too.

What is 'Policy'?

Considered as a broad concept, *"...at its very simplest, a policy is a position that is deliberately taken. In government, the policy decision usually belongs to the responsible Minister, or to the Executive. Public policy is the position in order to achieve a particular goal or objective. Sometimes that objective is to make things better, sometimes it is to stop things getting worse. Sometimes it is aspirational and long-term, sometimes it is very specific and achievable in a shorter timescale. Sometimes it is to fulfil a political commitment, sometimes it is to fulfil a legal obligation, sometimes it is to respond to an emerging situation."*³

Paragraph 11 of Schedule 2 to the Act defines "policy" (for the purposes of the Schedule) as: *"...[including] proposals for legislation but does not include an administrative decision taken in relation to a particular person or case (for example, a decision on an application for planning permission, funding or a licence, or a decision about regulatory enforcement)".*

It is important to note that policy has vertical and horizontal components. So, for example, the NI Executive may be regarded as the highest point in the policy hierarchy and its decisions cascade down through Ministers to the appropriate level for delivery (i.e. vertical policymaking). However, within each level of the hierarchy there will be policy decisions to be made across the relevant department or departments, requiring consistency, coordination and collaboration to ensure appropriate policy integration. This is referred to as horizontal policymaking or, sometimes, "joined-up government".

³ [Making a difference: The NICS guide to making policy that works, p.2](#)

The duty to have due regard to this statement applies across all of these types of policymaking.

What is 'making policy'?

For the purposes of this statement "making policy" includes developing, adopting or revising policy.

DUE REGARD DUTY

Schedule 2 to the Act lays out the mechanism by which policymakers are to take account of the environmental principles policy statement.

This mechanism is the 'due regard' duty which states that when a UK Government minister or NI department is making policy for Northern Ireland they must have due regard to this statement. In the Act the term, 'have due regard to' is only used in respect of the policy statement, giving it an elevated status compared to the much more frequently used, 'have regard to'.

The duty to have due regard is to the principles policy statement rather than the individual principles but this does not lessen the importance of the principles themselves. The duty applies to all policy across NI government (not just environmental policy), subject to limited exemptions laid out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to the Act (see Exclusions to the Policy on p10).

This policy statement should be read alongside other relevant government documents, such as the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI \(where relevant\)](#), and it is important to note that, while the due regard duty is a statutory duty, it does not override other relevant international or statutory obligations.

What is Due Regard?

Having due regard is a significant legal duty, supported by ample case law, and is more onerous than the more common requirement in legislation to 'have regard'. In this context, to 'have due regard' means that in making policy, a body subject to the statutory duty must consciously consider the principles and guidance set out below, which have been established by case law. The most relevant legal authorities in this

area are the Brown case⁴ and the Bracking case⁵, both of which relate to the Public Sector Equality Duty⁶, which applies to a broader range of public authorities than this policy statement. While the Public Sector Equality Duty does not apply in NI (section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 is our equivalent), the case law remains relevant. The Equality Commission for NI has produced a helpful guide to the implementation of s.75, which includes relevant GB and NI case law.⁷

Paragraphs 90-96 of the judgement in the Brown case⁸ set out the following (paraphrased) principles for compliance with a due regard duty:

- the public authority decision maker must be aware of the duty to have "due regard" to the relevant matters;
- the duty must be fulfilled before and at the time when a particular policy is being considered;
- the duty must be "exercised in substance, with rigour, and with an open mind". It is not a question of "ticking boxes"; while there is no duty to make express reference to the regard paid to the relevant duty, reference to it and to the relevant criteria reduces the scope for argument;
- the duty is non-delegable, and
- is a continuing one;
- it is good practice for a decision maker to keep records demonstrating consideration of the duty.

In the case of Bracking, Lord Justice McCombe set out a summary of legal points related to a due regard duty established under 13 previous cases, including the Brown case. The additional points can be further summarised as follows:

- general regard to relevant issues is different from having specific regard, by way of a conscious approach to the statutory criteria;

⁴ R (Brown) v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions [2008] EWHC 3158 paras 90-96. See: <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2008/3158.html>

⁵ R (aoa Bracking) v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions [2013] EWCA 1345

⁶ The Equality Act 2010, Part 11, Chapter 1

⁷ <https://www.equalityni.org/S75duties>

⁸ <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2013/1345.html>

- while there is no obligation to expressly refer to the duty (for example in reasons), doing so is good practice and reduces the scope for argument;
- the relevant duty is upon the Minister or other decision maker personally. What matters is what the decision-maker considered and was aware of. They cannot necessarily be taken to know what their officials know or what may have been in the minds of officials in proffering their advice;
- officials must not merely tell the decision-maker what they want to hear but must be 'rigorous in both enquiring and reporting';
- the public authority concerned will have to have due regard to the need to take steps to gather relevant information;
- an important evidential element in the demonstration of the discharge of the duty is the recording of the steps taken by the decision maker in seeking to meet the statutory requirements; and
- provided the court is satisfied of the above, it is for the decision maker to decide how much weight to give to the statutory factors.

The Bracking Case

The Bracking case is an example of where a statutory 'due regard' duty applied –in the context of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) – which requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

The case was brought after a decision by the Minister for Disabled People to close the Independent Living Fund. In coming to this decision, the Minister had issued a public consultation and an equality impact assessment had been carried out. An application for Judicial Review of the Minister's decision was initially dismissed but that judgement was quashed by the Court of Appeal, which held that the Minister had failed to discharge their duty in relation to having due regard to the PSED.

The key issue leading the Court to this conclusion was that the Minister had failed to show that they had reviewed the necessary evidence to demonstrate they had discharged their duty in accordance with the Equality Act. Furthermore, it was

concluded that where the Minister had been given information to consider it did not provide a full picture of the situation, meaning that the Minister was unable to consider all of the appropriate facts in order to discharge their duty. This ruling highlighted the need to be able to provide evidence that the duty has been discharged.

It is worth noting that the decision to close the Independent Living Fund was reconsidered by a subsequent Minister, who again decided to close the fund. This decision was also challenged in the courts, who found in favour of the Minister as they were able to provide the necessary evidence of having properly discharged their due regard duty.

EXCLUSIONS TO THE POLICY

There are some exclusions to the application of the policy statement which are outlined in paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to the Act:

- Taxation, spending or the allocation of resources within government. "The exemption for 'spending or the allocation of resources' refers to central spending decisions only."⁹ For example, principles such as 'polluter pays' cannot be applied to the allocation of overall departmental budgets. Individual policies that involve spending by Departments will still need to have due regard to the policy statement.
- The armed forces, defence or national security.

If the policy in question is only incidentally associated with the exclusions rather than specifically about one of them, the duty to have due regard to the EPPS will still apply.

PROPORTIONALITY

Proportionality is a general principle used to guide policymakers that has been a key component of EU law over the last few decades. Its basic premise is that action taken should not go beyond what is necessary to achieve the objective/aim of a policy and that competing interests in this regard should be carefully balanced.

The statutory duty on NI departments and UK Government ministers is to have due regard to the policy statement, although that is caveated by paragraph 8(3) of

⁹ The Report Stage (Second Sitting) of the Environment Bill for this Act in the House of Lords

Schedule 2 to the Act, which stipulates that, “*Nothing in this paragraph requires a Northern Ireland department or a Minister of the Crown to do anything (or refrain from doing anything) if doing it (or refraining from doing it) – (a) would have no significant environmental benefit, or (b) would be in any other way disproportionate to the environmental benefit*”. Therefore, policymakers also have an active role in determining what is a proportionate course of action – this does not, however, obviate the need to have due regard to the policy statement.

One of the challenges for the policymaker is to establish what the competing interests are, and how they should be weighted and prioritised. It is difficult to apply general rules in respect of proportionality – each case must be considered on its merits and particular circumstances. Determining a proportionate response should not be solely informed by an assessment of the likely cost of measures – a holistic assessment needs to be made – and the need to apply the principles proportionately should not, in itself, be used as a reason to demote the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development.

Demonstrating consideration of the environmental effects does not necessarily need to be an extensive process akin to an Environmental Impact Assessment. The level of research should be commensurate with the *likely* effect of the policy on the environment. This method allows the policymaker, in appropriate cases, to apply the statement in a lighter touch way. So, for example, there will be policies that it will be quite clear from the outset will have no negative or positive impact on the natural environment. In such cases the policymaker will effectively ‘screen out’ the policy and, providing they can provide evidence to justify that decision, no further assessment will be required. At the other end of the scale will be the large-scale projects captured by the Strategic Environmental Assessment regime. While the completion of an SEA does not in itself exempt a policy from the requirements to comply with this statement, it may well provide significant evidence of the policymaker having due regard to the policy statement. Between these two extremes there will be a wide range of policies where the level of consideration will be a matter of judgement on the part of the policymaker. In essence, as the potential for environmental effects increases, more robust consideration will be necessary.

It is important to note that where policymakers are relying on existing assessment regimes as evidence of compliance with the due regard duty, the focus of those assessments may be strictly on the need to avoid or reduce harm, rather than seeking opportunities for improvement.

IMPLEMENTATION AND RECORD-KEEPING

As discussed above, ensuring that the duty to have due regard to the policy statement is properly implemented and, more importantly, that supporting evidence can be provided, is key to ensuring that policymakers meet their statutory duties and effectively apply the statement and its principles.

It is difficult, and perhaps even counter-productive, to be too prescriptive about how the due regard duty should be discharged and evidence of doing so presented, but there are some fundamental issues that should be addressed:

- staff responsible for developing policy should be aware of and understand this policy statement and the duty to have due regard to it;
- departments must have effective processes to have due regard to the EPPS, on an iterative basis, from the earliest stage in the policy cycle;
- staff must have access to the relevant resources and information needed to properly consider the principles;
- information must be recorded and retained as appropriate to be able to demonstrate how the policy statement has been applied; and
- it must be recognised that consideration of the principles for individual policies sits within wider departmental frameworks of governance, oversight and assurance.

All of the above processes and mechanisms should be as transparent as practicable and provide an appropriate audit trail.

While it will be for NI Departments and Ministers of the Crown to determine how they should record the substance, scope and timing of the consideration given to the policy statement, and the actions taken as a result, the Department will provide policymakers

with a template and additional guidance on completion. This will provide an opportunity for consistency of approach across business areas and departments.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Integration Principle

Description

This principle can be defined as ensuring environmental protection requirements are integrated into Departments' policies and activities, with a view to promoting sustainable development. In addition to its inclusion in the Rio Declaration of 1992, this principle is enshrined in Article 11 of the TFEU and applies to not only environmental policy but to all policies and activities.

The integration principle is a founding principle that: (a) establishes a means by which environmental protection and sustainable development can be promoted across all relevant policy areas; and (b) allows a holistic approach to applying the other principles below, either individually or in combination.

Advice for policymakers

The scope of this principle is wide ranging and should be applied at an early stage to every policy area where there is a potential impact on the environment, positive or negative. The application of this principle across a range of policy sectors should allow for a more cohesive approach which promotes the ethos of environmental protection.

Policymakers should, as a matter of best practice, think proactively, creatively and innovatively about how their policy and its implementation can contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development. This should be considered not only in the context of minimising negative impacts but also maximising positive impacts. The integration principle should be applied in a holistic manner so that the potential environmental impacts of policies are weighed against the overall purpose of the policy and potential economic and social impacts.

Prevention Principle

Description

This principle concentrates on anticipating and preventing any potential environmental harm rather than reacting to any damage caused by unregulated action. While prevention rather than cure is the ideal, there will be circumstances where considering the rectification at source principle and/or the polluter pays principle simultaneously will be entirely appropriate and, indeed, beneficial.

The prevention principle is about adopting an approach of promoting sustainable, environmentally friendly policies as early as possible in the policy cycle. This is not only environmentally sound but, in many cases, will also be the most economically beneficial approach. While the actions that apply the prevention principle should normally be taken in preference to those that would allow harm to occur and then seek to rectify the damage, that will not always be possible. However, even where environmental damage has already occurred, the prevention principle may still be applied to prevent further damage within a specific area and/or to prevent its further spread.

Advice for policymakers

The policymaker's starting point should be to consider if the development of a specific policy could create an impact that should be prevented. The policymaker should then assess their policy goals alongside how the policy can contribute to protecting the environment or promoting sustainable development. This is the most effective deployment of the principle itself. Moreover, the policymaker needs to examine and understand the potential for environmental damage and/or improvement. Where environmental damage has actually occurred, the policymaker may still apply the principle either in isolation or with other principles to prevent further damage from occurring.

When creating policies, it is important to consider the suitability of the principle and the environmental impact. It is the sustainability of the prospective policy design that needs to be considered and how the implementation of environmental protection can be integrated at an early stage. It may not always be possible to totally exclude the

possibility of some environmental damage – the overall benefit to society has to be factored into the decision-making.

Scientific evidence should be considered when assessing whether environmental damage has taken place or may take place, either directly or indirectly, together with factors such as the scale, geographical extent, and potential longevity of damage. In this case the precautionary principle may also need to be considered. It may be necessary to modify the policy as a result of these findings (or even abandon the policy altogether), but those decisions can only be taken after careful consideration of all of the relevant facts and expert advice.

Precautionary Principle

Description

The precautionary principle is designed to assist with decision-making where there is scientific uncertainty and is a core principle of environmental law. It requires that *“...where there are threats of serious [or] irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation”*¹⁰. A precautionary approach captures the idea that regulatory intervention or the modification of a policy may be necessary if there is the potential to cause harm to the environment, even if the supporting evidence is incomplete or speculative and the economic costs of regulation are high.

In essence, the precautionary principle is a risk management tool that supports policymakers where there is a plausible risk that a proposed policy could cause serious or irreversible damage to the environment and there is limited scientific evidence in respect of its likelihood and severity. In this context ‘risk’ means the combination of the likelihood of occurrence and the impact of such damage.

The key focus should be on the level of scientific uncertainty, whether that relates to the intrinsic threat (e.g. could a substance have negative effects on people or the environment?) or the likelihood of occurrence (e.g. will people or the environment be exposed to the substance through its intended use).

¹⁰ [Environment Act Explanatory Note page 153](#)

Advice for policymakers

For policymakers the precautionary principle can play an important role in addressing multiple layers of uncertainty. It should be deployed when there is a threat of serious or irreversible damage to the environment, and where there is a lack of available scientific certainty regarding its seriousness and likelihood.

As with all risk management approaches, it is implicit that for any given situation there is an acceptable level of risk, but that level is not static and will vary according to the degree of uncertainty that serious damage will occur. Put another way, the greater the risk of the damage being serious, the less certainty the policymaker requires to decide to: not proceed with the policy; modify the policy; or impose regulatory measures. In such cases the priority should be to prevent environmental damage.

It is important to try to identify the level of threat posed to the environment by the implementation of the policy. However, when the level of threat cannot be identified or is uncertain this should not hinder the policymaker from adopting a precautionary stance if the likelihood is that serious harm may be inflicted on the environment.

Where the policymaker has identified a potentially serious risk to the environment, a scientific analysis should be carried out to assess the level of threat associated with the implementation of the policy. This scientific analysis should be robust (using the best available science – i.e. the most reliable scientific data available and the most recent results of international research). After this material has been collated, all relevant parties should engage and discuss the process of integrating precautionary measures into the policy.

The principle should be applied in a holistic manner – it is not enough for the policymaker to simply rely on the fact that a scientific risk evaluation has been carried out – ultimately, the policymaker needs to consider the data provided and weigh this against other factors such as potential social and economic effects.

Ultimately it will be for the policymaker to balance all of the relevant social, economic and environmental factors when deciding on the appropriate level of caution to be employed in the policy design and implementation processes.

Rectification at Source Principle

Description

The principle that environmental damage should, as a priority, be rectified at source: Environmental damage should be rectified by targeting its original cause and taking preventive action at source. This principle works closely with the prevention principle to ensure damage to the environment is tackled when (and where) it occurs so that it does not have a long-term environmental impact on the local community and biodiversity, spread further afield or have a delayed effect.

Advice for policymakers

This principle places the initial responsibility for harm that will or may result from a policy on the decision-maker. The policymaker when applying the principle should first seek to prevent pollution rather than attempting to shift it downstream in the process where it may be less visible. This encourages processes that are inherently clean rather than approaches which treat the problem as or after it occurs. However, where the avoidance of all harm is not possible, responsibility for managing environmental damage should rest with the polluter or the source of environmental harm.

The policymaker needs to have an understanding of where the potential environmental damage is originating from and whether this has any transboundary issues. It is important to recognise that it may not always be possible to prevent environmental damage completely and in this scenario the approach should be to minimise the potential impact as much as possible. Where pollution or other potential environmental damage are unavoidable, consideration should be given to the application of control and remediation measures at the earliest practicable point in the relevant process. Where relevant, this should be done in tandem with the polluter pays principle to ensure that those causing pollution/damage are made amenable for the costs of applying such measures.

Polluter Pays Principle

Description

This principle essentially means that the costs of preventing, controlling and remediating pollution or other environmental damage should be borne by those who

cause it rather than those suffering from the effects of environmental damage, or the community at large.

There are typically two approaches which are associated with the principle: command and control; and market approach. Firstly, the command-and-control approach includes performance and technology standards, such as environmental regulations in the production of a given polluting technology. The market-based approach and its instruments include fines, charges or ecotaxes, an example of which is the carrier bag levy, and also licence or permit fees, caps and trading schemes.

Advice for policymakers

The policymaker first of all needs to consider the potential for environmental damage to occur and what the effect of this damage is likely to be.

The next step should be to analyse who the polluter is or could be, if the policy were to proceed. Are they a group or an individual? Polluters range from large industrial companies (sewage overflows, chemical spills and releases of noxious fumes and odours etc.), through agricultural operations (slurry spills and run-off into waterways etc.), to individuals dropping litter, chewing gum etc. The things the policymaker should be assessing in this regard are: the practicality and fairness of identifying the polluters; the practicality of assessing the costs; the ability of the polluter to pay some or all of the relevant costs; if it is a group or sector, whether these costs can be distributed across that sector or specifically apportioned; impacts on others such as consumers and supply chains; the existence of a practical mechanism to make the polluter pay; and whether the funds collected are used to benefit the environment or for some other purpose.

It should then be considered what mechanisms or cost controls can be put into place to alleviate the effects of the environmental damage. When considering this, the policymaker has to weigh up the financial implications as well the environmental damage and apply this proportionately.

Where applicable, the policymaker needs to determine what is an appropriate method of payment, whether this is through fines, civil sanctions or enforcing charges and whether that method will act as an incentive or disincentive to environmental damage. Consideration should also be given to what should happen if the polluter can't be

identified, does not have the necessary resources, or has gone out of business – for example, in some cases it may be appropriate to impose a levy on businesses to provide a fund to carry out remediation, or to consider placing a statutory charge on land or assets.

The objective of remediation is to provide the same level of natural resources or services as would have existed if the damage had not occurred. There are 3 types of remediation defined in the Environmental Liability (Prevention and Remediation) Regulations (NI) 2009: primary; complementary; and compensatory. Primary remediation is any remedial measure which returns the damaged natural resources or impaired services to, or towards, the state that would have existed if the damage had not occurred. Complementary remediation is any remedial measure taken in relation to natural resources or services to compensate for the fact that primary remediation does not result in fully restoring the damaged natural resources or impaired services to the state that would have existed if the damage had not occurred. Compensatory remediation is intended to compensate for interim losses of natural resources or services that occur from the date of damage until remediation has achieved its objective (i.e. it does not refer to financial compensation, which is a separate issue). The policy maker should exercise their discretion when determining the most appropriate remedy, or combination of remedies, that will promote environmental protection and restoration.

GENERAL APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES

Advice to Policymakers

From the outset of policy development, policymakers should be aware of their statutory duty to have due regard to the environmental principles policy statement and, where practicable, build in appropriate protections or enhancements throughout the policymaking process. This process does not necessarily involve an extensive exercise of collecting data/information. Information is provided in the next section as to how the policy maker can show compliance with the duty. More guidance on policy development and implementation is available through the Green Book.¹¹

¹¹ [The Green Book \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk)

There will be other factors that policymakers need to take into consideration, such as other existing statutory obligations and other relevant matters – e.g. the balancing of economic or social considerations, or the advancement of innovative technologies where the environmental impact has not yet been fully assessed.

With regard to the application of new technologies and innovation, the proper implementation of the due regard duty does not imply any positive or negative bias. This policy statement is neutral on the matter, but it is essential that the implications of introducing new technology are robustly considered in the context of the 5 principles and that appropriate evidence of such considerations can be produced as required.

While it is impossible to cover all potential scenarios in this policy statement, some of the actions that might be taken as a result of considering the principles include:

- the amendment of existing policy options or the inclusion of additional options during the initial policy design phase;
- reframing the problem the policy is intended to solve or the details regarding policy options and their implementation;
- the specific inclusion of one or more of the principles in legislation or guidance, particularly where principles are to be an integral part of the decision-making or policy implementation process;
- the postponement of a policy until sufficient evidence is obtained to support decisions – e.g. applying the precautionary principle may indicate a need to further explore the potential for environmental damage.

How the Principles can be considered together

Principles can and should be considered together and this is likely to be the most effective approach for environmental protection and sustainable development. There are common threads between each of the principles and there will be situations where the policymaker deems it appropriate to apply a combination of some or all of the principles when considering policy design and implementation. For example, the polluter pays and rectification at source are two principles which can often be effectively deployed together to maximise environment protection by firstly tackling and minimising the environmental impact and then reinforcing positive habits through

the polluter pays principle. However, it should be recognised that while consideration of some of the principles will be appropriate to all relevant policy decisions, there will be circumstances that do not lend themselves to the application of specific principles.

There is no set order in which the principles should be considered, and policymakers are encouraged to deploy the principles in a holistic and proportionate manner that maximizes environmental protection as far as that is practicable. What is particularly important is that the principles should be considered from the outset of the policymaking process and reviewed as the policy develops before any substantive decisions have been taken. While there is no strict hierarchy in applying the principles, there will be obvious situations where it will be appropriate to apply certain principles at certain times – e.g. deploying the prevention principle before the rectification at source principle, given that its aim is to prevent environmental damage from occurring at all.

OTHER RELEVANT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Policy makers will always have to consider other evolving policy and initiatives. It would be impossible within this document to predict all future policy development and initiatives but, at the time of writing this document, examples may include any test to be introduced under the Green Growth strategy and the just transition principle set out in s.30(3) of the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022. It is the responsibility of policy makers to consider evolving and new policy, and to apply the appropriate weighting regarding environmental effects. Typically, such policy initiatives will relate to specific sectors or policy areas, which may give rise to potential policy tensions. It is important to note that the due regard duty encourages such considerations, but it may also be necessary for policy makers to seek appropriate legal advice.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

As mentioned previously, the policymaker is required to have due regard to this principles statement. Monitoring and reporting need not be an extensive exercise of data and information collection. However, the exercise should be proportionate and fit for purpose for the environmental implications being addressed. One way of showing that the requirement has been fulfilled is for the policymaker to record the consideration given to the policy statement in respect of the relevant policy decisions, along the lines of an Equality Impact Assessment or Rural Needs Assessment. The

Department does not intend to prescribe the content of such a record but will provide a 'toolkit' for policymakers, including a recording template, and will be able to provide advice to other departments to assist them in meeting their statutory obligations. It is important for policymakers to note that they may be required to provide evidence to those to whom they are accountable, including the NI Assembly and the public that their statutory duties have been met. The Department will monitor its own compliance with the statutory duty and will report through normal business planning processes. It is recommended that all departments put their own monitoring and reporting processes in place.

WINDSOR FRAMEWORK / PROTOCOL ON IRELAND/NORTHERN IRELAND

Annex 2 & 4 to the Protocol, now superseded by the Windsor Framework, set out some environmental areas in which Northern Ireland is required to remain aligned to EU laws. Policy in these areas was developed within the framework of environmental principles contained in the TFEU. While it may seem reasonable to assume that the implementation of EU law listed in the Annexes to the Protocol would necessarily mean that the principles had been adhered to, policymakers should note that there is no exception in the Act to the requirement to fulfil the due regard duty when making policies introduced in the implementation of the Windsor Framework in Northern Ireland – e.g. NI legislation transposing a Directive listed in the Annexes. While this could potentially lead to some difficulties, for example if there was significant divergence between EU and NI requirements on environmental principles, that is not currently the case. Policymakers are advised to consider all policy areas captured by the Windsor Framework in the context of both the relevant EU policy and the environmental principles policy statement, and to seek specialised legal advice where necessary.

Annex A

Consultation Questions on the Environmental Principles Policy Statement

1. Do you believe the Introduction, Background and Purpose sections give the reader a good understanding of the aims and objectives of the EPPS?
2. Do you believe the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development is communicated adequately within the EPPS?
3. Is there enough information provided on the due regard duty to effectively assist policy makers to comply with the statement?
4. Do you believe the descriptions of the 5 principles and advice for policy makers give adequate assistance to policymakers on how the principles should be applied?
5. Departments will be required to monitor their compliance of the EPPS – do you believe the guidance given in the ‘Monitoring and Reporting’ section is sufficient?
6. Do you have any other comments on the draft policy statement which are not covered by the previous questions?

The consultation will run for a 10-week period. Questions should be answered via the Citizen Space platform by completing the online survey at: <https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/daera/draft-environmental-principles-statement>

Ards and North Down Draft response to the Consultation on Draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement

1. Do you believe the Introduction, Background and Purpose sections of the draft statement give the reader a good understanding of the aims and objectives of the EPPS?

To a certain extent however, in the introduction the first paragraph outlines the approval of the Act to the devolved NI government and goes on to detail the requirement to publish a policy statement on environmental principles and provide clarification how the principles should be applied and by whom when making policy. The second paragraph goes on to further describe what they cover and then goes on to outline how it will guide policy makers. However, the actual five core environmental principles set out in the Act are not detailed until page 3. It is therefore suggested that the 5 principles are set out clearly in the earlier section of the introduction for the reader as well as being repeated in the later overview section which may give a better initial understanding of the 5 principles at the outset before going into further detail later on in the statement.

2. Do you believe the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development is communicated adequately within the EPPS?

No

New definitions of sustainability reject the concept of economic growth because they recognise that endless growth on a finite planet is not feasible. Instead, they promote development models that acknowledge **planetary boundaries**, focusing on maintaining ecological balance, ensuring long-term well-being, and addressing social equity. This shift is driven by the urgent need to mitigate climate change, prevent biodiversity loss, and live within the Earth's ecological limits while improving the quality of life for all.

Modern sustainability thinking should be reflected in the EPPS, acknowledging that ecological limits should be respected as they are essential for a functioning and healthy economy and society. These new definitions of sustainability call for transformative changes to the economy, recognising that sustainable development cannot occur without confronting the limits imposed by nature and prioritising wellbeing and social equity above growth.

3. Is there enough information provided on the due regard duty to effectively assist policy makers to comply with the statement?

Yes. The inclusion of references to 'due regard' case law is deemed to be particularly helpful for policy makers to achieve compliance with this duty. In relation to the implementation and record keeping (of the supporting evidence) the commitment to the policymakers to provide a template and additional guidance would be deemed

appropriate to ensure consistency of approach. It is noted that the EPPS refers to the processes and mechanisms being transparent and provide an appropriate audit trail. Some specific consideration may need to be given to the disclosure of such information under FOI / EIR

4. Do you believe the descriptions of the 5 principles and advice for policy makers give adequate assistance to policymakers on how the principles should be applied?

In addition to the descriptions and advice provided, the Department could give consideration to the development of an additional guide to support the application of the principles, possibly which provides worked examples/ case studies of the application of each principle in policy making, highlighting best practice where possible.

5. Departments will be required to monitor their compliance of the EPPS – do you believe the guidance given in the ‘Monitoring and Reporting’ section is sufficient?

We support the introduction of a toolkit for policymakers, including a recording template, to provide consistency across government. We recommend additional guidance on how the principles should be applied to policy making (as suggested in our response to Q4) is included in this toolkit. It is understandable that the Department does not want to be overly prescriptive but as reference has been made to the toolkit and recording template, it would be helpful if there was further explanation or possibly a draft of the toolkit and recording template.

We note that in this section of the EPPS, a comparison is drawn with the Equality Impact Assessment and the Rural Needs Assessment. There is a risk of developing too many screening exercises, which could lead to a decline in the quality of assessments. Given that sustainable development is in the scope of this policy statement, and ‘People Planet and Prosperity’ are the three central missions of the Programme for Government, we suggest that a single statutory impact assessment is created for ‘Sustainable Decision-Making’ that brings together environmental, climate, social and economic considerations and streamlines existing and future statutory screening requirements. Equality and rural considerations can be included in this assessment.

6. Do you have any other comments on the draft policy statement which are not covered by the previous questions?

There may be scope to finish the policy statement giving a commitment that the policy will be reviewed and updated in light of any changes additions/following a period of experience in the use of the statement in making policy decisions in NI.

Unclassified

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ITEM 9.2**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Director of Environment
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Assets and Property Services
Date of Report	15 November 2024
File Reference	90313
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	NIE Networks - Consultation on Cluster Substations
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Draft Cluster Substations Consultation Response to NIE 13112024

Background

NIE Networks have launched a consultation on Cluster Substations:

<https://www.nienetworks.co.uk/about-us/regulation/cluster-substation-update-consultation>

The purpose of this consultation paper is to present proposals to amend NIE Networks' cluster connection charging methodology, as set out in NIE Networks' Statement of Charges for Connection to the Northern Ireland Electricity Networks distribution system (the 'SoCC') Appendix 2. Ultimately it is NIE Networks' view, that the existing network and current charging arrangements do not provide the capability to connect the volume of renewables required to meet 2030 targets in time without a level of change or investment. While these consultation proposals alone will not enable the 2030 targets to be met, they aim to be a step towards addressing the stagnation that currently persists.

This consultation seeks views on whether NIE Networks should:

Not Applicable

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1. Amend the charging arrangements for assets needed to increase cluster substation capacity (e.g. second transformer), to align with the charging arrangements in place for the original cost of the cluster substation. Currently the costs of the second transformer are wholly chargeable to the customer that triggers the need and this is limiting the further development of existing clusters.
2. For new cluster sites, expand the scope of the generation that can be considered when designating a cluster i.e. to include generation that is at early-stage planning, with an appropriate weighting factor applied, and to look at including two transformers from designation stage.
3. At what stage NIE Networks should seek approval from the UR for costs associated with developing existing and new cluster substations.

Proposed Consultation Response

This programme of work by NIE Networks is of key importance in the context of the Council's Sustainable Energy Management Strategy and our capacity to meet specified carbon emission reduction targets.

A draft response to the consultation has been prepared by officers and is attached at Appendix 1. The deadline for response is 6 December 2024

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approve the draft consultation response at Appendix 1.

Ards and North Down Borough Councils Response to NIE Cluster Substations Consultation.

Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the NIE Cluster Substations consultation. Council supports NIE's commitment to better engagement with stakeholders in this important process. Council has reviewed the various consultation materials, and the proposed scenarios and offers the following comments and recommendations:

1. Do you agree that the current Cluster methodology needs to be revised to ensure substantial progress towards 80% renewables

ANDBC acknowledge that the current situation regarding the charging for network and clusters is not feasible in the short term if the target of 80% renewables by 2030 is to be met.

With the actions required from the Climate Change Act of 48% reduction by 2030 and the policy of moving towards electric vehicles we will continue to require increased electric capacity within our grid. In order to do this, we feel that there needs to be a more agreeable approach for developers of renewable energy. We like lots of other councils, business and organisations are addressing the change to a green fleet of electric vehicles where possible.

In order to try and meet our own targets of reaching 48% reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050 we are relying partially on the 80% renewable energy target to help reduce the emissions from our electric consumption, whilst progressing through items on our energy action and biodiversity plans so that we are not reliant on the 80% renewable energy target being met. This 80% target has to be met primarily by private developers and by the power stations.

ANDBC feel there are a lot of time restrictive procedures and costs to large scale renewable energy producers, who have to assume the costs for upgrading any transformers or work to clusters.

Section S applications between NIE and SONI are required under the Transmission Interface Agreements (TIA), and then the ensuing Utility Regulator (UR) approval process for pre-construction and construction delay the process. Establishing the required clusters to meet the 2030 target is proving near impossible.

Long planning procedures, and exhaustive costs and requirements for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA's) are stagnating the progress of meeting the 80% renewables target by 2030.

Due to the nature and layout of Northern Ireland and the vast areas of countryside we understand that there would be significant costs incurred by customers to enable large generator sites to be able to connect into the current infrastructure.

ANDBC therefore agree that charging arrangements to increase cluster substation capacity need to be amended to help progress renewable generation as rapidly as possible. We would propose the cost is passed to the Utility Regulator.

2. Do you support the high-level proposals set out as per Section 3, outlining the installation of a second transformer at existing cluster substations?

ANDBC would strongly support the high-level proposals set out in Section 3 as it will substantially reduce timelines for connections and also reduce the cost to the generator. This helps to promote business growth, whilst also protecting the general customers under the current agreement, both large and domestic.

We strongly support the proposals as it would also be more environmentally friendly to build a second transformer at an existing cluster and not disrupting the natural environment for a new cluster site. We strongly support sustainability and biodiversity within our borough.

Should the proposal be maximised and provide an additional 360MVA this will help generators to connect wind farms, PV farms, etc easily in the race to meet set targets under the Climate Change Act.

3. NIE Networks proposes that a weighting is applied to generators who at earlier stages in the development pipeline and be included when calculating the threshold for designation of a cluster substation. Do you agree?

ANDBC recognise the difficulties involved in foreseeing the design of clusters and where these are located to best suit current and future plans.

With the geographical layout of NI there are many possible sites for wind farm development, and increasingly more and more installations of solar/PV panel arrays.

More and more businesses are planning large scale PV arrays on land next to their assets that could feed surplus electricity to the grid. Therefore, ANDBC feel that all parties need to collate their knowledge and future planning skills and foresee where the best location is for new clusters and also what size these would be.

As the suggestion put forward says, we would agree that an appropriate weighting factor is applied at pre-planning for the possibility of future renewables projects. The weighting factor would address potential generation from sites, probability of future projects going ahead, costs of installation to both customer and to NIE (unless the charging arrangement changes), and if the addition of a second transformer at new sites could alleviate the risk of future expansion at any new cluster location.

ANDBC would apply the following weighting factors to the stage as below:

Stage	Weighting Factor
Consented	1.0
Submitted to Planning or PAC	0.8
EIA commenced	0.5
EIA commenced with generator in AONB or similar	0.4
Withdrawn from Planning	0.3
Early Stage	0.3

4. What process should be set up to allow NIE Networks to obtain accurate information of renewable generators who are in early stages of planning?

We feel that developers, government agencies, planning departments, NIE and SONI must all come together and look at future development plans and pre-planning and planning applications to jointly agree what capacity a cluster and possible transformers require in different areas of the country.

ANDBC feel that an online portal should be set up by NIE to allow developers to enter an expression of interest in a site, what the project is, size of power generation are they considering, and the timescale. This should be a system whereby the details are entered for NIE to see but otherwise kept private from other developers. This would allow NIE to generate a clearer understanding of what changes are needed to existing clusters, if a second transformer is required, or if a new cluster would be needed for the area.

It would also help NIE to ascertain if further upgrades to the distribution network may be needed. Obviously, there would need to be a cut off point to enable proper design of the network in areas, but the addition of a second transformer from the outset at each site would then allow any further expansion.

5. Should second transformers be included from the outset in Cluster Designation and if so, would a value of 81MVA be appropriate to trigger the need for two transformers at newly designated cluster infrastructure?

ANDBC approve the proposal for second transformers to be installed from the outset at new sites, and that the UR should meet the cost to enable NI to push ahead with a 2050 target of net-zero.

We feel the addition of a second transformer at new sites from the outset will allow larger renewable generating sites to connect to the grid more easily and remove any unforeseen future developments in areas.

The structure would already be in place so would reduce delays that we currently have in areas where there is not sufficient capacity currently for new larger renewable connections such as windfarms, and the timelines required to put the necessary infrastructure in place is too extensive and also too costly in most cases for developers.

ANDBC would agree that if second transformers are to be included from the outset in Cluster Designation then the value of 81MVA would be appropriate to trigger this automatically new cluster infrastructure.

6. Should charging arrangements for second transformers be updated to match the charging arrangements in place for first transformers, where generators pay their MVA share of the cost to connect to the second transformer?

ANDBC are of the opinion that generators should pay their MVA share of the cost to connect but would support additional remuneration backing from the UR if we are to try and meet our 2030 targets. The targets have been set by government at climate summits so therefore must increase public spending to help organisations meet their targets and also to ensure they meet renewable targets laid out.

Whilst organisations should not rely wholly on renewable generation targets, it is something that they have based emissions on in the roadmap to net zero. So therefore, it is vital that the government, and in this case the UR, help to fund this to ensure that people can then afford the renewable energy and not fall below the poverty line.

7. What criteria should be applied for NIE Networks to be entitled to bring forward an approval request to UR for the cost recovery associated with a second transformer?

We would be supportive of an automatic trigger but essentially one which takes on projects in the planning pipeline. Whilst there is a risk of this taking longer for the capacity of the transformer to be filled, it also allows for additional larger generators to connect earlier than what would be deemed normal due to the delay in the process of cluster installation, which can take up to 6 years from designation to energisation. Adding a second transformer when the primary transformer reaches a certain MVA rating is a much more feasible solution financially, environmentally, and socially.

ANDBC and all other councils, and organisations have a target of 48% emissions reduction by 2030 under the Climate Change Act and if a large renewable energy developer had to wait 6 years to get a new cluster added to cope with greater supply to the grid, then this would be adding a severe risk to organisations' plans and roadmaps. Whilst most organisations are not depending on the renewables target being met and will be progressing with actions within the energy plans, having the 80% renewables target met could be the difference in whether an organisation achieves their own target. This also applies to the possible introduction of biomethane into the natural gas supply to reduce the emissions factor for their gas supply.

ANDBC understand that if further clusters were needed over and above the second transformers then this could have a very problematic situation to meeting the 80% renewables target due to the timeline required for planning and site selection, and also additional switchboards being needed.

From: DOJ Victims and Witnesses Mailbox <DOJVictimsWitnesses@justice-ni.gov.uk>

Sent: 22 October 2024 11:12

Subject: DOJ News Release - CALL FOR VIEWS: NEW VICTIM AND WITNESS STRATEGY 2025 – 2030 LAUNCHED

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Good morning all,

Please see the below press release that was issued.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

21 October 2024

Call for Views: New Victim and Witness Strategy 2025 – 2030 launched

The public is being invited to have their say on ideas and priorities to include in a strategy to help improve the experiences of victims and witnesses when engaging with the criminal justice system.

The Department of Justice would like to hear from members of the public, from community and voluntary organisations, and from anyone with an interest in and knowledge of the victim and witness experience

In particular, those with experience of being a victim of or witness to crime are being asked to respond to the call for views, which will help the Department of Justice develop a new Victim and Witness Strategy for 2025–2030.

A full public consultation on the strategy will be launched in January 2025.

The closing date for submitting views is 29 November 2024. You can respond online via Citizenspace at: [New Victim and Witness Strategy 2025-2030 - Call for Views - NI Direct - Citizen Space](#) or alternatively via the Department of Justice website at: [Victim and Witness Strategy 2025-2030 Call for Views | Department of Justice](#)

Kind Regards

Amy

Amy Porter

Victims and Witnesses Branch | Victims Support Division | Department of Justice | Massey House | Stormont Estate | Belfast BT4 3SX

Working in partnership to create a fair, just and safe community where we respect the law and each other



Unclassified

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ITEM 10.1

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	14 November 2024
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Ongoing Conversations Invitation
Attachments	Invitation letter, Dates & Venues and ToRs

The Council has received an invitation from Artsawonder inviting Members to participate in its new programme, Ongoing Conversations, which is funded by the International Fund for Ireland (see attached correspondence).

Members are asked to consider if they wish to attend any of the following Conversations events:

17-19 January 2025

Best Western Plus White Horse
Hotel
68 Clooney Road
Derry – Londonderry BT47 3PA

28 February –2 March 2025

Whistledown Hotel
6 Seaview
Warrenpoint BT34 3NH

Not Applicable

9-11 May 2025

Haslem Hotel
Lisburn Square
Lisburn BT28 1TS

13-15 June 2025

Maldron Hotel Portlaoise
Abbeyleix Road
Meelick
Portlaoise R32 HKN3

The attached correspondence requests the Council to either confirm which Conversations Members wish to attend or to nominate other party colleagues (ie: a full party member, aged between 20 and 40) who would be interested. It is not essential to commit to attending all meetings. Attendees will not be asked to pay for meals and accommodation, but travel expenses are not paid.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers the invitation.



Artsawonder

Finding uncommon ground in Peace and Reconciliation



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

Ongoing Conversations

I am writing to introduce Artsawonder (www.artsawonder.com) and to invite your participation in our new programme, **Ongoing Conversations**, which is funded by the International Fund for Ireland.

Artsawonder was set up with a mission to strengthen and advance the cause of reconciliation and citizenship on the island of Ireland through the medium of the Arts, for the public benefit and in support of the Peace Agreements. Members of the group have been individually involved in Peace building initiatives from the early 1990s and their coming together as Artsawonder seven years ago has produced several significant fresh initiatives involving the Community and those drawn from the tradition of Political and Religious leadership. Artsawonder, while acknowledging and respecting diversity, aims to promote the concept of 'a higher level of disagreement' through its work.

Ongoing Conversations will allow you to meet different political groupings and their affiliates from across the islands of Ireland and Britain, and engage with them in regular, ongoing, meaningful dialogue to work around issues relevant to you and your party. This facilitated dialogue series, 12 in total over a two-year period, began in early October 2024. Each meeting will:

- be between the representatives of different political groupings;
- include individuals who play various roles within their respective political party including elected representatives, elected Local Council/County Councillors, Members of the Local Assembly (MLAs), Teachta Dála (TDs) or Members of Parliament (MPs);
- run over a weekend Friday evening to Sunday lunchtime;
- will have music and the arts as a fundamental element of each meeting;
- have accommodation and meals provided at no cost to the attendee or his/her party; and
- be held in venues in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

We would welcome your support of this initiative by asking you to either confirm which Conversations you wish to attend or to nominate other party colleagues (ie: a full party member, aged between 20 and 40) who would be interested. It is not essential to commit to attending all meetings, as we are aiming to create a pool of interested participants. You will not be asked to pay for meals and accommodation, but travel expenses are not paid.

I can be contacted on artsawonder@gmail.com or on 07977 115416.

Yours faithfully

Mary Verner, Project Co-ordinator

Address: 50 Shore Rd Rostrevor Co.Down BT34 3AA

email: artsawonder@gmail.com Tel: 0044 (0)75 2506 4574 / (0)79 2772 9631



ARTSAWONDER
ONGOING CONVERSATIONS
DATES & VENUES 2024-2025

22-24 November 2024	Hillgrove Hotel, Leisure & Spa Old Armagh Road Latlorcan Monaghan H18 RK15
17-19 January 2025	Best Western Plus White Horse Hotel 68 Clooney Road Derry – Londonderry BT47 3PA
28 February –2 March 2025	Whistledown Hotel 6 Seaview Warrenpoint BT34 3NH
9-11 May 2025	Haslem Hotel Lisburn Square Lisburn BT28 1TS
13-15 June 2025	Maldron Hotel Portlaoise Abbeyleix Road Meelick Portlaoise R32 HKN3



Artsawonder

Finding uncommon ground in Peace and Reconciliation

ONGOING CONVERSATIONS

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 Introduction.

The **Ongoing Conversations** programme engages different political groupings and their affiliates from across the islands of Ireland and Great Britain, to allow them to participate in regular, ongoing, meaningful dialogue and to work relevant to the participants.

As with all progressive processes the trajectory of the peace process is not easy to predict and it is not always easy to identify the obstacles and opportunities that lie ahead as it makes progress.

It is planned that these Conversations are not only concerned with crises but will rather serve as a continuous forum which considers how opportunities can be fully exploited as well as how obstacles can be navigated. The Conversations will not necessarily seek consensus around the issues discussed but members will be expected to at least reach “a higher quality of disagreement.”

2.0 Objectives.

- 2.1 to build connections and relationships between politicians North-South/East-West,
- 2.2 To share any consensus and/or constructive findings or possibilities from the meetings with party structures and officials.

3.0 Criteria for membership.

2.3 Group criteria.

- Each meeting will not exceed 20 – 25 members.
- Each Conversation will be inclusive of the political perspectives and interests of the main political stakeholders involved in the peace process.



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

2.4 Individual criteria.

Participants in each Conversation will:

- be a representative of a political grouping based in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Great Britain.;
- play a role within their respective political party including all card carrying members elected representatives, elected Local Council/County Councillors, Members of the Local Assembly (MLAs), Teachta Dála (TDs) or Members of Parliament (MPs);
- demonstrate a willingness to work with others from different political, cultural and religious backgrounds in support of the peace process.

2.5 Expectations of members.

Participants are expected to:

- attend weekend Conversations;
- be able to work collaboratively with others;
- share useful elements of Conversations with groups to which they are affiliated, but they agree to not attribute specific comments to individuals;
- accept that Conversations are not secret, but should be considered as private. Participants will not seek to publicise any aspect of The Conversation.

4.0 Operations and practicalities.

4.1 Meetings

- This facilitated dialogue series, 12 in total over a two-year period, will begin in October 2024. with each meeting running from Friday evening to Sunday lunch-time, involving 2 overnight stays and located in various locations throughout Ireland;
- The agenda of the meetings will be agreed by the participants upon arrival at the venue.
- If desired and agreed by the members, small groups to explore specific issues may be formed to report back to full meetings;
- External expert contributors may be invited to participate in all or parts of meetings.

4.2 Basic operating principles and modalities.

The number of participants at any one meeting will not exceed 20-25

- Participants may agree to invite expert opinion on specific aspects of the peace process to provide inputs to or participate in specific meetings.
- Conversations will be held in hotels and other venues as appropriate
- Accommodation and meals will be provided at no cost to the attendee or his/her party;



- While the membership in the first instance will comprise representatives from the political sector, participants may wish to consider at some future stage to open the forum up to representatives from other disciplines or sectors.

5.0 Facilitation and servicing of Conversations

- Conversations will be managed and serviced by a small voluntary peace building group based in Rostrevor, Co. Down called ‘Artsawonder’;
- Artsawonder will serve each Conversation through a team of facilitators;
- Artsawonder will raise and manage all funds related to the smooth and successful operation of the Conversations;
- Artsawonder will serve the Conversations by providing all secretarial, administrative and logistical functions as well as ensuring that communication with and between members is efficient and effective.
- Artsawonder will serve the Conversations without influencing the discussions and in appreciation of the need for privacy will seek no publicity in the fulfilment of this role.

6.0 Evaluation

In accordance with the requirement of the programme’s funder, an independent academic evaluator has been appointed and will attend all meetings and will respect strict confidentiality at all times.

7.0 Artistic contributors

Artistic contributors will attend all meetings, in line with Artsawonder’s ethos which believes in the positive influence and value that music and arts can play as part of the relationship building process.



Unclassified

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ITEM 11

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	31 October 2024
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Nomination to Outside Bodies
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Drainage Council - Candidate Information Booklet Appendix 2 - Drainage Council - Application form

Places on working groups are filled through nomination at the Council's Annual Meeting and are thus held by individual Members rather than Parties. When a position becomes vacant, it reverts back to Council to nominate a Member to fill the place rather than Party Nominating Officers.

Following the resignation of Councillor Gilmour from the Fair-Trade Working Group, a place has become available.

The below table reflects the current membership of the Working Group:

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Alderman Gibson	Councillor Irwin
2	Councillor S Irvine	Councillor S Irvine
3	Alderman Keery	Councillor Gilmour
4	Councillor Irwin	-

Not Applicable

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In addition, the Chief Executive has received correspondence from the Department of Infrastructure informing her that a position has become available on the Drainage Council. Members are asked to consider whether they wish to submit an application to become a Non-Executive Member of the Drainage Council. The Candidate Information booklet and the application form are appended to this report. The Department request that applicants ignore the closing date listed on the form but that any applications are submitted as soon as possible.

The below table reflects the current membership of the Working Group:

	2023/24	2024/25
1	Councillor Kerr	-
2	Councillor Wray	Councillor Wray

Next Steps

Nominations are sought from Council to fill the place held by Councillor Gilmour on the Fair-Trade Working Group for the remainder of the term as necessary and Members are asked to consider nominating a Member to apply for the position on the Drainage Council.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council:

- (a) Nominate a Member to the Fair-Trade Working Group and;
- (b) Consider whether they wish to individually submit an application to become a Non-Executive Member of the Drainage Council.

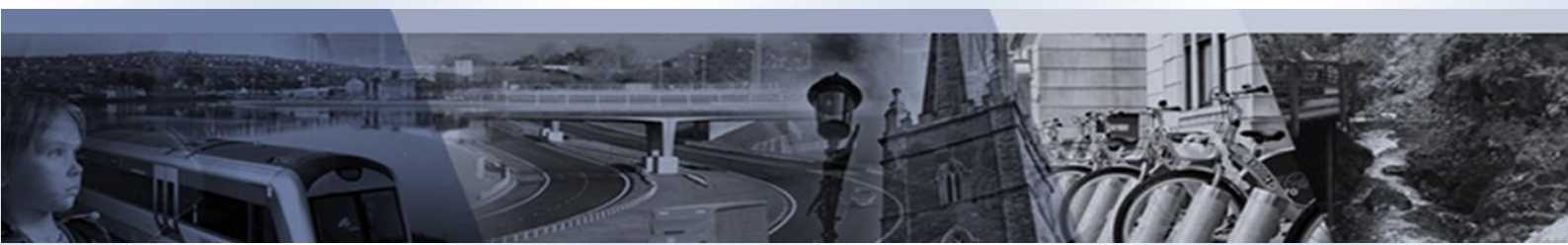
APPOINTMENT OF TEN COUNCILLORS TO THE BOARD OF DRAINAGE COUNCIL NORTHERN IRELAND

Completed applications must be returned to DfI Public Appointments no later than 12 noon on Friday 19 July 2024

Jennifer Macrory
Public Appointments Unit
Department for Infrastructure
1st Floor, James House
2-4 Cromac Avenue
Belfast BT7 2JA

CPANI

The Commissioner
for Public Appointments
Northern Ireland



The Department for Infrastructure invites applications for ten Non-Executive Councillor Members to the board of Drainage Council NI. Seven of the appointments will be effective immediately and a further three from 01 January 2025 and will be for a period of up to four years.

This information booklet can be made available in other formats, such as Braille, large print, audio etc.

To request this or any other information on the appointment process please contact:

- Tel: 028 9054 0994
- Text relay service 18001 028 9054 0994
- E-mail your request to: publicappointmentsunit@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk
- Public Appointments Unit, Department for Infrastructure,
1st Floor, James House
2-4 Cromac Avenue
Belfast BT7 2JA

Privacy Notice

The Department for Infrastructure will only process the personal data you provide us for the purpose of recruiting members to the Board of Drainage Council Northern Ireland and in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI Code of Practice. For more information, please see our Privacy Notice at [GDPR Privacy Notices for DfI Business areas | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

CONTENTS OF THIS BOOKLET

Section 1	Information about the Drainage Council Northern Ireland
Section 2	Role Profile - Councillors to the Board of Drainage Council NI
Section 3	Application and Selection Process
Section 4	Equal Opportunities Monitoring and Complaints Procedure
ANNEX	Probity and Conflicts of Interest Guidance

KEY APPOINTMENT PROCESS STAGES

Stage in Process	Timescale
Closing Date for applications	19 July 2024
Interviews	5, 6 and 8 August 2024
Date of appointments	Seven of the appointments will be effective immediately and a further three from 01 January 2025

Section 1 – Information about DfI Rivers and the Drainage Council NI

DfI Rivers Vision and Responsibilities

1. Our vision is to manage flood risk both now and into the future, to maintain and create sustainable living places and support economic development.
2. To support this vision, Rivers aims:
 - to reduce the risk to life and the damage to property from flooding from rivers and the sea; and
 - to undertake our work in a sustainable manner.
3. In support of these aims, Rivers' objectives are to:
 - implement and inform sustainable flood risk management policies to meet society's social, environmental, and economic needs, whilst taking account of climate change;
 - implement the requirements of the Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2009 for the assessment and management of flood risks;
 - inform new development decisions from a flood risk perspective;
 - reduce the number of properties currently at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea;
 - sustainably maintain flood defences, drainage infrastructure and the designated watercourse network;
 - discharge lead Department responsibilities for the emergency response to flooding;
 - communicate flood risk through flood mapping and community engagement;
 - deliver the Rivers element of the Living with Water Programme;
 - prepare for the further commencement of the Reservoirs Act (Northern Ireland) 2015;
 - support and develop all staff to achieve our objectives; and
 - deliver quality services for our customers and stakeholders in a fair and equitable way.
4. We also provide secretariat and administrative support to the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland, a non-Departmental Public Body which carries out a general scrutiny role on the drainage functions of the Department.
5. The DfI Rivers are not responsible for coastal erosion or water quality and pollution issues.

Drainage Council

6. The Drainage Council exists to perform a general scrutiny role in relation to the Department's drainage functions and has a statutory duty to ensure uniformity of treatment on drainage issues throughout Northern Ireland.

Key Priorities

7. The Key Priorities include:
 - determining which watercourses and sea defences should be designated for maintenance by DfI Rivers at public expense. Recommendations for designation may be put forward either by DfI Rivers or by any other Government Department or person;
 - making informed determinations if an Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken for a scheme, whether proposed drainage works should be approved;
 - ensuring equality of treatment in accordance with Government policies on fairness and equality (Section 75);
 - considering the Department's proposals in relation to flood defences, drainage schemes or variations to schemes;
 - considering the Department's proposals in relation to Byelaws associated with drainage works;
 - acting in a consultative capacity on other flood protection and drainage related matters such as the Department's annual maintenance programme and in the environmental assessment of proposed drainage works; and
 - examining information presented in Environment Statements prepared by DfI and reaching a reasoned conclusion (informed decision) on the significant effects of the drainage scheme on the environment. This reasoned conclusion is included in the decision for approval of a scheme.

Constitution

8. By Statute, the Council's membership of 18 consists of 10 representatives from Councils, a specialist adviser on drainage matters, an officer of the Department representing drainage, a representative of fishery interests, a representative from each of industry, tourism, agriculture

and conservation interests and a representative from the Department to represent Planning interests.

9. A Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson are elected by members at the opening meeting of each new Council term.

Governance Arrangements

Accountability

10. Drainage Council as a corporate body, is responsible to the Minister of the sponsoring Department (DfI), who is in turn accountable to the public on the extent to which it fulfils its statutory duty and meets its objectives and general standards to public service.

Liability of Drainage Council Members

11. Drainage Council members have a corporate responsibility for all their actions. An individual member who has acted honestly and in good faith will not have to meet out of his/her own personal resources any personal civil liability which is incurred in the execution or purported execution of his/her Council functions, save where the person has acted recklessly.
12. For further information on the relationship between The Drainage Council and DfI Rivers please see the following link: [Memorandum of understanding between DfI and Drainage Council NI](#)

Section 2 – Role Profile

13. Applicants for these appointments will be a local Councillor currently serving on one of the eleven local Councils of Northern Ireland.
14. Applicants will be expected to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the representative role of local councils in the context of the development of drainage and flood defence schemes.
15. Members of the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland, including the Chair, have corporate responsibility for ensuring that the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland complies with all relevant statutory or administrative requirements including requirements in respect of the use of public funds.
16. The role of the members of the Drainage Council is as follows:
 - Make informed determinations regarding designations undertaken for maintenance by DfI Rivers at public expense;
 - ensure all applications are treated impartially and equally in accordance with Government policies on fairness and equality (Section 75);
 - consider the Department's proposals in relation to flood defences, drainage schemes or variations to schemes;
 - examine information presented in Environment Statements prepared by DfI and reach a reasoned conclusion (informed decision) on the significant effects of the drainage scheme on the environment. This reasoned conclusion is included in the decision for approval of a scheme;
 - consider the Department's proposals in relation to byelaws associated with drainage works; and
 - acting in a consultative capacity on other flood protection and drainage related matters such as the Department's annual maintenance programme and in the environmental assessment of proposed drainage works.

Training

17. Appropriate induction training will be provided to the appointee.

Time Commitment and Remuneration

18. The new appointees will be expected to attend the Drainage Council meetings and other ad hoc meetings as required. Three to four Drainage Council meetings are held per year, depending on the volume of Drainage Council business to be considered. Meetings are held in such locations within Northern Ireland as the Council may determine. Drainage Council meetings may vary in time commitment, but meetings are generally inside normal working hours. Members of the Drainage Council can claim reasonable travel expenses incurred on Drainage Council business but receive no other remuneration.

Expenses

19. Following appointment, reasonable travelling expenses and subsistence will be paid to attend meetings in accordance with the Drainage Council's processes. Any additional costs associated with childcare, dependents or having a disability will also be considered to enable the Member to attend evening meetings. All remuneration and expenses are subject to deduction of income tax and national insurance.
20. The appointment is not pensionable.

Period of Appointment

21. Seven of the appointments will be effective immediately and a further three from 01 January 2025 and will be for a period of up to four years. If the appointee ceases to be a member of the local council, they will cease to be a member of the Drainage Council, but no such cessation shall take effect until that person's successor is appointed.
22. It is the current policy of the Department of Infrastructure that there is no appointment or re appointment without an open competition taking place. Current appointees on their first term may apply in competition for a second term, subject to evidence of an appropriate standard of performance having been achieved during the initial period in office and evidence of continued adherence to the seven principles of public life.

Code of Practice

23. A Code of Practice governs the activities of the Board. To ensure that public service values remain at the heart of the Drainage Council, Members are required, on appointment, to

demonstrate high standards of corporate and personal conduct and to subscribe to the Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies.

24. Councillors when appointed will be expected to demonstrate a high standard of probity and integrity and commitment to the seven principles underpinning public life.

Section 3 – Application and Selection Process

25. The Department for Infrastructure is committed to the principles of public appointments based on merit, with independent assessment, openness, and transparency of process. The Department is also committed to equality of opportunity and welcomes application forms from all suitably qualified applicants irrespective of religious belief, gender, race, political opinion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or whether they have dependants.
26. The Department for Infrastructure is committed to improving the diversity of the Boards to which it makes appointments and wants to encourage more women, younger people, people from ethnic minorities and people with disabilities to apply for appointments. Applications from these groups would be particularly welcome.
27. These appointments are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (CPA NI) and the competition may be examined by CPA NI for compliance with the Commissioner's Code of Practice.

Application Procedure

28. Application forms or further information about the process can be obtained from the Public Appointments Unit at the address on the cover of this document or by e-mailing a request to: publicappointmentsunit@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk
29. Hard copy or electronic versions of the application form are acceptable. You must not reformat the electronic application form. CVs, letters, or any other supplementary material in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms will not be accepted.
30. Applications must be completed fully and clearly, using black ink or typescript minimum font size 12. It is strongly recommended that you read the guidance notes on the completion of the application form.
31. All sections of the application form must be completed in full.
32. Information Documents and Application Forms can be provided in alternative formats. Any applicants who require assistance should contact the Public Appointments Unit. All

reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the needs of applicants/candidates with a disability.

33. Application forms should be submitted by post, email or in person to arrive with the Public Appointment Unit by **Noon, Friday 19 July 2024** (see contact details on cover sheet).
34. Please check your application form before submitting to the Department, as failure to provide a fully completed application may result in your application form being excluded from the process.
35. Applications made to the Department will be acknowledged within three working days of receipt. If receipt is not acknowledged, applicants should contact the DfI Public Appointments Unit (028 9054 0994).
36. Candidates invited for interview will be eligible to claim reimbursement of reasonable travelling expenses incurred within the UK and Republic of Ireland in attending for interview. Travel claims will usually be paid at public transport rates. Any other appropriate expenses, such as particular costs associated with disabilities or childcare, can also be claimed.

Selection Process

37. All Councillors who have been nominated by their Council will be invited to interview. The selection Panel will comprise Gary Quinn, Director of Rivers Operations, Alan Strong, Chair of the Drainage Council and Catherine Magee, an Independent Member from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI.
38. At interview, Councillors will be expected to demonstrate that they have knowledge, experience, and capacity in the following:
 - Contribution to Council or Public Life - examples of the type of evidence the panel will be looking for are listed below. You will not be expected to meet each one of the examples.
 - a positive contribution to public life and the wider Local Government sector for the benefit of the general public;
 - ability to challenge or scrutinise appropriately when necessary;
 - able to align policy and delivery considerations; and

- an understanding of the role of DfI Rivers.
- Effective Communication skills – examples of the type of evidence the panel will be looking for are listed below. You will not be expected to meet each one of the examples.
 - excellent communication and interpersonal skills;
 - the ability to communicate effectively with colleagues, other senior leaders and the public;
 - ability to work collaboratively; and
 - experience in applying influencing and negotiating skills to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes.

39. Those Potential or perceived Conflicts of Interest, along with probity and integrity will be reviewed with candidates at interview.
40. The panel will also check with the applicant that they can meet the time commitment involved with the appointment role.
41. At interview, all candidates must satisfy the panel that they adequately meet all recruitment aspects of the appointment. The Minister for Infrastructure will take the final decision on who to appoint.
42. A written record will be made of the discussions and an applicant summary will be prepared by the selection panel. The applicant summary will provide the Minister with an objective analysis of each candidate's skills and experience based on the information provided by the candidate at interview.
43. The Minister may decide to create a reserve list to cover any unforeseen vacancies that arise within 12 months of the date of the Minister's decision.

Timetable / Time Frame

44. The deadline for receipt in all cases is **Noon, Friday 19 July 2024**. It is the responsibility of the applicant, considering their chosen method of delivery, to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for their application to arrive with the Department on or before the deadline. **Late applications will only be considered in exceptional circumstances**. Please ensure that posted applications bear the correct amount of postage as any shortfall may lead to a delay in delivery, causing you to miss the deadline. Applicants who send their application form electronically are also required to meet the closing deadline for receipt in this office. If the timetable is varied, applicants will receive notice and an explanation of any variation which may affect them.
45. Interviews are expected to be held on **5, 6 and 8 August 2024**.

Disqualified Candidates

46. Under the terms of the House of Commons Disqualifications Act 1975, and the Northern Ireland Assembly Disqualification Act 1975, existing MPs and MLAs cease to hold their elected office if they take up an appointment to a public body listed in the legislation.
47. If an individual holding a public appointment decides to stand for election as an MP or MLA, it is their responsibility to check whether the public body to which they belong or the office that they hold is listed in the appropriate Disqualification Act.
48. If the public body to which an individual belongs or the office that they hold is listed in the Disqualification Act they must immediately notify the Department of their intention to stand for election. To avoid any disqualification issues from arising later they should resign their appointment before submitting their nomination as candidate in an election. If they have not resigned their public appointment before submitting their nomination as a candidate and are subsequently elected as an MP or MLA their election will be void.

Conflicts of Interest and Probity

49. The Department must ensure that any individual appointed is committed to the seven principles of conduct underpinning public life and values of public service. **These principles are: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.**

The successful candidate will be asked as part of their appointment to sign a declaration committing to the seven principles.

50. The information pack includes copies of the leaflets entitled “Probity and Conflicts of Interest – Guidance for Candidates” and an information leaflet from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (NI) about “Conflicts of Interest, Integrity and Making a Complaint”. These provide information on these issues, including some examples to help applicants evaluate whether they have a real, perceived, or potential conflict.
51. The Department must take account of any actual or perceived conflict of interest. Therefore, applicants, in their application form, must disclose information or personal connections which, if they were to be appointed, could lead to a conflict of interest, or be perceived as such. Failure to do so could lead to the appointment being terminated.
52. It is very important that all applicants provide appropriate details on their application form of any interests which might be construed as conflicting with the appointment for which they have applied. If it appears, from the information provided on the form, that a possible conflict might exist, or arise in the future, this will be fully explored with the applicant with a view to establishing whether it is sufficiently significant to prevent the individual from carrying out the duties of the post. The Panel will do this at interview stage.
53. You will also be asked on your application and at interview to declare whether you are involved, or have been involved, in activities that could call into question your own reputation and/or damage the reputation of the body to which you are applying for. In this regard, the Department may carry out probity checks with the Insolvency Service to determine if applicants are recorded on the Disqualification of Directors or Bankruptcy registers. Any potential probity issues detailed in your application form or of which the panel is aware will not prevent you from being called for interview but will be explored with you at the interview to establish how you would address the issue should you be successful in your application.

Other Public Appointments

54. Departments have a duty to satisfy themselves, as far as practicable, that those they appoint to the Boards of public bodies will carry out their duties in an efficient and effective manner.

The Department for Infrastructure will, therefore, be checking with other Departments if there are any probity or performance issues associated with applicants who hold other public appointments. Similar information will be provided by this Department to other NICS Departments on request about all associated board members.

The Two Terms Rule

55. In accordance with the CPANI Code, those who have served two terms in the same position on the same board cannot apply through open competition for a third term. If any applicant has served two terms in this position, his/her application will be discounted at the sift stage.

Double Paying

56. Applicants who already work in the public sector need to be aware that:
- if appointed, they will be asked to obtain confirmation from their employer that any remuneration due and time worked for this position are truly additional to their existing job role and is not a duplication with salaried employment (unless allowed under the terms and conditions of employment).
 - In the interests of minimising the potential for double paying to occur the Department reserves the right to contact your employer regarding your candidature.
57. Former Civil Servants are subject to rules on the Acceptance of Outside Business Appointments, Employment or Self-Employment for a period of up to two years after leaving the NI Civil Service. Individuals in this category, who wish to apply, should check their eligibility to do so with their former Department.

Publicising Appointments

58. A Press Release will be published to announce the appointments. The Commissioner for Public Appointments also requires that announcements about successful candidates should contain details of any recent political activity. Consequently, should you be appointed, you will be required to complete a political activity form. Details of any political activity, together with some of the information that you have provided in your application form, will be made public in the press announcement. This applies particularly to any other public appointments you may hold and to any significant political activity recently undertaken by you. The Press Release will include:

- Your name;
- A short description of the body to which you have been appointed;
- A brief summary of the skills and knowledge you bring to the role;
- The period of appointment;
- Any remuneration associated with the appointment;
- Details of all other public appointments held and any related remuneration received;
and
- Details of any political activity declared in the last 5 years.

Section 4 - Equal Opportunities Monitoring and Complaints Procedure

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form

59. The Department is committed to providing equality of opportunity. The Department monitors applications to ensure that equal opportunities measures are effective in its appointments processes. Applicants are therefore asked to complete the Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form attached to the application form. The information is purely for monitoring purposes. It is **not** made available to the selection panel and does **not** play a role in the decision-making process. The information will be analysed independently by staff in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and will be treated in strict confidence.

Complaints Procedure

60. The Department is committed to getting this appointment process right first time. However, if you are not entirely satisfied with any aspect of our service, please tell us and we will do our best to resolve the matter. Our aim is to resolve any complaint quickly and you are invited initially to bring any concerns you may have to the official named below. However, if you still feel dissatisfied after this approach, you may initiate a formal complaint in writing.

Please direct your concerns in the first instance to:

Gavin Irwin

Public Appointments Unit, Department for Infrastructure

1st Floor, James House

2-4 Cromac Avenue

Belfast BT7 2JA

Email: gavin.irwin@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

If you remain dissatisfied, you may then write to:

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland

Dundonald House, Annexe B, Stormont Estate, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast

BT4 3SB

Email: info@publicappointmentsni.org

PROBITY & CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the information contained in the leaflet “CPA NI Guidance on Conflicts of Interest, Integrity and how to raise a complaint” which provides examples of the types of issues that may give rise to conflicts of interests.

Standards of behaviour

Ministers expect that the conduct of those they appoint to serve on the Boards of public bodies will be above reproach. Everyone who puts themselves forward for a public appointment must be able to demonstrate their commitment to the maintenance of high standards in public life.

The Seven Principles Underpinning Public Life

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

Selflessness - Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends.

Integrity - Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity - In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability - Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness - Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty - Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership: Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and

challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. A link is provided to the revised principles. [Seven Principles of Public Life](#)

As part of the selection process, you will be tested on your commitment to maintaining high standards in public life with particular emphasis on probity issues and conflicts of interest.

What is a conflict of interest?

Public Appointments require the highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity, and objectivity, in relation to the stewardship of public funds and the oversight and management of all related activities. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable, or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the body concerned should be declared.

There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.

No-one should use, or give the appearance of using, their public position to further their private interests. This is an area of particular importance, as it is of considerable concern to the public and receives a lot of media attention. It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for a public appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the individual and the board that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a perceived conflict of interest on the part of a board member can be extremely damaging to the body's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would be. The fact that a member acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form for you to complete. This asks you to consider and declare whether you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

No - each case is considered individually. If you are short-listed for interview, the Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to contribute effectively and impartially on the Board and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. For example, it may be possible to arrange for you to step out of meetings where an issue is discussed, in which you have an interest. However, if, following the discussion with you, the Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the probity of the Board or the appointment they can withdraw your application from the competition. The summary of the outcome of the interview process, which is put to the Ministers, will include clear written

reference to any probity issues or perceived or actual conflicts of interest connected to any candidate put forward as suitable for appointment. It will include sufficient information to ensure that the Ministers are fully aware of any of these matters and can make an informed decision.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Department after my appointment?

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Department may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would be deemed to have breached the seven principles of conduct underpinning public life and may terminate your appointment.

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

This situation may arise where the applicant is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the Panel, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the candidate in the application form. They will then explore this at interview with the candidate.

What happens if a conflict of interest arises after an appointment is made?

This could arise for two main reasons. The first is that the member's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in doing so, a conflict with their work on the board becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the body, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.

In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Chair of the Board and the Chief Executive of the body concerned, in consultation with the Sponsoring Department, to decide whether the member can continue to carry out their role in an appropriate manner and each case is considered individually.

It may be that the conflict is such that it would be impractical for the member to continue on the board, if they would have to withdraw from a considerable amount of the body's routine business. In such, cases, the member may be asked to stand down from the body.

You may be asked to sign a declaration of commitment to the above principles as a condition of your appointment.

DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE APPLICATION FORM

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NON-EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS OF THE DRAINAGE COUNCIL NORTHERN IRELAND

Completed applications must be returned to DfI Public Appointments no later than 12 noon on **Friday 19 July 2024**

Jennifer Macrory
Public Appointments Unit
Department for Infrastructure
1st Floor, James House
2 - 4 Cromac Avenue
Belfast BT7 2JA

CPANI
The Commissioner
for Public Appointments
Northern Ireland

Candidate No: _____

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APPLICATION FORM
NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBER OF DRAINAGE COUNCIL COUNCILLOR APPOINTMENTS

The Application Form is in two parts. The closing date for the return of completed application forms is 12 Noon on Friday 19 July 2024.

PART A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

- Typewritten or electronic versions of the application forms are welcome and should be completed in Arial with a minimum font size of 12. Handwritten applications should be completed using black ink.
- If your application is submitted by e-mail, we will require you to sign Part A when you attend interview.
- Please do not staple, tape, or stick additional information to this form. CVs, letters, or any other supplementary material in place of or in addition to the completed application form will not be accepted.
- We would advise you to retain a copy of your application for your own information.
- Applications will not be reviewed until after the closing date.
- We will only process the personal data you provide us for the purpose of recruiting members to the Board of the Drainage Council and in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI Code of Practice. For more information, please see our Privacy Notice at www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/dfi-public-appointments

Please send all both parts of your completed application to:

Jennifer Macrory
Public Appointments Unit
Department for Infrastructure
1st Floor, James House
2 - 4 Cromac Avenue
Belfast BT7 2JA

Or by email to: publicappointmentsunit@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

1. PERSONAL DETAILS

Title (Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms/etc):										
Surname:										
Forename(s):										
Former surname(s) (if any):										
National Insurance Number: (if applicable)	<table><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>									
Permanent address, including postcode:										
Telephone No (including STD code):										
Mobile:										
E-mail address:										
Address for correspondence, including postcode: (if different from above)										
Telephone No of correspondence address (including STD code): (if different from above)										

We will normally contact you by email; however, if you would prefer to be contacted by a different means then please indicate this here.

By Telephone ☐

By Mobile ☐

By Post ☐

- Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs) and Fast-Track Voluntary Arrangements (FTVAs);
- Bankruptcy Restrictions Orders or Undertakings (BROs/BRUs);
- Debt Relief Orders (DROs); and
- Debt Relief Restrictions Orders or Undertakings (DRROs/DRRUs)

3. Reasonable Adjustments

<p>Please let us know if you require any reasonable adjustments, or arrangements to enable you to attend for interview or take up an offer of appointment. The selection panel will only be advised of any adjustments they need to know about to manage the interview process.</p>
<div></div>

PART B: PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS

Candidate No: _____

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1. **PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS** – please list all current public appointments, giving the name of the public body, the position held, the length of the appointment and any remuneration paid.

Public Body	Position Held	Dates		Remuneration
		From	To	

Have you ever been a member of the Drainage Council Board?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you have previously served on this board, please indicate when and the positions held	Position Held	From	To

7. PROBITY AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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Before you complete this section, it is important that you read the guidance on probity and conflicts of interest contained in your information pack.

a) Are you prepared to abide by the seven principles of public life?

Yes ☐

No ☐

b) Have you, your partner, or your immediate family, any business or other interests or personal connections that might be construed as conflicting with the appointment for which you have applied?

Yes ☐

No ☐

c) Are there any other probity issues which might cause embarrassment if, in the future, they are raised in public or any other issues you feel the Department for Infrastructure may need to be made aware of?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you answered yes to questions b) and/or c) above, please provide details below.

Any potential probity issues or conflicts of interest detailed above will not prevent you from being called for interview but will be explored with you at that time to establish how you would address the issue should you be successful in your application.

8. DECLARATION

I have read and understood the information provided in the Candidate Information Booklet. I declare that I am available to meet the time commitment required for this role.

I have read the 'Probity and Conflicts of Interest: Guidance for Candidates' information leaflet and I understand that, if appointed, I must raise with the Departmental Permanent Secretary and the Chief Executive of the public body, any probity or conflict of interest issues that might arise during my term of appointment and that my failure to do so could lead to my appointment being terminated.

I undertake to inform DfI Public Appointments Unit in writing of any change in my circumstances which may occur between the date of my application and any possible date of appointment.

I have read the information pack and understand my responsibilities in relation to statutory disqualifications and public appointments. I declare that the information I have given in support of my application is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and reflects my own individual experience, personal achievements and undertakings and all statements contained therein relate to me personally. I understand that if I am found to have suppressed any material fact, or to have given false answers, I will be liable to disqualification or, if appointed, to dismissal.

I understand and accept that the information I have provided will be processed by the Department for Infrastructure, in accordance with its Data Protection Registration, for the purposes of making these public appointments; and that this may involve disclosing information to other Government Departments, the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland, or anonymously in response to Assembly Questions and other enquiries.

I also understand and accept that, if appointed, my details will be recorded and held within the Public Appointments database and my name will also be published in the Public Appointments Annual Report.

Also, that some of the information I have provided will be included in a press release announcing my appointment and therefore placed in the public domain.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Unclassified

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ITEM 12**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Director of Place
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	18 November 2024
File Reference	RDP 63
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Queen's Parade Update
Attachments	

Background

As Members will be aware the Council and the Department for Communities (DfC) entered into a Development Agreement with Bangor Marine Ltd (BM) for the development of lands at Queen's Parade, Bangor in May 2019. Following that, BM finalised its plans for the development and submitted a planning application. The application was agreed by the Council on 26 January 2021, however, the Department for Infrastructure did not permit the Council to issue the determination until 29 September 2022. Since then, BM has been working up the detailed designs and information required to comply with their pre-commencement conditions as outlined in their planning approval, gaining approval of these for Phase 1, Marine Gardens, on 5th November 2024.

Members will also be aware following a recent press statement that BM plans to commence works on site early 2025.

Not Applicable

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For this commencement date to be met there are three outstanding issues that need to be finalised:

Development Agreement and Quality Specification

Under the terms of the Development Agreement (DA), as amended by the agreed Deed of Variation, BM must submit plans, including the technical specifications, for the proposed works to Marine Gardens and the McKee Clock arena. The Council was also obligated to appoint an Integrated Consultancy Team (ICT) to assist it with assessing the proposals put forward by BM.

The Council has now received the specifications for the works, and these are being assessed by Council officers and the ICT. Once agreement on the specifications has been reached, the ICT will prepare a Specifications Report for the Council's consideration and approval, it is anticipated this will be brought to Decembers Place and Prosperity Committee. Following approval, the specifications will be used to ensure the works are completed as agreed.

Crown Estate

The majority of Marine Gardens sits within the Recreational Lease from the Crown Estate. Protracted negotiations have been ongoing with the Crown Estate over several issues around the proposed design/specifications. Most of these have been resolved and it is anticipated that the remaining will also be settled within the next couple of weeks.

At the meeting of the Corporate Services Committee held on 12 November 2024 it was agreed to execute the final Recreational Lease and to grant a licence to Bangor Marine to commence work on site if the Lease has not been sealed subject to certain terms and conditions. This work will continue.

Deed of Variation

As with all major developments, changes to the initial agreements are proposed and accepted with the passing of time. This has been the case with the development of Queen's Parade. The Development Agreement was signed in May 2019 and a Deed of Variation (DoV) was agreed in January 2023.

Since then, further negotiations have taken place which require an additional DoV. This agreement is currently being finalised and it is anticipated it will be brought to Decembers Place and Prosperity Committee for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council gives delegated authority to the Place and Prosperity Committee, which is to meet on 5 December 2024, to review and agree the Specifications Report and the Deed of Variation to enable the works on site to commence in the New Year.

Unclassified

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ITEM 15

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	27 November 2024
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	15 November 2024
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Notice of Motion Status Report
Attachments	Notice of Motion tracker

Please find attached a Status Report in respect of Notices of Motion.

This is a standing item on the Council agenda each month and its aim is to keep Members updated on the outcome of motions. It should be noted that as each motion is dealt with it will be removed from the report.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes the report.

NoM Ref:	Responsible Committee	Date Received	Submitted by	Notice (Original and any amendment)	Council & Committee Meetings (Date & Item)	Status (Most recent status update at the top followed by detail of what has been accomplished to date)	Responsible Officer	Final Outcome
11	Community & Wellbeing	31.05.15	Councillor Muir & Alderman Keery	Rory McIlroy Recognition	Council June 2015 Corporate Services Committee October 2015	Officers discussing options with McIlroy Organisation	Graeme Bannister	
330	Environment	21.01.19	Councillor Brooks & Councillor Smith	This Council brings back a report on providing a shelter or sheltered area near the slipway in Donaghadee which would provide cover for the growing numbers of open water swimmers that use the area on a daily basis.	Council January 2019 Environment Committee 06.02.19 Item 16.3	Report to be brought back to Committee	Peter Caldwell	
370	Environment	13/09/2019	Councillor Cathcart & Alderman Gibson	That this Council acknowledges that Council byelaws are in need of review. Many of our Council byelaws are now outdated and do not cover new housing developments and playparks in the Borough. The Council therefore will carry out a comprehensive review of Council byelaws	Council - September 2019 Referred to Environment Committee - October 2019 Environment Committee 02.09.20 Item 12	Review of the byelaws to commence and be undertaken in three stages. Phase 1 - Scope, Phase 2 - Council Review and Phase 3 - Recommendation and Decision	Richard McCracken	
419	Community & Wellbeing	20.10.20	Councillor Brooks & Councillor Chambers	"I would like to task officers to produce a report to consider what could be a more environmentally friendly and benefit the wellbeing of the community for the use of the disused putting green on the Commons and play park at Hunts park in Donaghadee . Following the success of the Dog park in Bangor and the demand for a Dementia garden, both should be considered as options in the report. The process should involve consultation with the local community."	Council October 2020 Community & Wellbeing Committee December 2020	Report to November C&W Committee. Consideration of Masterplan and application of play strategy with local consultation when it takes place in Donaghadee	Stephen Daye	
514	Community & Wellbeing	19.05.22	Councillor Cummings & Councillor Johnson	Business case for redesign of the parallel sports pitches and facilities at Park Way, Comber	Council June 2022 Community & Wellbeing Committee September 2022 and deferred to October 2022	Council agreed Comber 3G pitch is ranked 21st in project prioritisation. Stakeholder engagement to commence at the appropriate time	Ian O'Neill	

516	Corporate Services	20.06.24	Councillor Greer & Councillor McKee	Report exploring the possibility of introducing a policy that shows commitment to supporting the wellbeing of our workforce by ensuring appropriate support is available to anyone undergoing IVF.	Council June 2022 Corporate Services Committee October 2022 Corporate Services Committee November 2024	Report to Corporate Committee November 2024. After ratification remove from tracker.		
519	Community & Wellbeing	20.06.22	Councillor Kendal, Councillor McRandal & Councillor McClean	Engagement with relevant community stakeholders to ascertain community need and desires in respect of the Queen's Leisure Complex	Council June 2022 Community & Wellbeing Committee September 2022 and deferred to October 2022	Report to November C&W Committee. Community Engagement took place on 24th September 2024	Nikki Dorrian & Ian O'Neill	
522	Corporate Services	05.07.22	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery Amendment received from Councillor Cathcart	That this Council changes the name of Queen's Parade to Queen's Platinum Jubilee Parade in honour and recognition of the 70th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne. *** Amendment - That this Council, in recognition of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee and her conferment of City Status upon Bangor, agrees to name an appropriate place or building within Bangor in her honour and that future Council Bangor entrance signs make reference to Bangor being a Platinum Jubilee City.	Council July 2022 Environment Committee September 2022 Corporate Services January 2024	April 2023 - Letter requesting permission to use the Royal Name sent to the Cabinet Office and awaiting response January 2024 - Report brought to Corporate Committee Amendment Agreed and advice sought from Cabinet Office November 2024 - Advice still outstanding		

525	Community & Wellbeing	24.08.22	Councillor Cooper, Councillor T Smith & Councillor Irvine	Amended 11.10.2022 Corporate Committee: That Council officers bring back a report on relevant Council policies with a view to withdrawing funding to any sporting organisations with any political objectives or named references to terrorism in their constitution, club names, stadiums, or competitions and such a report will be appropriately guided by legal advice in relation to this course of action	Council August 2022 Corporate Committee October 2022	Legal advice to be sought by the Councils Equality Officer and a report to be brought back to Community & Wellbeing Committee in January 2025	Nikki Dorrian	
529	Environment	22.08.22	Councillor Dunlop & Councillor Douglas	<p>That this Council agrees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •All pedestrians should feel safe on our pavements, yet street clutter can make walking and wheeling unsafe, forcing people onto the road which is dangerous; •Street furniture should be clean, have a purpose and be consistent; and •Street clutter should be removed. <p>Therefore, Council tasks officers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Carry out an audit of street infrastructure including street signage, project information; posts, etc; •Remove historic street clutter which has no current purpose or future benefit; •Ensure relevant signage is cleaned and fit for purpose; •Ensure signs have the appropriately-named Council on it, where this applies; •Identify a nominated officer within the Council to lead on the audit to ensure items are listed and removed; and •Write to the Department for Infrastructure to request they complete a similar de-clutter across the Borough. 	Council September 2022 Environment Committee October 2022	<p>Project ongoing for 24 months with reports brought to C&W Committee as necessary.</p> <p>First working group was on 10th May 2024.</p> <p>Grants transformation project already underway.</p>	Peter Caldwell	

545	Community & Wellbeing	16.11.22	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Cummings	That Council officers open discussions with Historic Environment Division regarding the return of the 13th century 'Movilla Stones' to the Borough and the provision of a suitable site for these to be located. Officers are also tasked with promoting these extremely important archaeological artefacts in the local community and local schools when the stones have been returned.	Council November 2022 Community & Wellbeing December 2022 and March 2023 and June 2023	Officers have asked HED to confirm return arrangements and will report to future C&WC when final arrangements for return of the stones is confirmed	Nikki Dorrian	
549	Community & Wellbeing	09.12.22	Councillor Douglas & Councillor Walker	That this Council adopts the White Ribbon Pledge to ' <i>Never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls</i> ', agrees to sign the Pledge, and tasks Officers to bring back a report outlining how we can amalgamate existing relevant policies, undertake the Listen, Learn, Lead programme within the Council, and identify effective routes to encourage other agencies and organisations in our Borough to engage with the White Ribbon Project.	Council December 2022 Corporate Services Committee January 2023 Community & Wellbeing Committee January 2024	Report to December C&W Committee after Officer meets with TEO. Action plan being developed by PCSP and brought back to C&W Committee. Womens Night Charter reported to January C&W Committee ratified at Council.	Nikki Dorrian	

550	Environment	13.12.22	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor MacArthur	<p>That this Council expresses concern with the number of residential and commercial bins left on public footways in the Borough long after the bin collection date. Bins left on public footways are not only unsightly, they can lead to hygiene and contamination issues, as well as safety concerns, forcing pedestrians onto the road due to the blocking of a footway. This Council notes its own lack of enforcement powers to tackle this issue and expresses concern at the Department for Infrastructure's reluctance to use its own enforcement powers. Accordingly, this Council agrees to write to the Department for Infrastructure asking the Department to engage with Councils with the aim of creating appropriate enforcement powers to tackle this issue. Council Officers, will in the meantime, bring back a report to the appropriate committee detailing action that the Council can take under current powers to try address the issue of bins left on public footways.</p>	<p>Council 21.12.22 Item 16.4</p> <p>Environment Committee January 2023 May 2024</p>	<p>12.12.23 Letter sent to DAERA by CEx 08.11.23 Response received from DFI 13.10.23 - Acknowledgement received from PSNI 12.10.23 - letters sent to DFI & PSNI by CEx</p>	Nigel Martin	
555	Community & Wellbeing	08.12.22	Alderman Wilson & Councillor Douglas	<p>This Council acknowledges the environmental and health benefits associated with the recent increase in cycling and declares Ards & North Down a cycling friendly borough. The Council also recognises that people who cycle are among the most vulnerable road users, and tasks officers with producing a report detailing ways in which we can help improve safety. The report should include possible sources of funding, potential partnerships, and ways in which we can promote good relations between users of different forms of transport</p>	<p>Council January 2023</p> <p>Community & Wellbeing Committee February 2023 and June 2023</p>	<p>Officers working on business case and elements for cycle to work and infrastructure planning. Budget not secured for 2024/25. Further report to future C&WC if budget made available in 2025/2026 including the report to recommend declaration</p>	Stephen Daye	

562	Environment	18.01.23	Councillor Morgan & Councillor McRandal	The prolonged cold weather spells just before Christmas and last week resulted in icy, slippery, and dangerous footpaths and car parks in the Borough's City and town centres. It is not acceptable that in such circumstances the Council does not have a plan or the resources or facilities to grit these areas to enable residents to walk safely to and from the main shopping areas or fall when they step out of their cars onto ice. It is proposed that officers bring back a report with costs to outline what steps can be taken to ensure that Council car parks and footpaths in the City and town centres are gritted when the weather is forecast to have heavy snowfall or prolonged freezing weather conditions.	Council January 2023 Environment Committee February 2023 October 2023	Supplementary report requested - TBC	Nigel Martin	
564	Community & Wellbeing	08.02.23	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery	That this Council tasks officers to begin discussions with the Education Authority with regards to the Future of Bloomfield playing fields, Bangor. This is to include the lease and the exploring of the possibility of bringing the facility up to intermediate level for football. A report to be brought back to Council following said discussions.	Council February 2023 Community & Wellbeing Committee March 2023	Officers awaiting response from EA in order for report to be brought back to future C&W Committee. EA has responded to say they '...would be in contact when they are ready to progress...'	Ian O'Neill	

567	Corporate Services	14.02.23	Councillor Adair & Councillor Edmund	This Council rename the square at Portavogie War Memorial Queen Elizabeth Square in memory of our late Sovereign Queen Elizabeth II.	Council February 2023 Corporate Services Committee March 2023	A response has been received from the Cabinet Office and a report went back to Committee 30/5/24 - follow up letter sent to Cabinet Office for update. Letters sent to the Cabinet Office requesting use of the Royal Name July 2024 - Advice now received - Report presented at September CSC. Agreed that combined EQIA more appropriate . A further report to be brought to CSC when EQIA ready to go.		
568	Place & Prosperity	06.02.23	Councillor Smart & Councillor Irvine	<p>Officers are tasked with reviewing current powers and how council could best effect positive change.</p> <p>As part of this review officers would investigate using part or all of Newtownards town centre as a pilot scheme to tackle dereliction, which could then be broadened across the Borough if successful. The review may form a working group which would consider what incentives could be provided through, DFC whom hold regeneration powers, the Planning system, Building Control, or by other means, to encourage the re-use or redevelopment of local derelict buildings to provide new business opportunities or homes. Consideration would also be given to what limitations can be placed on public and private property owners who are not willing to work in partnership for regeneration and the public good.</p>	<p>Council 29 March 2023 (Item 22.1)</p> <p>Place & Prosperity Committee 15 June 2023 (Item 28.1) 13 June 2024 (Item 15)</p>	Further report to be brought back to Committee		

535	Environment		Alderman Adair, Councillor Edmund & Councillor Kerr	That Council task officers to bring back a report on the costing to install signage identifying the townlands of Ballyblack and Kirkistown and that officers are tasked to bring forward proposals to incorporate townland signage across our Borough.	Council August 2023 Environment Committee September 2023		Peter Caldwell	
585	Community & Wellbeing		Alderman Adair, Councillor Edmund & Councillor Kerr	That Council recognise the value of our Beaches and coastal environment to our residents and tourists alike note the new DEARA regulations for the cleaning and maintenance of our beaches and task officers to bring forward a report on cleaning and maintaining our beaches on a proactive basis in line with the new DEARA regulations to ensure our beaches continue to be a clean, safe, attractive and well-managed coastal environments.	Council October 2023 Environment Committee November 2023 Community & Wellbeing Committee January 2024	Officers working on report to C&W Committee in January 2025. Further report requested being considered by officers with a report to future C&W Committee	Stephen Daye	

588	Environment		Councillor Wray & Alderman Smith	<p>That this council asks officers to include the repainting of the traditionally styled bus shelter (owned by Council), located in Main Street, Greyabbey in the 2024/25 maintenance budget.</p> <p>Furthermore Council seeks an officer's report on the feasibility of Council painting the decorative Greyabbey lamp posts (in the ownership of DFI). This is a feature of the historic village, and we understand the current shabby condition impacts not only residents of the village, but the wider tourism and regeneration potential of this scenic conservation area.</p> <p>Amendment: That Council welcomes the repainting of the traditionally styled bus shelter located on Main Street, Greyabbey and tasks officers to ensure it is maintained to a high standard going forward.</p> <p>Furthermore, Council writes to the Department of Infrastructure to ask for the decorative lamp posts on Main Street, Greyabbey, to be repainted to ensure they are maintained as a feature of this historic village; and writes to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to seek funding to deliver a mini</p>	<p>Council October 2023 Environment Committee November 2023 Council August 2024 Item 20</p>	<p>Officers to liaise with Greyabbey Community Association. Amendment Agreed at Environment Committee.</p> <p>That Council welcomes the repainting of the traditionally styled bus shelter located on Main Street, Greyabbey and tasks officers to ensure it is maintained to a high standard going forward.</p> <p>Furthermore, Council writes to the Department of Infrastructure to ask for the decorative lamp posts on Main Street, Greyabbey, to be repainted to ensure they are maintained as a feature of this historic village; and writes to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to seek funding to deliver a mini public realm or streetscape project in Greyabbey.</p>	Peter Caldwell	
586	Corporate Services	16.10.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Martin	<p>That this Council, further to recent positive discussions with landowners, agrees to reexamine the April 2014 decision of North Down Borough Council to accept a gift of open space at Ambleside, Bangor, which was never completed and tasks Council Officers to bring back a report looking at (i) acquiring the land and (ii) options around future uses for the land.</p>	<p>Council October 2023 Corporate Services Committee November 2023 Corporate Services Committee September 2024</p>	<p>Report to CSC. Agreed to proceed to acquisition subject to terms & discussions with vendor.</p> <p>July 2024 - Letter now sent to vendor.</p> <p>Report to Corporate Committee in September 2024. November: Proceeding through compliance team.</p>		

595	Community & Wellbeing	16.11.23	Councillor McCracken & Councillor Blaney	<p>This Council recognises the importance of Bangor's early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council requests that officers bring back a report which evaluates how the physical link between two main sites, Bangor Abbey and the North Down Museum, could be improved, to include the renovation and potential remodelling of Bell's Walk, with consideration for improved wayfinding and lighting. The motion also requests that officers consider how Bangor Castle Gardens and The Walled Garden could be better incorporated into the walking route, and how the overall attraction could be packaged to create a more complete tourism and placemaking experience.</p>	Council 29.11.2023	<p>Initial report to December 2024 C&W Committee. Second report to March 2025 C&W Committee</p>	Nikki Dorrian	
598	Community & Wellbeing	20.11.23	Alderman Adair & Councillor Edmund	<p>That this Council continues discussions with the Education Authority concerning the redevelopment of the play area fronting Victoria Primary School, Ballyhalbert (which is a shared facility between the school and public) and tasks officers to source external funding streams to enhance recreation & sports facilities for the village and surrounding area. Further, Council notes the poor condition of Ballyhalbert children's play park and tasks officers to bring forward a report on enhancing and improving the play park to meet the needs of local children.</p>	<p>Council 29.11.23 Community & Wellbeing January 2024</p>	<p>Report to November 2024 C&W Committee. Officers continue to work with DfC application for external funding.</p>	Stephen Daye	

599	Community & Wellbeing	21.11.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Gilmour	<p>“That this Council recognises the invaluable work undertaken by community/voluntary groups and organisations in this Borough in identifying and tackling the needs of communities and residents. The Council therefore, commits to undertaking a root and branch review of community development funding, arts and heritage, sports development and all other funding streams to ensure that it provides the most efficient, effective and responsive service to our community, thus maximising impact, accessibility and equitable allocation of resources. The review should examine the following 4 categories: (see further wording on agenda)</p>	<p>Council 20.12.23</p> <p>Community & Wellbeing Committee January 2024 and April 2024 and June 2024 and September 2024.</p> <p>Corporate Committee September 2024</p>	<p>Project ongoing for 24 months with reports brought to C&W Committee as necessary.</p> <p>First working group was on 10th May 2024.</p> <p>Grants transformation project already underway. Regular Updates will be brought. Next report will be to January 2025 Committee.</p>	Nikki Dorrian	
607	Corporate Services	13.01.24	Councillor Wray & Alderman Smith	<p>That this Council writes to the Department of Infrastructure to once again express our deep concern at the poor state of roads across Ards and North Down.</p> <p>Council further requests that DfI changes their policy in relation to the depth of potholes that are required to be repaired back to 20ml from the current 50ml in order to improve the quality and safety of our roads network.</p>	<p>Council 31.01.24</p> <p>Corporate Services Committee June 2024. Corporate Services Committee September 2024.</p> <p>Corporate Services Committee November 2024.</p>	<p>Update report to Corporate Services Committee in June 2024. Letter to DfI re 'weighted indicators' used to allocate funds. Report to Corporate Committee September 2024.</p> <p>9.10.2024 further letter sent following Corporate September, reply received and Response to NOM to November 2024 Corporate Services Committee.</p> <p>4th letter to be issued.</p>		

610	Community & Wellbeing	19.02.24	Alderman Adair & Councillor Edmund	That Council note the increasing growing population in the village of Ballyhalbert and the current lack of public open spaces in the village and task officers to bring forward a report on options to provide a public green open space to promote health and wellbeing of the local community and further tasks officers to engage with developer to ensure the new play park planned for Saint Andrews is delivered in line with our Council play strategy.	Council 26.03.24 Community & Wellbeing Committee March 2024	Officers working on a Business Case. Report to November 2024 C&W Committee	Stephen Daye	
613	Community & Wellbeing	04.03.24	Councillors Wray, Kerr, Boyle, Edmund, Aldermen Adair and McAlpine	Rescinding Notice of Motion - Playpark, Parsonage Road, Kircubbin	Council March 2024	Report to November 2024 C&W Committee. To be combined with play strategy future recommendations following Council decision in June 2024.	Stephen Daye	

616	Environment	19.03.24	Councillor McCollum & Councillor Irwin	<p>That this Council recognises the significant opportunities which the redevelopment of Donaghadee Harbour could bring to the local economy in terms of leisure sailing and tourism and thus instructs officers to work with local groups to scope potential operational facilities which could enhance the offering in the Harbour and further brings back a feasibility report on the various options, including costings and possible funding streams.</p> <p>Further, that this Council recognises the issues associated with high winds and coastal change and reviews the original 2020 Harbour Study conducted by RPS including the necessity for an offshore breakwater and agrees to bring back a report in time to be presented to Council in September 2024, outlining the budget required to undertake this work, any key considerations, next steps and identify which stakeholders would need to be involved.</p>	Council 26.03.24 Environment Committee 03.04.24 Item 14	<p>Agreed that Council proceeds as proposed in section 4 of the report, with the outcome of engagement outlined being reported back to Environment Committee by January 2025.</p> <p>April 2024 - Agreed, officers to bring back a report to Committee.</p>	Peter Caldwell	
619	Community & Wellbeing	30.04.24	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson	<p>That this Council notes with concern the temporary closure of Groomsport Tennis Courts due to issues around the safety of the playing surface. Further to this Council tasks officers to bring back a report on Tennis Court maintenance throughout the Borough and will commit to ensuring all our Tennis Court facilities are properly maintained and are fully accessible to all. Council will also promote the use of Tennis facilities in the Borough as we approach the spring/summer season.</p>	Council 29.05.24 Community & Wellbeing Committee June 2024	Report to December C&W Committee.	Ian O'Neill	

620	Community & Wellbeing	05.03.24	Councillor Ashe & Councillor Morgan	<p>That this council recognises the importance of ensuring that our parks and open spaces are inclusive and accessible to those with speech, language, and communication needs and that it recognises the positive role of communication boards in achieving this. That it commits to working with relevant organisations to bring back a report regarding communication boards considering, but not limited to, the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •How communication boards would integrate with the required existing signage; •Identifying possible locations for the communication boards, such as a specific Tier of park; and •An indicative budget. 	<p>Council 29.05.24</p> <p>Community & Wellbeing Committee June 2024</p>	Report to November C&W Committee	Stephen Daye	
623	Corporate Services	14.5.24	Councillor Gilmour & Councillor Martin	<p>8th May 2025 will be 80 years since VE Day- the official end of the Second World War in Europe. This council recognises the significance of this occasion and tasks officers to bring forward a report outlining potential ways this historic anniversary can be commemorated. Including any national plans for beacon lighting and with the council working with local people and local community groups to look at holding fitting events to mark this occasion so that a budget can be included in the next rate setting process.</p>	<p>Council 29.05.24</p> <p>Corporate Services Committee 18.06.24 Item 17.2</p>	June 2024 - Agreed, officers to bring back a report to Committee. Further Report to follow.		

625	Environment	21.05.24	Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund	That Council tasks Officers to bring forward urgent proposals for ground maintenance to address the poor and unkept condition of Millisle Beach Park in order to ensure the area is clean today and well kept to welcome visitors to the Kite Festival to be hosted in Millisle by the Ards Peninsula village partnership on August 26th. Further Council bring forward in report on actioning repairs to disability access to Millisle and Portavogie Beaches following recent storm damage.	Council 26.06.24 Item 15.1 Council 31.07.24 Item 15	Amended and agreed at July Council that Council proceed with the above-mentioned works at a cost of approximately £13,000 and further Council write to NIEA to request a site meeting to discuss the need to repair access to beaches at Cloughey, Millisle and Portavogie. Heard and Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion at Council meeting 26.06.24		
626	Corporate Services	13.06.24	Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers	That the Council, following the 80th anniversary of D-Day, recognises the service of US regiment(s) stationed in Donaghadee and our Borough prior to D-Day and tasks officers to bring a report back looking at ways in which our Borough could provide a lasting memory to them.	Council 26.06.24 Item 15.2	Referred to Corporate Services Committee for hearing at September 2024 committee. Agreed that report brought back to relevant committee. Report at Nov CS committee.		

627	Community & Wellbeing	01.08.24	Councillor Creighton & Councillor Moore	<p>This Council notes the importance of organ donation in saving lives and improving the quality of life of residents of this Borough.</p> <p>This Council further notes that there are plans for the production and installation in the Borough, of a bench celebrating organ donation. This project began in 2013 and is supported by a number of organ transplant charities. Council resolves to work with the charities involved to finalise the detailed design and expedite installation of this bench in a prominent place in the Borough. A fund to cover all the manufacturing costs and any necessary support structures has already been raised. The hope is that this will be a place for people to engage in conversations about and spark interest in this important issue and somewhere to reflect and remember loved ones.</p>	<p>Council 28 August 2024 (Item 25.1)</p> <p>September 2024 C&W</p>	Report to November 2024 C&W Committee	Stephen Daye	
628	Place & Prosperity	18.08.24	Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers	<p>That Council Officers be instructed to consider options for appropriate signage to direct the public to the Camera Obscura in Donaghadee. That Council Officers should explore and consider opportunities for securing sponsorship for the signage from local businesses and organisations</p>	<p>Council 28 August 2024 (Item 25.2) referred to Place & Prosperity Cttee - 5 September 2024 (Item 14.1)</p>	<p>Established. Audit completed on existing signage to provide rationale for additional signage. Update report to future P&P Committee</p> <p>Agreed at 5 Sept P&P and ratified by 25 Sept Council</p>		

629	Community & Wellbeing	19.08.24	Councillors Gilmour, Hollywood, McClean and McKee	That this council notes that significant investment was previously made to deliver a play park, MUGA and amateur league sized football pitch on the Clandeboye road. Notes with regret there have been ongoing issues with the pitch. Instructs officers to reinstate the goalposts and mark out the pitch so that it can be played on by the local community. Furthermore, following consultation with the local community, that a report is brought back regarding the longer term maintenance and enhancement of the site, to ensure any necessary provisions can be considered during the rate setting process to ensure that the football pitch is fit for purpose and can be used as previously agreed."	Council 28 August 2024 (Item 25.3) September C&W Committee	Report to January 2025 C&W Committee	Stephen Daye	
630	Community & Wellbeing	19.08.24	Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund	That Council notes the increasing complaints from local sports clubs regarding the poor annual summer maintenance of football pitches across the Borough and tasks officers to bring forward a report on options to improve the maintenance of our football pitches to ensure our pitches are maintained to a high standard to meet the sporting needs of local clubs and league requirements	Council August 2024 (Item 25.4) September C&W Committee	Report to November C&W Committee	Stephen Daye	

631	Corporate Services		Alderman McIlveen, Councillor Boyle, Alderman McDowell, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, Councillor Smart, Councillor Kennedy, Councillor S Irvine	That this Council bestows the Freedom of the Borough upon Rhys McClenaghan - European, Commonwealth, World and Olympic Gold Medallist - in recognition of his outstanding achievements in sport.	Council September 2024 (Item 13.1)	Agreed at Council September 2024. After ratification the final minute was sent to the Administration team.		
632	Environment	21.08.24	Councillor Irwin and Alderman McRandal	That this Council tasks officers with producing a report outlining how pedestrian access to Household Recycling Centres in the Borough could be facilitated. This report should include consideration of health and safety requirements, the HRC booking system and the ability to provide pedestrian access in other council areas in Northern Ireland.	Council September 2024 (Item 13.2) Environment October 2 October 2024 (Item 11.1)	Agreed at Environment Committee 2 October 2024	Nigel Martin	

633	Community & Wellbeing	05.09.24	Alderman P Smith and Councillor Wray, Councillor W Irvine	That this Council strongly opposes the UK Government's recent Winter Fuel Payment policy change. We resolve to write to the Prime Minister, urging the Government to reverse this harmful decision which will have a far-reaching and devastating impact on pensioner households across the UK. Furthermore, we seek assurance that, at the very least, the Pension Credit minimum income guarantee will be increased, ensuring that more low-income pensioner households, particularly those who narrowly miss out, become eligible for pension credit.	Council September 2024 (Item 13.3) Community and Wellbeing Committee	Letters sent November 2024	Nikki Dorrian	
634	Place & Prosperity	1.10.24	Councillors Blaney & Hollywood	This Council notes with deep concern the fraudulent activity impacting local businesses through the manipulation of bank account information on Just Eat partner centre accounts, resulting in substantial financial losses; recognises the critical role these businesses play in supporting the local economy and acknowledges the severe impact these losses have on their ability to operate and resolves to write to Just Eat, expressing our deep concern over the financial harm caused to local businesses and calling on the company to urgently engage with affected businesses to resolve this devastating issue and prevent further incidents.	Council October 2024 Item 23.1 - Place & Prosperity Committee November 2024	Subject to ratification at Nov '24 Council		

635	Environment	11.10.24	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Douglas	<p>That this Council notes the 70% recycling target set out in the Climate Change Act 2022 and that the current household recycling average is 50.7%.</p> <p>Further notes the aims and intentions around the consultation on “Rethinking our resources: measures for climate action and a circular economy in NI” includes the reduction in grey bin capacity by either volume of bin or three weekly collections;</p> <p>Further notes that nappy collection scheme was not referred to in Rethinking our resources: measures for climate action and a circular economy in NI” despite around 4% of residual waste being made up of disposable nappies and other absorbent hygiene products;</p> <p>Further notes with concern the impact reduced grey bin capacity will have on those households disposing of nappies and/or other absorbent hygiene products as well as the amount of recyclable materials such products contain;</p> <p>This Council writes to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs expressing its view that there is a need for a nappy collection scheme in Northern Ireland in order to meet recycling targets and to support households if grey bin capacity is reduced as a</p>	Council October 2024 - Item 23.2 Environment Committee November 2024	Agreed at Environment Committee in November 2024		
636	Community & Wellbeing	16.10.24	Councillors Boyle & Wray	<p>That officers bring back a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the huge success of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Options would include a Civic Reception to celebrate 6 years of the huge success of the facility in 2025</p>	Council October 2024 Item 23.3 - Community & Wellbeing Committee November 2024	Agreed at Community & Wellbeing Committee November 2024	Ian O'Neill	

637	Community & Wellbeing	21.10.24	Councillor S Irvine & Councillor W Irvine	<p>This Council agrees to consider as part of the upcoming rates setting process sufficient support to the cultural expression programme. Subject to this process, consideration should be given to committing funds from Council which are sufficient to meet the costs of planning activities without the uncertainty of funding coming from other sources, as has been the case for the last two years. Should in year funding become available from other sources, Council's contribution would be adjusted accordingly. This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives in an attempt to ensure that groups can prepare for their events.</p> <p>This will guarantee that each group agreeing to abide by the cultural expression agreement will receive a letter of offer in advance of 31st May, regardless of whether external funding is available via the Good Relations Action Plan, or any other third-party source.</p> <p>This commitment reflects the Council's support for local cultural initiatives, ensuring that all the participating community groups can prepare for their activities without uncertainty regarding funding.</p>	Council October 2024 Item 23.4 - Community & Wellbeing Committee November 2024	Agreed at Community & Wellbeing Committee November 2024	Nikki Dorrian	
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638	Place & Prosperity	22.10.2024	Councillors Harbinson & McCracken	<p>that this Council should:</p> <p>1. Prepare a visual map for all public sector land in Bangor City Centre and Ards Town Centre and colour code holdings that are potentially connected with future developments (even if not yet fully agreed), including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizen's Hub and the Council's Car Park Strategy. This includes public land belonging to the Council and NI Executive Departments.</p> <p>2. To further identify public sector land that is currently unproductive and outside the scope of wider strategies, which could be made available for future private sector development. This includes land that is either vacant, contains empty or derelict buildings, or contains buildings that are under-utilised or dated to the point that redevelopment is required. The map should also include land that is facilitating meanwhile use.</p> <p>3. Prepare a summary report to highlight how unproductive public sector land could be re-purposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive</p>	Council October 2024 Item 23.5 - Place & Prosperity Committee November 2024	Subject to ratification at Nov '24 Council		

AMENDMENT TO NOTICE OF MOTION – ITEM 16.2

That this Council condemns the failure by the UK Government to prioritise farming families and the rural economy as part of the Autumn Budget; notes with deep concern the decisions to introduce new thresholds for Inheritance Tax and Agricultural Property Relief, which will jeopardise succession planning on farms and discourage investment in many farm businesses.

Further that this Council welcomes the launch of the Farming for the Generations pilot scheme to support farm succession planning; calls on the UK Government to reconsider the proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief given the disproportionate impact on family farms in Northern Ireland; and further calls on the Executive to support a ring-fenced budget for agriculture, agri-environment, fisheries and rural development within the 2025-26 budget and beyond.



Commissioner's Report

2023-2024



Northern Ireland
Local Government
Commissioner for **Standards**

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Foreword from the Commissioner

The Code of Conduct for Councillors is designed to ensure public trust in local democracy through the promotion of good standards in public life. The Code sets out the standards expected from local representatives and aims to ensure that those taking essential decisions for citizens in Northern Ireland are clear on the principles and actions which should underpin public life.

The Code refers to the key principles of public life, the Nolan principles including leadership, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, duty and respect. It also goes further and provides greater guidance for councillors including their duties not to bring either themselves or their councils into disrepute, the need to consider proper declaration of interests and ensuring public debate remains both compliant with the law and respectful.

In my role as Commissioner I consider it important that my office engages with both councillors and senior council staff to promote an understanding of the Code and to provide support and training. It is equally important that the public are aware of the Code and understand how to bring an allegation that it has been breached. During the last year we have continued to engage with councils and councillors. Having begun a programme of engagement with surveys of key stakeholders last year we have continued that as a central element of our approach. We engaged with over 38% of councillors in the last year, approximately 160 councillors and all 11 councils. We have also delivered 10 separate training sessions on the Code.

I understand that being subject to an allegation under the Code and to any subsequent investigation and adjudication is stressful and my office has worked hard to make this process more timely. Over the last three years my team has been working hard to reduce the number of older cases and investigations and I am pleased to say that there was no case older than 18 months at the end of the current year. Cases carried forward have been substantially reduced; with the overall number dropping from 78 cases carried forward in 2021/2022 to 38 cases in 2023/2024. Further the team exceeded each of their Key Performance Indicators.

I want to thank those councillors who have been subject to a complaint for their co-operation during the process. I would further like to thank my staff at the Local Government Ethical Standards team for their hard work during the year as well as those who ensure the smooth running of adjudications. I also thank both my assistant Commissioners for their dedication in ensuring that adjudications continue to operate in a timely and independent manner.



Margaret Kelly
Commissioner for Standards

Introduction

The mandatory **Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors** came into effect in May 2014. The Code sets out the standards expected from local councillors in Northern Ireland.

The role of the **Commissioner for Standards** is to investigate and where appropriate adjudicate on written allegations made about a councillor that their conduct or behaviour has, or may have, breached the Code.

Where there is insufficient evidence of a breach of the Code, cases may be closed at either the assessment or investigation stage. In cases where an investigation indicates that there may have been a breach of the Code alternatives to an adjudication are considered prior to referring a case to the Commissioner.

The investigation of complaints has been delegated to the **Local Government Ethical Standards (LGES)** team.

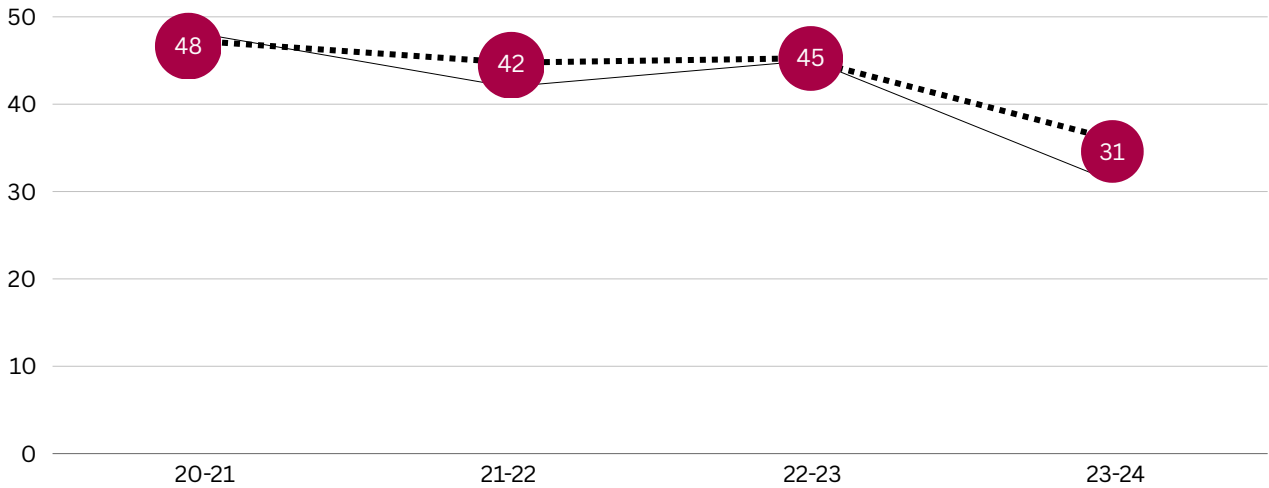
The separation between the investigation and adjudication functions ensures that should a case be referred to and accepted by the Commissioner that the issues raised as part of the investigation report are considered fairly and independently.

Only the Commissioner, after an Adjudication, can decide whether there has been a breach.

This report covers both the investigation and adjudication functions.

Investigations

Total Written Allegations Received



Graph showing total number of written allegations received since 20-21

	Written allegations received
20-21	48
21-22	42
22-23	45
23-24	31

There were **31** written allegations that councillors may have breached rules within the Code of Conduct in 2023-24. This compares to **45** written allegations received in 2022-23.

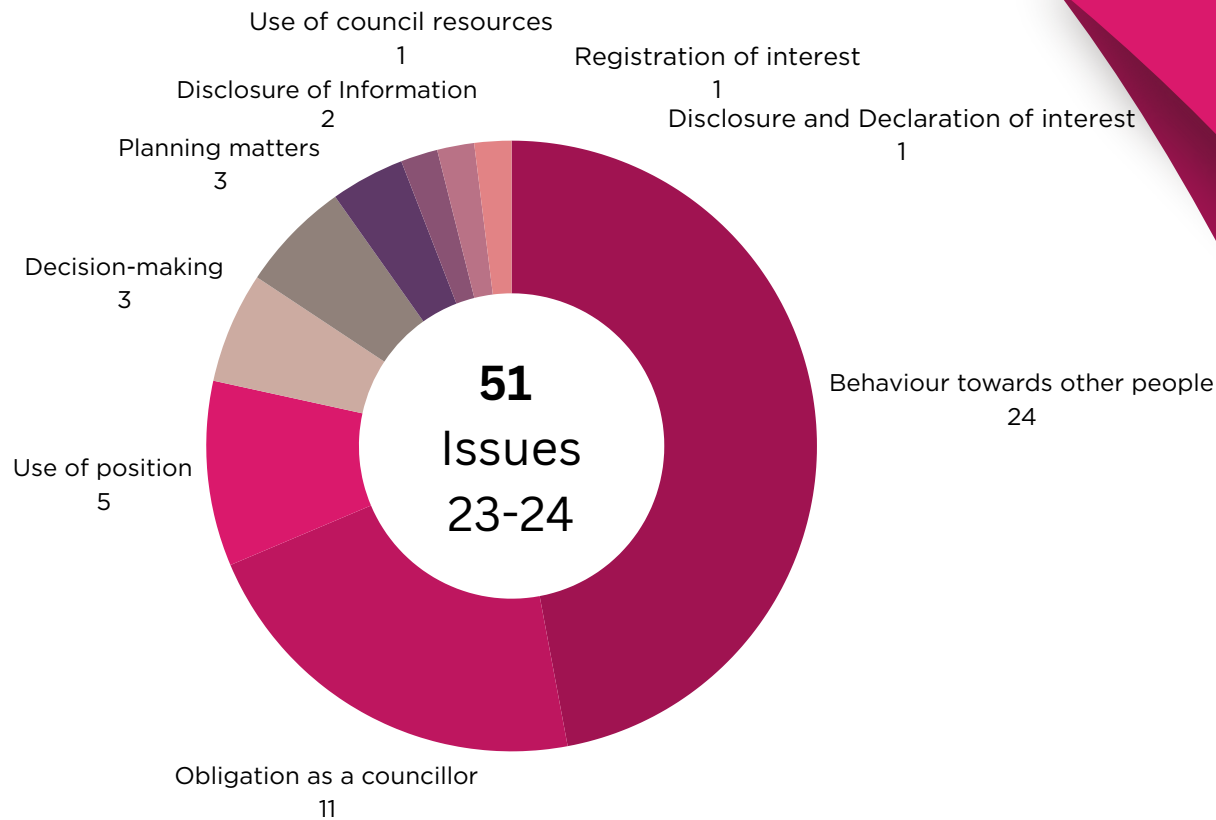
In addition to the 31 allegations against councillors received during the year, **45** cases were carried forward from 2022-23 giving a caseload of **86 allegations**.

31
written allegations
receieved 23-24

An allegation may raise issues relating to possible breaches of a number of rules or principles within the code.

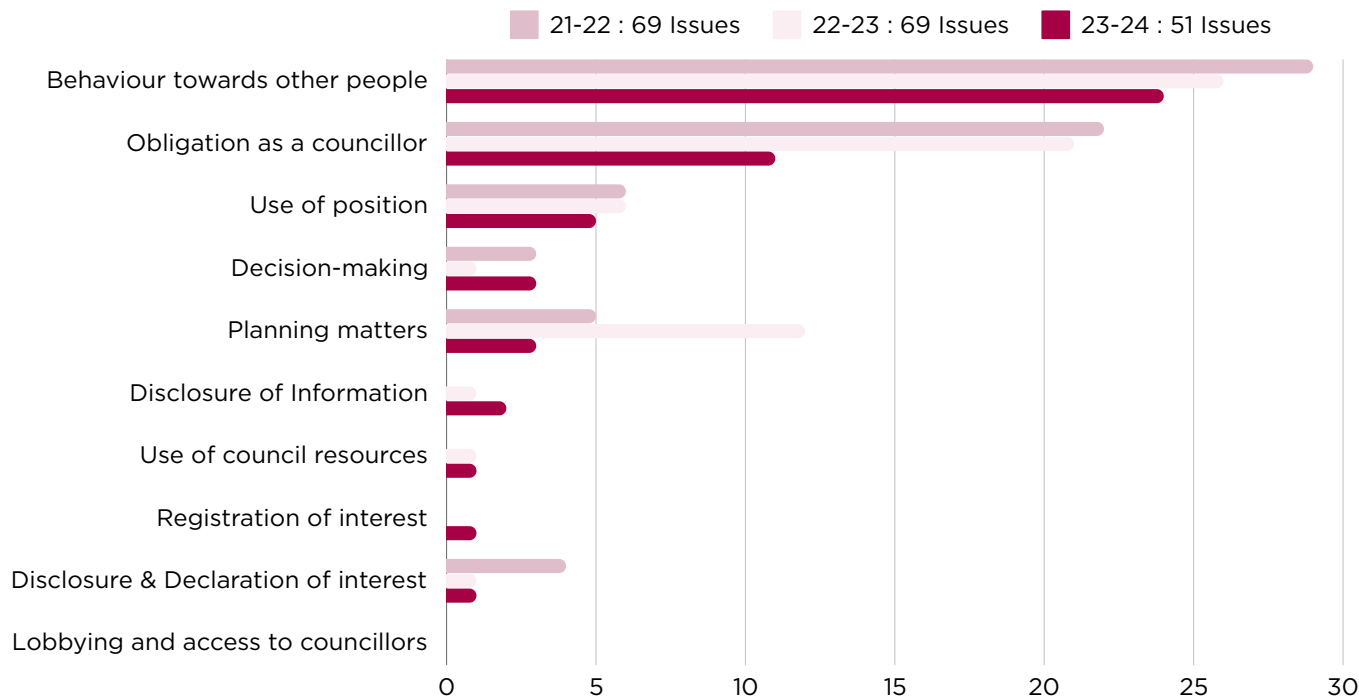
Issues of Complaint

The below pie-chart outlines each of the issues raised within the 31 written allegations received.



Each written allegation received may contain information indicating a potential breach of a number of rules in the Code of Conduct. A complaint may contain a number of allegations that a councillor has breached the Code. In 2034-24, **the 31 allegations that a councillor may have breached the Code of Conduct indicated 51 potential breaches.**

Issues of Complaint since 21-22



47%

of issues raised related to concerns about councillor's behaviour

Similar to previous years the largest area of concern raised in the allegations received related to the **behaviour of councillors towards others**. A total of **24 issues** were raised about councillors' behaviour. This compared to 26 issues about behaviour towards others being raised in 22-23.

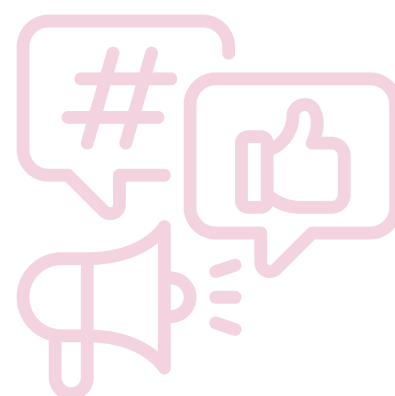
Concerns raised about the behaviour of councillors include comments made both at council meetings and on social media. Social media and online platforms are powerful tools for councillors to engage with constituents, share information, and participate in public discussion. However, **their immediacy and wide reach present unique challenges and responsibilities, making it essential for councillors to use these channels responsibly and in line with the Code**.

11

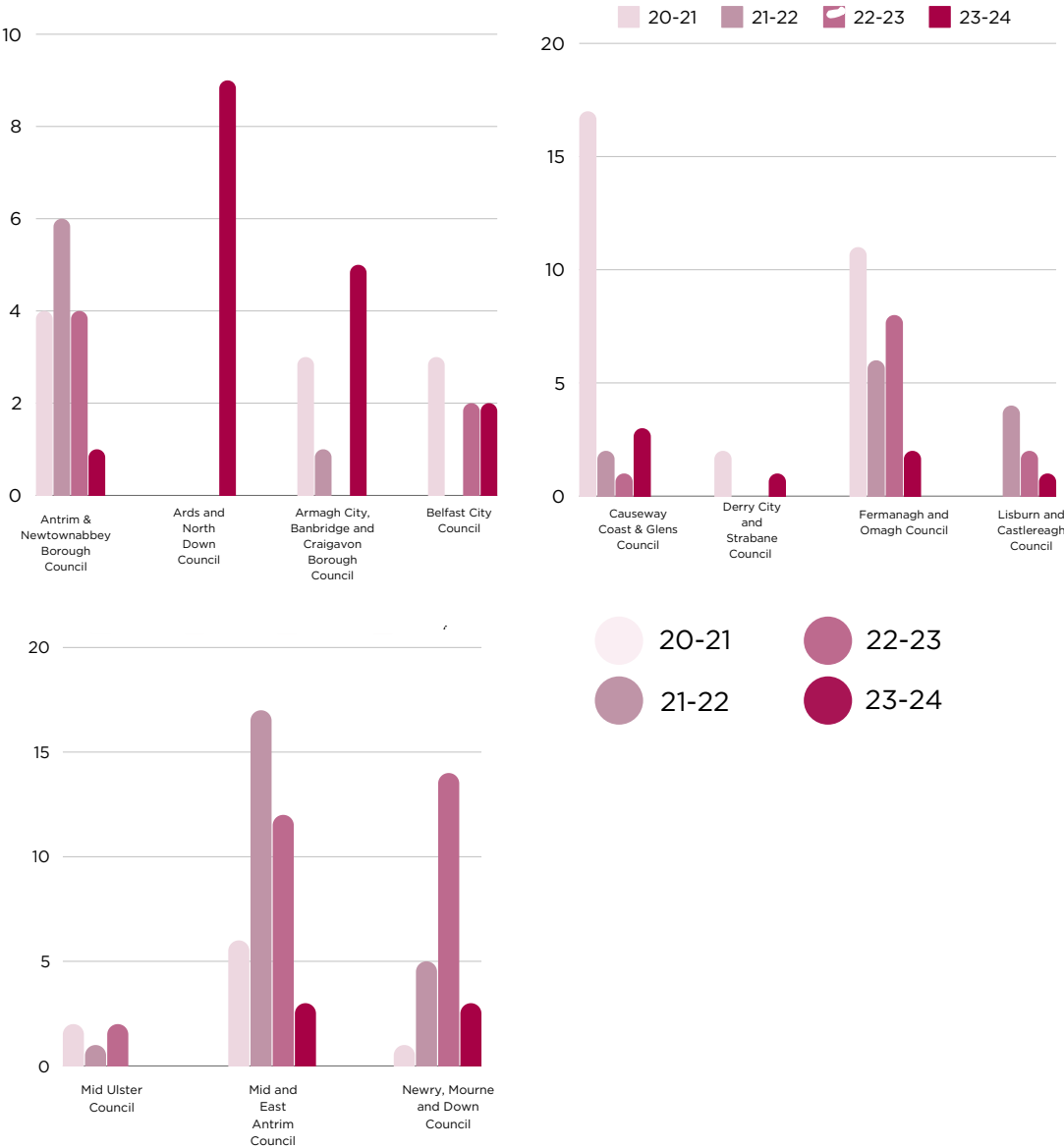
issues raised related to obligations as a councillor

The second largest area of concern (11) raised in the allegations related to the sections of the Code of Conduct relating to obligations as a councillor. This section requires councillors to act lawfully, in accordance with the Code, and not to act in a manner which could bring their position as a councillor, or their council, into disrepute.

The registration, disclosure and declaration of interests are key requirements of the Code. They are intended to give members of the public confidence that decisions are taken in their best interests, not in the interests of councillors or their family, friends or personal associates. A councillor's failure to act in accordance with these sections of the Code may reduce public confidence in their role as councillor but also harm the reputation of the council as a whole.



Written Allegations Received by Council Area



Council	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	4	6	4	1
Ards and North Down Council	0	0	0	9
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	3	1	0	5
Belfast City Council	3	0	2	2
Causeway Coast & Glens Council	17	2	1	3
Derry City and Strabane Council	2	0	0	1
Fermanagh and Omagh Council	11	6	8	2
Lisburn and Castlereagh Council	0	4	2	1
Mid Ulster Council	2	1	2	0
Mid and East Antrim Council	6	17	12	3
Newry, Mourne and Down Council	1	5	14	3
Total	48	42	42	30*

*One councillor was not named in a complaint received so it is not possible to determine the council

Allegations by Closure Stage

Closure Stage		Cases Determined in 23-24
Initial Assessment	Examines whether the allegations relate to conduct covered by the Code	4
Assessment	Examines whether there is evidence of conduct which, if proven, indicates a breach of the Code	13
Investigation	Where it was decided that there was no evidence of any failure to comply with the Code	20
Adjudication	Referred to the Commissioner with a request that she consider an Adjudication on the issues raised	7*
	Total	44

*These were consolidated into 3 Adjudications

During the year the LGES team have been working to ensure that decisions on allegations are taken at the most appropriate stage of the case handling process. This approach has resulted in a considerable reduction in the time taken for cases to be determined. This change has been possible through early engagement with councillors about whom the allegations were made, encouraging participation in the process and ensuring that it is fully understood that the process is inquisitorial and not adversarial.

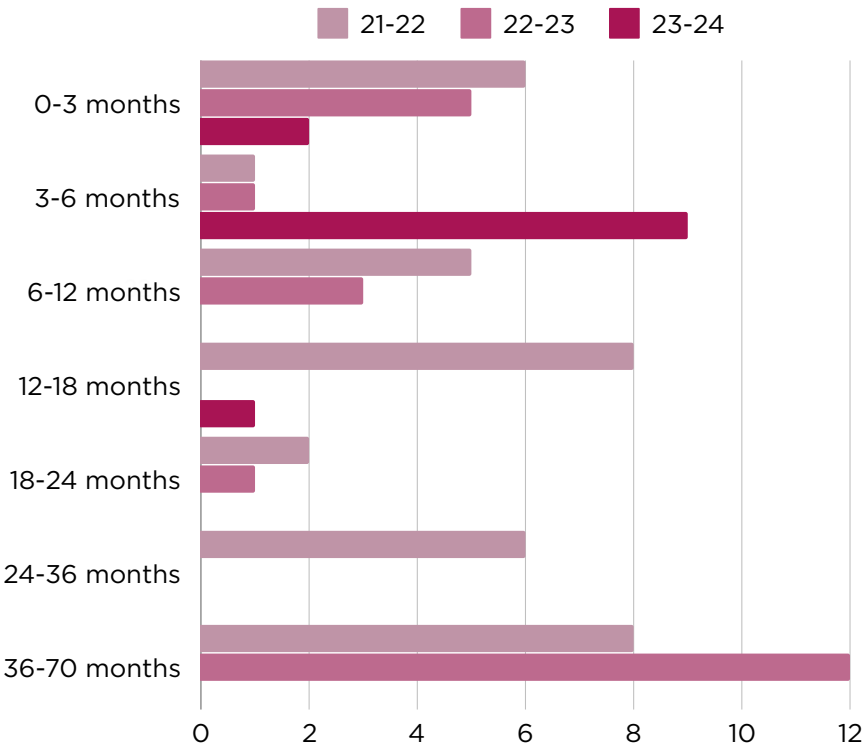
In considering the allegations made about a councillor the team take a proportionate approach which ensures a balance is struck between the effective use of resources while upholding high standards of conduct. In order to achieve this balance where an alleged breach of the code of conduct is unlikely to lead to a significant sanction following an adjudication the LGES team will explore whether the issues may be resolved without the need for adjudication.

Investigations Ongoing at Year End

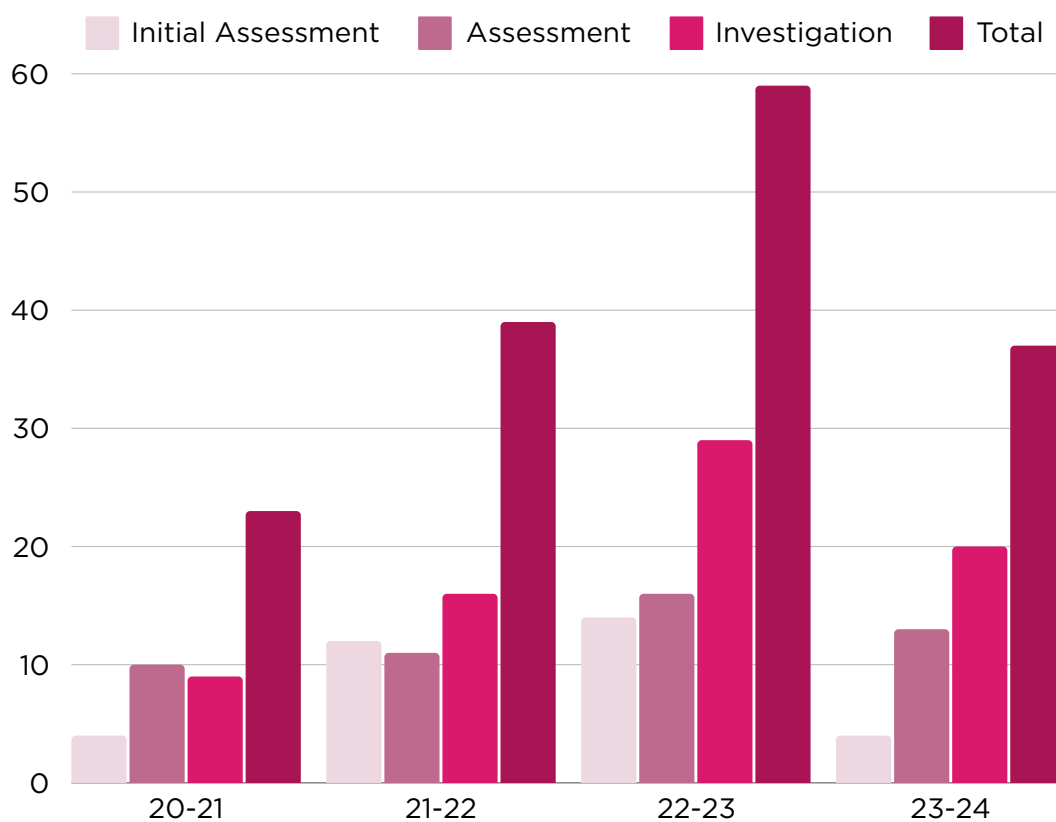
This graph shows investigations ongoing at year end by age of case over the past 3 years.

In the last two years **8 cases (4 cases in each year) have been resolved through action taken by the councillor without the need for an adjudication.** The number of investigations and the number of older investigations ongoing have been dramatically reduced. There has also been a focus on resolution through alternative action.

As a result of taking a proportionate approach involving early engagement and the cooperation of the councillors concerned, the workload carried forward has reduced from **78** carried forward into 2021/22, to **32** carried forward in 2024/25.

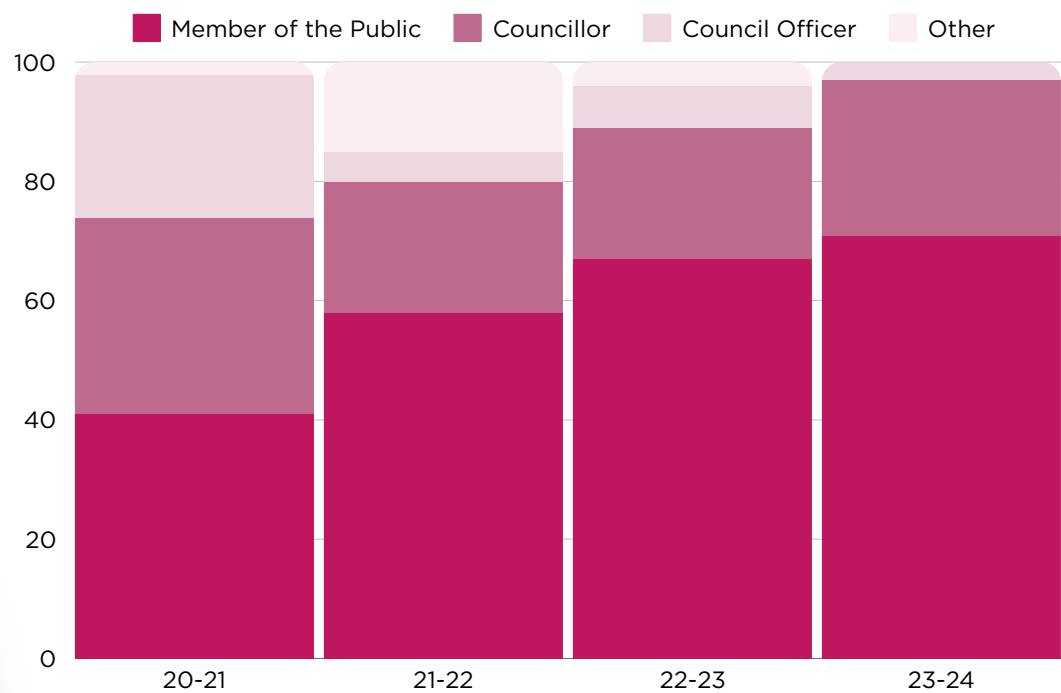


The graph below shows **the stages at which decisions were made** on the allegations considered in each of the last four years.



Written Allegations Received by Referral Source

The chart below shows **the source of written allegations** since 20-21. The number of written allegations received from members of the public has increased steadily over the past 4 years.



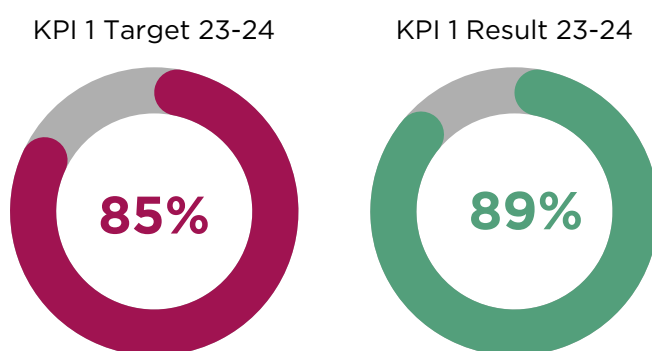
Performance

The Commissioner has established two Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for the Investigation team. **In 23-24 these KPI targets were met.**

KPI 1 establishes a target for the timeframe within which a decision should be made on whether an allegation should progress to investigation:

Target: In 85% of cases, the person making the allegation and the relevant councillor is told whether the allegation will be investigated within 4 weeks.

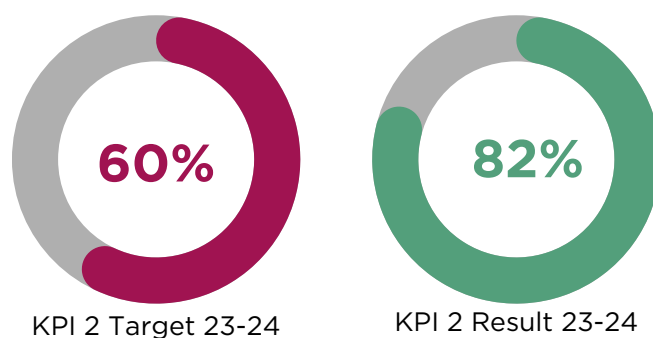
Result: Target was exceeded by 4% and KPI 1 was **achieved in 89% of cases.**



KPI 2 sets a timescale for completion of the investigation and reporting to the councillor on the outcome of that investigation.

Target: In 60% of cases, to complete an investigation within 40 weeks of the complaint being received.

Result: Target was exceeded by 22% and KPI 2 was **achieved in 82% of cases.**



Case Summaries

Allegations that a councillor made inaccurate and defamatory comments closed without need for investigation

A councillor was alleged to have made an inaccurate and defamatory statement about a mining company during a meeting of the council's Environmental Services Committee.

It was claimed he had accused the organisation of systemically intimidating members of the council for a period of ten years. By doing so he was accused of bringing his position as a councillor into disrepute.

Having reviewed the audio recording of the council meeting the Deputy Commissioner found that the councillor, whilst making comments about the companies actions did not bring his position as a councillor into disrepute.

As he could not find any evidence which would indicate a potential breach of the Code of Conduct the Deputy Commissioner decided the complaint should be closed without the need for an investigation.

Apology resolves councillor 'liking' inappropriate twitter post

The Deputy Commissioner considered an allegation that a councillor had breached the Code of Conduct because he had 'liked' an inappropriate post on Twitter.

The councillor provided a response to the allegation in which he accepted that he 'liked' the tweet but said this was unintentional as he did not see the comment "2 deviants and an enabler" above the graphic. He said that once he became aware that he had 'liked' the comment with the tweet he 'unliked' it.

The Deputy Commissioner verified that the councillor had 'unliked' the tweet prior to having been made aware of the allegation that he may have breached the code of conduct. Taking account of the step taken by the councillor of his own accord the Deputy Commissioner considered it was possible to deal with the alleged breach of the code of conduct without the need for an adjudication taking into consideration the Commissioner's 'Alternative Action' policy.

The Deputy Commissioner considered a public apology to the relevant individuals would be an appropriate way to uphold the public interest in ensuring respect. Following the councillor making a public apology on Twitter the case was closed.

Councillor's comments protected under Article 10 of the ECHR

A councillor alleged that another councillor directed 'highly disrespectful' comments towards her at a council meeting.

She said that the other councillor accused her of having a 'little tantrum' in relation to comments she made during a heated debate at a council meeting. She said the comment was sexist as she believed the other councillor would not have used the term about a male councillor.

She also said she took personal offence at his comment that she 'had represented terrorist organisations'. She said the comments were disrespectful and beyond the free speech limitations afforded to councillors under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

The councillor who made the comments told investigators that he was responding to an 'outburst' from the female councillor, and stated that the word 'tantrum' can be levied at either sex.

He also said that his comments were not a personal attack, they were an attack on the party the councillor represents and that as group leader for her party she was speaking on behalf of it.

The councillor's comments were considered against the Code of Conduct and the requirement to uphold the principles of the code and to show respect to others.

As the comment was on a political issue and occurred during a debate at a council meeting the Deputy Commissioner considered he had to consider the comments in the light of the enhanced protection available to councillors on matters of political expression as set out in article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In the Deputy Commissioner's view the 'little tantrum' comment could reasonably be considered disrespectful and discourteous. The councillor who the comments were directed at considered them offensive however when the comments were considered in the context of the debate the Deputy Commissioner considered they fell just short of the threshold for a referral to the Commissioner.

Therefore, as there was no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code the investigation was closed.

Investigation into councillor's acceptance of hospitality

A councillor alleged that a fellow councillor had breached the Code of Conduct by accepting hospitality from a business in the council area.

She said that this was a conflict of interest because as Chair of the council's Planning Committee he had recommended the planning application be refused which was the position being advocated by the business from whom he received hospitality. The planning officers recommendation to the planning committee was that the application be refused.

The councillor making the allegation said that shortly after proposing to the committee that the application be refused (the position the business advocated) he accepted an offer of a trip to a sports event in London.

The minutes and audio recording of the Planning Committee meeting were considered as well as the council's policy relating to the acceptance and registration of hospitality and the sections of the code of conduct relating to disrepute, gifts and hospitality and seeking preferential treatment.

Enquiries were also made with the business about the nature of the hospitality and the reason it was offered.

The councillor was interviewed and provided an explanation for his conduct. He explained he had voted in line with the recommendations put forward by the Council's planning department.

Having considered the evidence, the Deputy Commissioner was satisfied that at the time of the Planning Committee meeting the business had no intention of offering the councillor the hospitality, nor had the councillor any knowledge of the event in question or of a potential invite.

He was satisfied that the reason the hospitality was offered was not linked to the councillor's role, either as a councillor or as chair of the Planning Committee.

After concluding there was no evidence of a failure to comply with Code he ceased any further investigation of the complaint.

Complaint about social media posts resolved by alternative action

An allegation was received that two councillors had inappropriately shared confidential information on Twitter (X) about an ongoing legal challenge against their council. The allegation was investigated and it was felt that confidential information had been disclosed.

The information that was disclosed by the councillors was a matter of public interest, and would have come into the public domain at a future point. The Deputy Commissioner considered the councillors should not have commented on the information until the outcome of the legal challenge was known. Taking account of all the information it was felt that the matter could be resolved by action short of an adjudication.

The Deputy Commissioner decided that the case should be closed following an apology by the councillors for their breach of confidentiality at a full Council meeting.

Adjudications

Adjudication Caseload		23-24
Cases ongoing at the start of the year		3
Cases referred to the Commissioner for consideration of adjudication		3
Cases accepted		3
Cases not accepted		0
Cases closed		3
Cases ongoing at year end		3

3

adjudications
completed 23-24

Adjudication Decisions		23-24
No breach		0
Breach - No Further Action		0
Breach - Alternative Action		0
Breach - Censure		1
Breach - Suspension/Partial Suspension		1
Breach - Disqualification		1
Total		3

When an investigation is completed by the Deputy Commissioner and the evidence indicates **a breach of the Code of Conduct**, the Deputy Commissioner may refer the case to the Commissioner for consideration if the threshold for **adjudication** has been reached.

The Commissioner can decide whether or not to proceed with an adjudication or take other action to resolve the matter as appropriate.

Case Summaries

Former councillor disqualified after failure to declare conflict of interest

Former councillor Luke Poots (Lisburn and Castlereagh Borough Council) was disqualified from holding the office of councillor for 4 years following an Adjudication Hearing.

Adjudication Commissioner Ian Gordon determined that former councillor Poots had breached the Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors by failing to declare conflicts of interest while sitting on the Council's Planning Committee between 2015 and 2019.

The Adjudication Commissioner also made reference to a planning application submitted originally in the maiden name of former councillor Poots' mother, and the lack of clarity in the original application that the former councillor was a joint owner of the land.

Between February 2016 and February 2018 there were 35 occasions when the former councillor took part in the consideration of and voting on planning applications where his father, a public representative, was advocating either in favour of or objecting to the planning application being considered. Even when the former councillor declared the interest he continued to participate in the consideration of the applications and voted on them.

The Adjudication Commissioner found that the former councillor had received legal advice that his continuing to participate and, on occasion, Chair the Committee in these circumstances could give the appearance of bias. He referred to the councillor's Code of Conduct, which states that if there are conflicts of interest councillors should make a declaration and withdraw from the meeting.

He considered that in not doing so members of the public could conclude that former councillor Poots had not acted fairly.

He highlighted it was the former councillor's personal responsibility to comply with the Code, finding that he was in breach of paragraphs of the code of conduct relating to declaration of significant non-pecuniary interest and decision making.

He also found that by his actions the former councillor had brought his position as a councillor into disrepute.

Referring to the fact there were multiple breaches of the Code over a long period of time, and the former councillor's non-cooperation with the process, the Adjudication Commissioner concluded that a disqualification of 4 years was an appropriate sanction to ensure the public interest was upheld.

Alderman partially suspended over conflict of interest breach

Alderman John Smyth (Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council) was suspended from sitting on the council's Planning Committee for three months following an Adjudication Hearing.

The Alderman sat on the council's Planning Committee when his employer an MLA, made representations to the Committee on three planning applications. In one application the MLA, was the Agent for the application via his private planning consultancy business. During the meeting Alderman Smyth did not make a declaration of interest in respect of any matter and did not leave the meeting.

Although all of the planning applications were refused, the investigation looked at the Alderman's actions in line with the paragraphs the Code relating to declarations of significant private or personal non-pecuniary interest in a matter arising at a council or committee meeting.

Where a councillor makes a declaration of interest at a meeting the code also requires that they do not take part in discussion or voting on the issues and must withdraw from the meeting.

At the Hearing, Adjudication Commissioner Ian Gordon concluded that the presence of Alderman Smyth's employer advocating on particular applications at the planning committee gave rise to a potential conflict of interest. The Alderman should have erred on the side of caution by removing himself from the meeting,

Although he noted his previous record of good service and compliance with the code, and that his actions had no detrimental effect on the outcome of the planning applications, the Adjudication Commissioner noted that the Alderman was an experienced councillor with approximately 20 years of service. The adjudication Commissioner considered Alderman Smyth should therefore have been aware of how his actions would have been viewed under the Code.

He decided that a partial suspension from the council's Planning Committee for 3 months was an appropriate and proportionate reflection of the seriousness of the breaches.

Former councillor's actions brought council into disrepute

At an Adjudication Hearing former councillor Patrick Brown was censured by Adjudication Commissioner Ian Gordon after accepting he breached the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors while a member of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

The breach related to an incident in which the former councillor put information on Facebook about the content of a meeting held 'in committee' regarding the appointment of an interview panel for the post of Council Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The allegation indicated that the former councillor had suggested that the recruitment process was political rather than merit based. This had the potential to damage relationships between council political parties and damage the newly appointed CEO's prospective relationship with party groupings. It was alleged his actions had brought the council's recruitment process into disrepute.

Former councillor Brown's actions relating to the information he put online, his subsequent contact with the former Chief Executive of the Council, and his conduct during the investigation were held to be in breach of the Code of Conduct relating to respect, disrepute and cooperation with the Commissioner's staff.

In considering an appropriate sanction, the Adjudication Commissioner took into account that the former councillor had accepted that his conduct was inappropriate and had brought the council into disrepute. It was also noted that he had quickly taken down the comments and took steps to ameliorate the damage through contact with local newspapers.

The Adjudication Commissioner said that his consideration of the wider public interest involved the need to act proportionately when seeking a fair and efficient outcome, and that this should be reflected in his decision. He noted that a short period of suspension may have been an appropriate sanction for a sitting councillor. However, this was not an option, so in the circumstances he decided that a Censure was the correct sanction.

It was agreed that former councillor Brown would issue an apology to the members of the selection panel and the former Chief Executive of the council.

Engagement

391

10

We delivered 10 information sessions throughout the year



11 out of 11



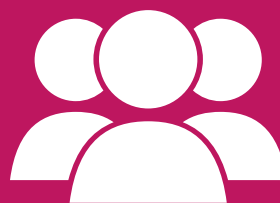
We engaged in multiple ways with all 11 councils in 23-24

38%

We met with 38% of all Councillors in NI this year



160+



In total we met with over 160 councillors throughout the year

In 2022/23 three surveys were carried out to identify further steps that could be taken to aid understanding of the code of conduct and to help councillors meet their responsibilities and obligations outlined in the code. The surveys were issued to all councillors, those who had made an allegation about a breach of the code and to council CEOs, senior council staff, and other relevant local government agencies with an interest in the Code.

As a result of the significant response received, work was commenced in 2023/24 to create bespoke training resources on specific issues such as conflicts of interest, the use of social media, and the Code itself. It is anticipated that these resources will be available during 2024/25.



Work is ongoing to provide further resources (including e-learning resources) and guidance on the issues most commonly giving rise to a breach of the code.



To ensure that the requirements of the code and the conduct expected are fully understood by councillors, work has commenced to update the Commissioner's guidance on the Code of Conduct. It is anticipated resources will be available during 24-25.

Commissioner and Assistant Commissioners



Margaret Kelly – Commissioner

Margaret Kelly took up the post of Local Government Commissioner for Standards in August 2020. Margaret has worked extensively in the voluntary and community sector for over 30 years and gained a range of experience in leading and managing services, developing policy and working in partnership with the public sector.



Ian Gordon OBE QPM LL.B – Adjudication Commissioner

Ian Gordon is a retired Deputy Chief Constable of Tayside Police. Seconded to HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for 3 years, he was the lead police officer on the annual statutory inspection of five UK police forces. Mr Gordon was a Convener for the Standards Commission for Scotland between 2010 and 2017 and led a focused improvement, to awareness of the Codes of Conduct, for elected members and Boards of Public Bodies.



Katrin Shaw – Adjudication Commissioner

Katrin was admitted as a Solicitor in 1996 and worked as a local government lawyer before she joined the Welsh Ombudsman's office as an Investigator in 2001. Since then, Katrin has held managerial roles in the office and is now the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's Chief Legal Adviser & Director of Investigations overseeing casework, including investigations under the ethical standards framework for local government members in Wales.

Appendix

Funding and Expenditure

The Local Government Ethical Standards (LGES) directorate is funded from a separately identified portion of the overall annual budget for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). The LGES budget is proactively managed by NIPSO over the course of each financial year to ensure that any emerging funding pressures are identified and addressed.

Similarly, where reduced requirements arise, under established arrangements with the Department for Communities (DfC), any such amounts are released back to DfC by NIPSO by means of a mutually agreed in-year transfer.

This is in accordance with normal in-year financial monitoring procedures, after which DfC pay the released funding back to Local Councils. Where applicable a final end of year adjustment must also be returned directly to DfC. In all cases the amounts returned are made available for redeployment within Local Government, thus ensuring that any unspent amounts are able to be utilised fully and effectively.

	21-22	22-23	23-24
Staff costs	386	461	395
Other administrative costs	148	153	196
Total	534	614	591



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