


July 23rd, 2025

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 30th July 2025 at 7:00 pm** in **Hybrid - City Hall, Bangor & via Zoom.**

Agenda

Agenda

 *C. 30.07.2025 Agenda.pdf*


Page 1

1. **Prayer**
2. **Apologies**
3. **Declarations of Interest**
- 4 **Mayor's Business**
- 5 **Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month (Copy attached)**

 *Mayoral Engagements July 2025.pdf*

Page 5

- 6 **Minutes of Council Meeting held on 25 June 2025 (Copy attached)**

 *C.25.06.25 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

 *C.26.06.25 MinutesPM.pdf*

Page 7

- 7 **Minutes of Committees**

- 7.1. **Community & Wellbeing Committee dated 18 June 2025 (copy attached)**

 *CWB 18.06.2025 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

 *CWB 18.06.2025 MinutesPM.pdf*

Page 36

- 7.2.. **Audit Committee dated 26 June 2025 (copy attached)**


 *AC 26.06.2025 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

 *AC 26.06.2025 MinutesPM.pdf*

Page 114

- 7.3. **Planning Committee dated 1 July 2025 (Copy attached)**

 *PC.01.07.25 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

8. Deputation Requests

8.1. Deputation Request – Portaferry Town Boys Club

Report attached

 **8.1. Deputation Request Report - Portaferry Town Boys FC.pdf**

Page 128

 **8.1. Appendix 1 Deputation Request Form.pdf**

Page 129

9. Conferences and Invitations

9.1. Commemoration of the 110th Anniversary of the 10th (Irish) Division's Actions on the Gallipoli Peninsula

Report attached

 **9.1 Commemoration of the 110th Anniversary of the 10th (Irish) Division's actions on the Gallipoli Peninsula.pdf**

Page 133

 **9.1. Appendix.pdf**

Page 135

10. Resolutions

10.1. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council – Impact of Second Homes and Holiday Rentals on Housing Stock Supply

Correspondence attached

 **10. 1. Resolution - Causeway Coast and Glens.pdf**

Page 136

10.2. Derry City and Strabane District Council – Use of Electricity by Data Centres

Correspondence attached

 **10.2 Resolution - Derry City and Strabane.pdf**

Page 138


11. Consultations

11.1. Consultation - Drinking in Public Bye-Laws and Powers

Report attached

11.2. Consultation - Audit of Inequalities and the Department of Finance draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan (2025 to 2030)

Report attached

 11.2 *Consultation - Audit of Inequalities.pdf*

Page 145

 11.2. *Appendix 1.pdf*

Page 147

 11.2. *Appendix 2-Draft consultation response.pdf*

Page 188

11.3. Consultation - Response to the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy

Report attached

 11.3. *A draft Consultation Response to the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy.pdf*

Page 195

 11.3. *Appendix 1 - NI-Executive-Anti-Poverty-Strategy-2025-2035.pdf*

Page 198

 11.3. *Appendix 2 - Draft Response to NI Anti-Poverty Strategy.pdf*

Page 230

12. Arts Project Grants Round 2

Report attached

 12. *Arts Project Grants Round 2.pdf*

Page 245

13. Additional Funding to Support Social and Racial Cohesion

Report attached

 13. *Additional Funding to Support Social and Racial Cohesion.pdf*

Page 248

 13. *Appendix 1 Additional Funding Support.pdf*

Page 250

 13.2. *Appendix 2-Draft consultation response DoF Audit of inequalities.pdf*

Page 253

14. Request to hold Orange Victims' Day service of commemoration at the Ward Park Cenotaph

Report attached

 14. *Request to hold Orange Victims' Day service.pdf*

Page 260

15. Sealing Documents

16. Transfer of Rights of Burial

17. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)

17. Notice of Motion Status Report.pdf

Page 341

17. Appendix NOM Tracker.pdf

Page 342

18. Notices of Motion

18.1. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum

That this Council recognises the success of Love Ballyholme and thanks all involved for their hard work and commitment; further recognises the importance of community led initiatives to improve community cohesion, while supporting local businesses, and asks officers to bring back a report, which includes a plan and funding opportunities to support the replication of this community led model in the Rathmore area of Bangor.

18.2. Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Smith and Councillor Smart

That this Council produces a report to scope the potential of introducing a public hire bicycle scheme similar to Belfast Bikes for use across the new Greenway network. That the report outlines the benefits, risks, costs, potential partnerships and any funding opportunities including those provided through DfI Active Travel to inform a Council decision on progressing such a scheme.

18.3. Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers

That this Council notes the role played by Donaghadee Cricket Club in promoting sport, health, and community engagement in Donaghadee, particularly for our youth. Council further requests that officers prepare a report to look at how sports clubs like Donaghadee could be better supported by Council, particular through the lease charges levied against the clubs acknowledging the great community work these organisations do as well as the role they play in maintaining the facilities.

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

19. Request from Maritime and Coastguard Agency for minor alterations at Bregenz House, Bangor

Report attached


 **19. Request from Maritime and Coastguard Agency.pdf** **Not included**

 **19. Appendix 1 - Request from Maritime and Coastguard Agency.PNG** **Not included**

20. Ards FC extension of the Lease of land at Floodgates and Lease Map revision

Report attached

 **20. Ards FC extension of the Lease of Land at Floodgates ad Lease Map revision.pdf** **Not included**

 **20. Appendix 1 - Council minute June 2022 - Lease to Ards FC.pdf** **Not included**

 **20. Appendix 2 - Current Lease Map - Lease to Ards FC.png** **Not included**

 **20. Appendix 3 - Revised Lease Map - Lease to Ards FC.pdf** **Not included**

21. Request for an Extension to a Licence for a Site Compound at The Square, Ballywalter

Report attached

 **21. Request for an extension to a licence for a site compound at The Square Ballywalter.pdf** **Not included**

22. Proposal to Deliver the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025-2026

Report attached

 **22. Proposal to Deliver the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025-2026.pdf** **Not included**

23. Joint tender award for the Activate Enterprise Programme between NMAD, LCCC and ANDBC under the Go Succeed Outreach Programme

Report attached

 **23. Joint Tender Award.pdf**

Not included

24. Boathouse Invitation to Tender

Report to follow

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

23 July 2025

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, 30 July 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 July 2025 (Copy attached)
6. Minutes of Council meeting dated 25 June 2025 (Copy attached)
7. Minutes of Committees (Copies attached)
 - 7.1 Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 18 June 2025
 - 7.2. Audit Committee dated 26 June 2025
 - 7.3. Planning Committee dated 1 July 2025
8. Deputation Requests
 - 8.1 Deputation Request – Portaferry Town Boys Football Club (Report attached)
9. Conferences and Invitations
 - 9.1. Commemoration of the 110th Anniversary of the 10th (Irish) Division's Actions on the Gallipoli Peninsula (Report attached)

10. Resolutions

10.1. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council – Impact of Second Homes and Holiday Rentals on Housing Stock Supply (Correspondence attached)

10.2. Derry City and Strabane District Council – Use of Electricity by Data Centres (Correspondence attached)

11. Consultations

11.1. Consultation - Drinking in Public Bye-Laws and Powers (Report attached)

11.2. Consultation - Audit of Inequalities and the Department of Finance draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan (2025 to 2030) (Report attached)

11.3. Consultation - Response to the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy (Report attached)

12. Arts Project Grants Round 2 (Report attached)

13. Additional Funding to Support Social and Racial Cohesion (Report attached)

14. Request to hold Orange Victims' Day service of commemoration at the Ward Park Cenotaph (Report attached)

15. Sealing Documents

16. Transfer of Rights of Burial

17. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)

18. Notices of Motion

18.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum

That this Council recognises the success of Love Ballyholme and thanks to all involved for their hard work and commitment; further recognises the importance of community led initiatives to improve community cohesion, while supporting local businesses, and asks officers to bring back a report, which includes a plan and funding opportunities to support the replication of this community led model in the Rathmore area of Bangor.

18.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Smith and Councillor Smart

That this Council produces a report to scope the potential of introducing a public hire bicycle scheme similar to Belfast Bikes for use across the new Greenway network. That the report outlines the benefits, risks, costs, potential partnerships and any

funding opportunities including those provided through DfI Active Travel to inform a Council decision on progressing such a scheme.

18.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers

That this Council notes the role played by Donaghadee Cricket Club in promoting sport, health, and community engagement in Donaghadee, particularly for our youth. Council further requests that officers prepare a report to look at how sports clubs like Donaghadee could be better supported by Council, particular through the lease charges levied against the clubs acknowledging the great community work these organisations do as well as the role they play in maintaining the facilities.

IN CONFIDENCE

19. Request from Maritime and Coastguard Agency for minor alterations at Bregenz House, Bangor (Report attached)
20. Ards FC extension of the Lease of land at Floodgates and Lease Map revision (Report attached)
21. Request for an Extension to a Licence for a Site Compound at The Square, Ballywalter (Report attached)
22. Proposal to Deliver the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2025-2026 (Report attached)
23. Joint tender award for the Activate Enterprise Programme between NMAD, LCCC and ANDBC under the Go Succeed Outreach Programme (Report attached)
24. Boathouse Invitation to Tender (Report to follow)

MEMBERSHIP OF ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Alderman Adair	Councillor Harbinson
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Hennessy
Alderman Brooks	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Cummings	Councillor S 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 (Mayor)
Councillor Blaney	Councillor McCracken
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McKee
Councillor Brady	Councillor McLaren
Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Moore (Deputy Mayor)

Councillor Chambers	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Thompson
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Smart
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Wray
Councillor Gilmour	

LIST OF MAYOR'S/DEPUTY MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS
FOR JUNE 2025

Wednesday 2nd July 2025

13:20 High Street Heroes Photo Launch, Conway Square, Newtownards

Thursday 3rd July 2025

10:45 Comber 11th Farmer's market, The Square, Comber

15:00 Translink Summer Photo Op, Bangor Castle

19:00 Next Generation Student Art Exhibition Launch, Ards Arts Centre

Sunday 6th July 2025

14:30 Ulster Automobile Car Club Display, Mount Stewart

Monday 7th July 2025

12:00 UK SPF Project Site Visits, Ward Park and Burr's Point

Wednesday 9th July 2025

10:30 Highland Dance Festival Photo Op, Nendrum College, Comber

Sunday 13th July 2025

14:00 Narrows Series Regatta, Portaferry Sailing Club

Wednesday 16th July 2025

11:30 That's TV Interview, via Zoom

Thursday 17th July 2025

11:00 Italian Visitors via Friends of Columbanus, Bangor Castle

Saturday 19th July 2025

11:00 Pipe Band Championships, Regent House Playing Fields

Tuesday 22nd July 2025

10:30 Entry for Britain in Bloom 2025 Tour, Donaghadee

Wednesday 23rd July 2025

10:30 Ultimate Pitch Photo Op, Seamus Heaney's Home, Bellaghy

Thursday 24th July 2025

11:00 Kite Festival Photo Op, Millisle

19:00 Comber Recreation Football Team Civic Event, Bangor Castle

Friday 25th July 2025

13:00 Irish Women's Bowling Association Senior Inter Competition Bowls,
Ward Park Pavillion

13:45 Portaferry Gala Festival

Saturday 26th July 2025

13:45 Donaghadee Lifeboat Festival

Sunday 27th July 2025

15:00 Emerald Isle Highland Dance Festival, Nendrum College, Comber

Thursday 31st July 2025

19:00 Creative Peninsula Launch, Ards Arts Centre

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 25 June 2025 commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair:	The Mayor (Councillor McCollum)	
Aldermen:	Adair	McAlpine (8.13 pm)
	Armstrong-Cotter	McDowell (zoom)
	Brooks	McIlveen
	Cummings (zoom)	Smith
	Graham	
Councillors:	Ashe	Irwin (zoom)
	Blaney	Kendall
	Brady	Kennedy
	Boyle	Kerr
	Cathcart	McBurney
	Chambers (7.08 pm)	McClellan
	Cochrane	McCracken
	Douglas	McKee
	Edmund	McLaren (zoom)
	Gilmour (zoom) (7.05 pm)	Moore
	Harbinson	Morgan
	Hennessy	Smart
	Hollywood	Wray
	Irvine, S (zoom)	

Officers: Chief Executive (S McCullough), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), 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), Community Planning Manager (P Mackey), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (J Glasgow).

1. PRAYER

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

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend were received from Alderman McRandal and Councillor Thompson.

Apologies for lateness were received from Alderman McAlpine, Councillor Chambers and Councillor Gilmour.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Hollywood, McKee, Moore and Smart declared an interest in Item 18 – Q1 Funding CAAND and Community Network and Item 19 – Memorandum of Understanding for Advice Services 2025-26.

Alderman Graham and Councillor Kerr declared an interest in Item 17.4 – Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Douglas and Alderman Adair.

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

The Mayor commenced her business by extending thanks and very best wishes on behalf of Council to the former Councillor Ray McKimm who had resigned from the Council at the start of June. She thanked him for his service to the Council which he did with comradery and integrity.

The Mayor extended a warm welcome to Councillor Tom Brady who had been co-opted to Councillor McKimm's seat.

The Mayor reminded Members that the Somme Commemoration Wreath Laying Service would be taking place on Sunday 29th June 2025 at Ward Park, Bangor. Members were asked to be attendance for 1.15 pm and advise Democratic Services if they would be attending to allow for their robe to be taken.

The Mayor announced recipients of the King's Birthday Honours who resided in the Borough:-

Paul Holmes (OBE) – Senior Director of Investigations, Police Ombudsman for NI
Victoria Barnett (OBE) – Chief Executive, Danske Bank UK
Peter May (CB) - Former Permanent Secretary, Department of Health
Christine Smith (CBE) – Barrister

The Mayor congratulated and sent best wishes to those recipients.

(Councillor Gilmour entered the meeting – 7.05 pm – via zoom)

NOTED.

5. MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR ENGAGEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF JUNE 2025

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- List of Mayor's/Deputy Mayor engagements for the Month of June.

The Mayor highlighted some of the engagements which she had attended during June:-

C.25.06.25PM

9

Presentation of Colin Middleton's Works, North Down Museum - The Mayor spoke of her delight to welcome Colin Middleton's daughter Jane to North Down Museum to donate a beautiful selection of her father's works and materials to the collection. She urged Members to visit the exhibition in the Museum.

Nowhere to Run 5K, Ward Park in aid of Women's Aid and the Men's Advisory Project which had been facilitated by PCSP. The Mayor remarked that it had been a fantastic event and worthwhile collaboration.

Orchardville Annual Awards and Celebration, Titanic Hotel. As one of the Mayor's Charities the Mayor remarked that it had been a fantastic honour and privilege to attend the event. An award for outstanding endeavour had been presented to Orchardville member, Nicole Smith who was from Newtownards.

(Councillor Chambers entered the meeting – 7.08 pm)

Intergenerational Project Showcase, City Hall, Bangor had been an inspiring collaboration between older people and younger people, sharing their shared and differing experiences. Great example of generations working together and building relationships.

Armed Forces Day, Ards Air Field – The event had been a gigantic effort by everyone involved. She was enormously proud of the results and the event had been a spectacular success.

(Councillor Chambers withdrew from the meeting – 7.10 pm)

The Mayor thanked and congratulated those involved in organising the Armed Forces Day event.

NOTED.

(Councillor Chambers re-entered the meeting – 7.11 pm)

6. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING DATED 28 MAY 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

7. MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING DATED 4 JUNE 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

8. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

8.1 Audit Committee dated 27 May 2025

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.

8.2 Planning Committee dated 10 June 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

8.3 Environment Committee dated 11 June 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Proposed by Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

In respect of Item 3, page 13 – Response to Notice of Motion - Donaghadee Sea Defences; Councillor Harbinson referred to the recommendation which stated 'sharing the findings of the study undertaken by AECOM' and he believed that should read RPS not AECOM.

In respect of Item 2, page 11 – Response to Notice of Motion – Donaghadee Sea Defences - Councillor Hennessy highlighted the inaccuracy in the spelling of 'berthing'.

8.3.1 Matter Arising from Item 9 - Notice of Motion Update on Bangor Christmas Lighting
(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Director of Environment attaching visuals of preferred options. The report detailed that an update report on the Notice of Motion agreed in April 2025 went to Environment Committee in June 2025, however further developments have since given rise to the need for a further update to Council.

The report to Environment Committee stated: *"Officers have been tasked with investigating the feasibility of festoon lighting [in Bangor], crossing the road at high level, down Main Street. Officers have had conversations with DfI representatives and are currently working through the requirements to apply for DfI approval. Once these set of requirements have been confirmed, officers will prepare a short list of potential lighting options and present them to the City Advisory Group for a decision based on their preference. It should however be noted that DfI may not approve the application."*

However, soon after the Environment Committee meeting, officers were advised that the road crossing lights had a long lead-in time and must be ordered by the end of June.

Therefore, a number of potential options were presented to a special meeting of the City Advisory Group (CAG) on 17th June and the preferred lights were attached to the report for Members information. It should be noted that members of the CAG were highly supportive of the proposed lighting features, recognising its benefit in creating a welcoming and vibrant city atmosphere, fostering increased civic pride and promoting economic activity during the festive period.

The columns proposed for installation of the road-crossing frames were on lower Main Street which were highlighted in red on a visual within the report.

Additional Works & Budget

Members would be aware that Officers had secured £19,800 from Department for Communities (DfC) for this project under the Urban Regeneration Programme, which included a required 10% contribution from Council, bringing the overall budget to £22,000.

The purchase cost for the 5 road-crossings would be approximately £7,000.

There was an opportunity to use the remainder of the DfC funding to purchase new frames for the remainder of the city centre (defined by the public realm footpaths). The replacement festive lighting frames could be selected to compliment the new road crossings. This idea was also discussed with the City Advisory Group, and the group's preferred frames were included in appendix.

The total cost for the 85no. frames required for the remainder of the town centre was approximately £22,000, bringing the project total to £29,000 and meaning there was a £7,000 shortfall in funding under the Urban Regeneration Programme.

It was worth noting that as the existing frames are approaching the end of their usable life, maintenance costs were increasing year-on-year. Last year the repair costs for Bangor Christmas decorations were in the region of £5,000. Naturally, those costs would not be incurred if we were to purchase new frames this year so the additional money required could potentially be sourced from the Christmas lighting maintenance budget. Alternately, there were other live DfC projects under the Urban Regeneration Programme that Officers believe may come in under budget and therefore a possibility to utilise any surplus to make up the shortfall in funding for this project.

Approvals

Members should note that the road crossings were still subject to DfI approval. Officers are working through the various requirements, including a structural engineers assessment of the columns and road-crossings. Council was therefore progressing the purchase of the road-crossing features "at-risk". Officers were fairly confident that the structural engineers report would be positive however, in the event that approval was not obtained, there would likely be alternative suitable sites for their use elsewhere within the estate.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees the above proposals in relation to Christmas Lighting in Bangor, utilising DfC funding wherever possible, with any shortfall coming from existing Christmas Lighting maintenance budgets.

Proposed by Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Councillor Douglas re-entered the meeting – 7.15 pm)

Councillor McClean was pleased to support the recommendation, detailing the idea was to install lighting that was of high quality and tasteful as a pilot in Bangor. If successful, that could be extended to the 5 towns within the Borough. He thanked the Head of Assets and Property who had been extremely proactive and the Rural Development Manager for securing the grant from DfC. The grant was a huge amount and would go most of the way to seeing the pilot project delivered.

Councillor Cathcart thanked the officers involved in taking the matter forward. The lighting was a fantastic scheme and would enhance the current offering. He asked about the timescale on getting the confirmation from DfL.

The Director of Environment explained that the Head of Assets and Property Services and the team had been in active discussions with DfL for some time. From the preliminary discussions, officers were confident, and no red flags had been presented to date. The design agreed by the CAG was believed to fit into an approvable specification. If DfL approval was not received, the Head of Assets and Property Services was satisfied that the goods could be utilised. As alluded to, grant funding was being provided by DfC.

Councillor Cathcart stated that DfL had been moving positively in respect of the public realm lights. He felt the lights would look fantastic and hoped that could be rolled out further. Councillor Cathcart asked the Director of Environment and Head of Assets and Property to keep Members updated.

Councillor Morgan acknowledged the work undertaken by the Head of Assets and Property Services. She recalled that when the original Notice of Motion came before the Committee she had expressed her views regarding the other towns who would also like new and improved Christmas lights. She noted at that time an informal promise had been made that could occur the following year. She felt it was really important that the lights in all the towns were addressed.

The Director stated that the matter had been debated at the Committee, and he had informed Members that the scheme technicalities designed for Bangor may not be delivered in the same augmentation in other towns. It was about the distance between the lighting columns, their construction and strength. There was a commitment to improve and move forward with the augmentation in the other towns. A budget provision would be included in the estimates for next year.

(Councillor Gilmour withdrew from the meeting – 7.27 pm – via zoom)

Councillor Blaney paid tribute to work of the Head of Assets and Property Services. If the pilot was successful in Bangor it could be rolled out in other areas. As Chair of the CAG he also wished to put on record his thanks to the officers who supported that group for their work.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the recommendation be adopted.

FURTHER RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the minutes of the Environment Committee be approved and adopted.

8.4 Place and Prosperity Committee dated 12 June 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Proposed by Councillor McCracken, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

In respect of Item 21 – Local Economic Partnership – Sub Regional Economic Plan; Councillor Boyle wished to raise the item in the exclusion of the public/press.

In respect of Item 12 – Response to Notice of Motion - Vacancy and Dereliction Studies;

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that Council notes this report and findings of the vacancy and dereliction study and, to assist in the formulation of a response to deliver Council's strategic goal to grow its non-domestic rate base, that Council writes to the Finance Minister to request that he amends the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill to provide local councils with the powers to vary the level of rate increases between SMEs and larger businesses.

Alderman Smith stated that the debate around the vacancy rates, highlighted the issue, particularly the vacancy rates in Bangor, and he felt the measure would help improve performance. The Council had a corporate priority to attract more businesses to the Borough and grow its non-domestic rate base. One matter that had been discussed was the non-domestic rate and the de-coupling powers to vary the domestic and non-domestic rate increases. One of the issues to be considered was that if the non-domestic rate was frozen/reduced that would currently benefit the large multiples most. Councils in Northern Ireland did not have the power to vary the rates for different types of businesses. Currently, the DoF provided small businesses rates relief and Alderman Smith outlined the levels of that relief. He outlined that in England the rates for businesses were calculated on a rateable value multiplier. He reported the rates in that regard for standard and small businesses and noted that they also provided a small rate exemption and rural rate relief. Scotland also provided a degree of rates relief along with variable poundage dependent on the rateable value. The principle of targeting rates for small businesses was well established in the UK. Although in NI Councils did not have the power or flexibility to vary the rates policy accordingly. Alderman Smith therefore wished to raise the matter with the Minister of Finance to give Councils the power to differentiate rates between SMEs and larger businesses. He called on political parties within the

Chamber to lobby their party colleagues. He felt his proposal added to the message that Ards and North Down was open for business and provide Council with another option to develop and deploy its business base within the Borough. Alderman Smith called for Members to support his proposal which would allow the Council the ability to make changes to the rates for small businesses if it chose to do so.

Councillor Blaney stated that a key priority of his was to attract as many different businesses as possible into the Borough and he believed that he had already been relatively successful in that regard. Rates were an important factor for attracting businesses. He would like to say Ards and North Down had the lowest non-domestic rate of Councils in Northern Ireland. The issue that existed was if the non-domestic rate was lowered, the larger multiples would benefit and that would be disproportionate. The proposal would also allow the Council to have flexibility to ensure that rates relief could be granted if it wished and provide more options. If the Minister proceeded, Council could give the matter further discussion. As Alderman Smith had alluded to, it was already happening across the UK.

Councillor Cathcart welcomed the proposal and expressed his frustration regarding the lack of powers that Council had. The blanket approach to lowering the non-domestic rate would benefit retailers such as Tesco, Asda etc and the only way to pay for that would be to massively increase the domestic rate and ratepayers did not need to be impacted further. Councillor Cathcart would like the variation to be not only on the size of the business but also geographical area. In terms of the vacancy rates in Bangor, that was relatively average in terms of the UK level and noted that places like Donaghadee and Comber had very low vacancy rates in comparison. Councillor Cathcart felt it would be fantastic to see businesses coming into Bangor and to support them further with lower rates. It was a legislative change that was required, with every political party in agreement for rates reform, he hoped that action would be taken.

Alderman McIlveen was happy that the matter be explored. Although the Council could vary the rates that would massively advantage the larger retailers and disadvantage the domestic rate payer. Additional tools were needed to address the matter. He suspected that such a change may require a consultation, and he was content to proceed with the enquiry.

(Councillor McKee withdrew from the meeting 7.44 pm)

Councillor Kendall was happy to support the proposal. The Covid-19 pandemic had seen the closure of many small businesses. She highlighted the importance of shopping locally and how rates could be a barrier to that. Holywood was thriving with small businesses. Councillor Kendall believed that having the ability to change the non-domestic rates for small businesses was very important for Council.

Councillor Boyle spoke in support of the proposal. He remarked on an announcement earlier that day on another major retailer pulling out of Bangor.

Councillor Moore was supportive in the sense that it was important to support businesses and in particular smaller businesses and to have the powers to respond locally. She would have preferred for the proposal to have been considered at the

Corporate Services Committee to have been properly debated to agree the best way forward. Councillor Moore was happy to support the proposal in principle.

(Councillor McKee re-entered the meeting – 7.47 pm)

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that Council notes this report and findings of the vacancy and dereliction study and, to assist in the formulation of a policy response to deliver Council's strategic goal to grow our non-domestic rate base, that Council writes to the Finance Minister to request that he amends the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill to provide local councils with the powers to vary the level of rates increases between SMEs and larger businesses.

FURTHER RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McCracken, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the minutes be approved and adopted (with the exception of Item 21, to be considered in the exclusion of the public/press).

8.5 Corporate Services Committee dated 17 June 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

(Councillor Brady withdrew from the meeting – 7.48 pm)

9. DEPUTATION REQUESTS

9.1 Deputation Request - Smartphone Free Childhood NI (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching deputation form. The report detailed that a deputation request had been received from representatives from Ards and North Down parents who were inspired by Smartphone Free Childhood movement

The request was in relation to Ards and North Down Children and Young People's Unfettered access to the Internet, Smartphone Ownership and Social Media Use.

- There was growing evidence linking the age of ownership of first smartphone and social media use to the mental health crisis facing our children and young people.
- Ofcom data shows 24% of 5–7-year-olds in the UK own their own smartphone.
- Parentkind data (including parents in Northern Ireland) showed 94% of primary parents polled believe smartphones were harmful yet almost all children had one by the end of P7. Many parents felt in an impossible position that they either give their child a harmful device designed for adults or

risk alienating them from their peer group at a crucial stage in their development.

- Parents were therefore coming together via the Smartphone Free Childhood movement to make a voluntary pact to delay giving their children smartphones until at least 14 and social media until at least 16 hoping that together they could remove the peer pressure, and no child can say 'I'm the only one without a smartphone'. Instead, these parents hope to give their child a basic phone which enabled texts and calls when the time comes e.g. when they are getting a bus to school.

The grouping wished to raise the matter because:

- Hundreds of parents in Ards and North Down had got involved in the Smartphone Free Childhood movement but with the Council's support for parents to delay smartphones and social media this could have a much further reach.
- The Group had met with local political representatives, school leaders, government departments, social workers, pediatricians and the PSNI and the issues presenting themselves across these professions (due in part to children's unregulated access to the internet and social media often facilitated by smartphones) is having a huge impact on children and young people with knock on effects for society. By Council supporting parents and school leaders to endorse the principle of delay, this had the potential to be a very impactful preventative measure for our children and young people's health, wellbeing, education and in assisting to avoid involvement with the criminal justice system.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers this request.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Kennedy, that the deputation be heard by the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

9.2 Deputation Request – U3A (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching deputation request form. The report detailed that a deputation request had been received from North Down and Ards U3A.

U3A were a community organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, social engagement, and wellbeing for older/retired people. The organisation welcome from any age group who are no longer in full time employment. They were an inclusive organisation which had members with physical, learning and mental health issues. The group would like to share the significant contributions the U3A makes to the local community and explore how they could collaborate with the council to further enhance their impact.

U3A believed their work aligned closely with the council's priorities, such as supporting active ageing, enhancing community wellbeing, and promoting social inclusion. The group would welcome the opportunity to discuss how they could

partner with the council to access resources, share facilities, or collaborate on initiatives.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers this request.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the deputation be heard by the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

10. 10 YEARS OF COMMUNITY PLANNING IN ARDS AND NORTH DOWN (Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching The Big Plan for Ards and North Down (2017-2032). The report detailed that the purpose of this report was to provide Members with an overview of progress and impact made over the past decade through the community planning process within Ards and North Down Borough. It highlights key developments, including the Big Community Planning 10-Year Summit, the publication of an updated Community Plan, and the launch of a new suite of animations that communicate progress to a wider audience.

Under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, Ards and North Down Borough Council assumed responsibility for leading the community planning process in April 2015. This collaborative, long-term planning approach had sought to improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of our residents through partnership working with a wide range of statutory, community, and voluntary stakeholders.

The original Community Plan, "The Big Plan for Ards and North Down," was launched in 2017, with a 15-year vision. As we mark 10 years of the community planning duty, this milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on achievements, challenges, and future ambitions.

THE BIG COMMUNITY PLANNING 10-YEAR SUMMIT

To mark a decade of community planning, the Council hosted **The Big Community Planning 10-Year Summit** on 7 May 2025, bringing together over 100 delegates from partner organisations, community groups, and residents. The Summit was facilitated by members of Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership and focused on showcasing local impact projects that have emerged from the community planning process.

Themes explored at the event included:

- Participation across all ages, abilities and with the third sector
- The determinants of health and the role everyone can play
- How partnership helps create welcoming and inclusive spaces
- Why a person centred approach to economic growth is essential
- Integration of climate action and local sustainability

Participants shared their experiences and reflected on the role of local voices in shaping community planning priorities.

Feedback from the Summit had been overwhelmingly positive and would help inform the ongoing refinement of our approach. Participants welcomed seeing the full spectrum of activities that community planning was helping to link together and there was a sense of enthusiasm and a renewed commitment for the next 10 decades.

An Updated Community Plan – A Mid-point Review

Building on the momentum of the past decade and the insights gathered via the community planning process, the Community Planning Partnership has now published a refreshed version of *The Big Plan*. This updated Plan continues to reflect the core vision of “*Vibrant & Connected; Healthy & Safe; and Sustainable & Prosperous Places*”.

The updated Big Plan includes:

- Revised outcomes and priorities, aligned with current socio-economic and environmental challenges
- A sharper focus on climate resilience, inclusive economic growth, and reducing inequalities
- Simplified language and a clearer description of the associated workstreams

The updated Plan reaffirmed the Community Planning Partnership’s commitment to shared leadership, collective impact and connectivity between outcomes, priorities and workstreams to try to reduce siloed interventions. Priorities and workstreams, help the Partnership focus on what they could collectively do to create positive outcomes for everyone across Ards and North Down. The review of the Big Plan reduced the number of priorities from 10 to 6. This was done to help improve communication with all stakeholders. Apart from outcome 1, each Big Plan outcome was now supported by a single (all be it complex) priority. The priorities and workstreams were outlined below.

1. **Participation** (Outcome 1)
 - Citizen engagement (Over 50s Council, Youth Voice, Community Support Steering Group, 3rd Sector CP HUB)
 - Community Resuscitation Group
 - Borough Reading Project
2. **Infrastructure** (Outcome 1)
 - Public Estate and Lands Group
3. **Determinants of Health** (Outcome 2)
 - Health and Wellbeing Group (Emotional Wellbeing and Social Isolation)
 - Whole Systems Approach to Healthier Weight
4. **Welcoming Spaces** (Outcome 3)
 - Age Friendly Alliance
 - Dementia Friendly (SE Area Partnership)
 - Multi-agency Support Hub
5. **Employment, Employability and Economic Inequalities** (Outcome 4)
 - Labour Market Partnership

- Anti-poverty (via Social Supermarket and AND Poverty Forum)

6. **Environmentally Sustainable Communities** (Outcome 5)

- Sustainable Tourism
- Climate Resilient Communities (incorporating Sustainable Food)
- Moved by Nature

Communicating about the achievement of Community Planning

A revised series of six Community Planning animations reflecting progress made under "The Big Plan" (2017–2032) were launched at the Big Community Planning 10 Year Summit. These refreshed animations highlight achievements aligned with the Big Plan's five outcomes, strategic priorities and workstreams.

The content of each animation was outlined below.

1. **Introduction to The Big Plan:** Presents the overarching vision and collaborative approach of the Community Planning Partnership
2. **Outcome 1 – Participation:** Showcases initiatives that enable residents to help influence how services are delivered and how pro-active engagement improves relationships and decision making
3. **Outcome 2 – Health and Wellbeing:** Highlights support initiatives that have been implemented to empower residents to take control of their own wellbeing.
4. **Outcome 3 – Welcoming Spaces:** Focuses on how we have worked with partners to create services that support people through all ages and numerous health conditions (physical and mental).
5. **Outcome 4 – Prosperous Economy:** Details activities that have been delivered to help residents access the labour market and to support people out of poverty and hardship.
6. **Outcome 5 – Sustainable Environment:** Emphasizes the importance of the environment so that its value is recognised and that it is protects for enjoyment by current and future generations.

These animations served as accessible tools to inform and engage the public about the Council's progress and ongoing commitments under The Big Plan. They illustrated how collaborative efforts across various sectors contribute to the Borough's sustainable development goals. The animations were available via the Council's website and over the next several months will be shared via Council, and community planning partners, social media platforms.

[The Big Plan Animations - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

An easy read version of the updated Big Plan was being produced

In October 2025, Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership will publish its fourth Statement of Progress. This statement would focus on

achievements over the past 10 years and would be used to communicate impact and progress by showcasing projects and interventions.

A decade on from the introduction of the community planning legislation, Ards and North Down could reflect on a significant body of work that had improved lives and strengthened partnerships. The 10-Year Summit, refreshed the Big Plan, and the supporting animations reaffirm the impact of collaborative planning and partnership work. The Summit also reflected on the work needed over the next decade to elevate community planning and further embed it across all statutory partnerships as well as government departments.

RECOMMENDED that Council note this report.

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

(Councillor Brady re-entered the meeting – 7.50 pm)

Councillor Smart wished to put on record his thanks to officers not only for the review but also for the successful recent event in Clondeboy Lodge. He recalled the commencement of the Community Plan process were there had been no money provided and no guidance. In terms of what had been delivered for young, old and vulnerable communities across the Borough that had been really impressive. The silos that had been broken down across the public sector had been meaningful and the lands engagement had been very worthwhile. Councillor Smart felt there was a lot to hope for moving forward with community planning.

Councillor McBurney referred to page 17 which talked about the research that had been undertaken to understand what poverty looked like across Ards and North Down and she asked if she could see a copy of that research.

The Community Planning Manager stated that there was a detailed report that contained information that was gathered from a range of bodies along with desktop analysis to understand what poverty looked like. Recommendations were also contained within that. She undertook to provide Councillor McBurney with a copy of that research.

(Councillor Kendall withdrew from the meeting – 7.55 pm)

Councillor McBurney congratulated officers on the Person to Patient goal which she felt was a strong objective. She asked about the participation of parents as a core group, and she felt that it was important to reach out to parents to ensure their views were heard.

The Community Planning Manager stated that engagement with residents was always welcome. One of the projects that community planning was working on currently was a whole systems approach to healthier weight and what occurred with children and young people between years 1-8. She felt that would be good opportunity to involve parents.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

11. NOMINATION TO OUTSIDE BODIES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive detailing that places on working groups were 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 reverted back to Council to nominate a Member(s) to fill the place.

Following the retirement of Councillor Ray McKimm on 2 June, a number of places became available on outside bodies. At the Annual Meeting 2025, 1-year positions previously held by Councillor McKimm were filled, with the exception of Diversity Champions – which has remained vacant since Councillor McKimm resigned from the group in February 2025 and which did not receive nomination to fill at the Annual Meeting. Nominations are sought to fill the vacant 4-year positions plus the role of Diversity Champion.

They positions were:

- Diversity Champions (1-year appointment)
- Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership
- Bangor City Steering Group
- Age North Down and Ards Management Committee
- BRCD Council Panel

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

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

	2024/25	2025/26
1	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McBurney
2	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
3	<i>(No nominations made to replace Councillor McKimm February 2025)</i>	-

Body: Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership – 4 Places (4 Year Appointment)

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Cathcart
2	Alderman Wilson	Councillor McCracken
3	Councillor McKimm	Vacant <i>(No nominations made to replace Councillor McKimm February 2025)</i>
4	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart

Body: Bangor City Steering Group – 6 Places (4 Year Appointment)

As Bangor Centre Councillors sit on the Bangor City Steering Group, Councillor Brady will replace Councillor McKimm on this group.

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Councillor Blaney	Councillor Blaney
2	Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Cathcart
3	Councillor Douglas	Councillor Harbinson
4	Alderman Dunlop	Councillor McCracken
5	Alderman Irvine	Councillor W Irvine
6	Councillor McKimm	Councillor Brady

Body: Age North Down and Ards Management Committee – 3 Places (4 Year Appointment)

	2023/27	2023/27
1	Councillor MacArthur Resigned 15.4.2024	Councillor Thompson
2	Councillor Wray	Councillor Wray
3	Councillor McKimm	Councillor McKimm
4	Alderman McAlpine	Alderman McAlpine

Body: BRCD Council Panel – 4 Places

	2019/23	2023/27
1	Councillor Adair Councillor Cathcart (since 10/3/21)	Councillor Cathcart
2	Councillor Smart	Councillor Blaney
3	Alderman McDowell	Councillor McKimm
4	Councillor Dunlop	Alderman McDowell

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:

- Diversity Champions
- Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership
- Age North Down and Ards Management Committee
- BRCD Council Panel

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that Councillor Brady be nominated to the groups detailed.

12. UPDATE ON POSSIBLE LEISURE OPERATING MODELS FROM APRIL 2028 (FILE CW51)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and

Wellbeing detailing that further to the report presented to Members in April 2025 which outlined the background, possible operating models, the timeline, the Member engagement process and communications process required for Members to decide on the future leisure operating model, this report provided Members with an update on progress made, since that time.

Leisure provision workshop one

The first leisure provision workshop took place on the 21st May 2025 to inform members of the process and to seek initial thoughts and requests for what information was required for the second workshop. The workshop was attended by 17 Members and supported by officers across various departments including HR, Finance, Leisure and Transformation.

In advance of the workshop members were provided with a variety of previous reports and papers which were of relevance to the decision. The documents were still accessible to members via the link provided at the time.

Workshop one focused on the following areas.

- The need for a decision to be made by September 2025
- The four possible models (Hybrid, Outsourced, Inhouse, Local Authority Trading Company (LATC))
- Key considerations
 - Ability to deliver strategic outcomes
 - Control and influence
 - Revenue implications (VAT, Staffing, Pensions, Maintenance and Utilities, Implementation costs)
 - Risks
 - Case studies
 - Current profile of leisure across the Borough

The members requested additional information to be provided for workshop two.

- Review of the Four Models outlining how they support the delivery of the Leisure Strategy and deliver Council Outcomes
- Possible financial scenarios
- Staff Satisfaction
- Further assessment of the considerations (Financial, Control, Staff, Users, Risk, etc)
- For an Outsourced model (including hybrid) – what quality measures / penalty clauses could be included in the contract to help support Council's outcomes/mitigate risks?
- More detail on the maintenance arrangements

Leisure provision workshop two

Leisure provision workshop two was scheduled for 23rd June at 6.30pm in Bangor City Hall. The workshop would address the points raised at workshop one and would provide the Members with the opportunity to discuss in more detail the different operating models, and in particular criteria for guiding a decision on the way forward.

Timeline

Members were aware that the future leisure operating model had been discussed a number of times over recent years as it was a significant decision for Council.

If Council's decision was to continue to outsource the management of leisure facilities (either hybrid or fully), then a new procurement exercise must be undertaken. Therefore, the absolute deadline for a decision, as previously noted, was no later than the end of September 2025. If the decision was to insource and retain in house then a significant amount of time would be required to develop that process further.

The workshops between now and September would aid the Member's decision-making process on the future leisure operating model:

- 23rd June - Elected Members workshop two; and
- 28th July 2025 - Elected Members workshop three

At workshop one there was a request that the decision would be considered at a Special Council Meeting. It was recommended that a Special Council meeting was scheduled for 18th September 2025.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the update and the anticipated timeline for decision by 18th September 2025 as outlined.

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

Councillor Boyle asked if the future meetings would be open to the public.

The Director of Community and Wellbeing advised that was dependent on the nature of the detail. The preference would be to have the meeting in public. A further workshop was planned and a report would be written in time for the September Council meeting.

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

13. HERITAGE GRANTS (FILE HER01R225/26)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Round 1 of the 2025-26 Heritage Grants were awarded in February 2025. There were seven applications to the grant, of which, six were awarded £500 (£3000 in total). That left £2000 of the budget remaining.

Round 2 opened in April 2025 and closed on 13 May 2025. Eight applications were received. The applications were assessed by a Panel comprising Mr Billy Carlisle (Arts and Heritage Panel), the Community Arts Development Officer and the Heritage Development Officer.

There was a total of £2,000 available in grant money with a maximum of £500 per application awarded. As shown in the accompanying Scoring Matrix, each

application was scored out of 100. Recommendation for award of grant was based on a minimum score of 60.

The unsuccessful applicants would be provided with feedback on their application to assist them with future applications.

Application Assessment Scoring

GRANT REF:	ORGANISATION	PROJECT TITLE	SCORE	AWARDED
HER-PG008/2526	Kilcooley Women's Centre	Restoration of clock and outreach - Market Street: Step Back in Time	40	£0
HER-PG009/2526	Ards Historical Society	Booklet - The History of Scrabo Hill and Tower	85	£0 Already in receipt of grant for 2025-26
HER-PG010/2526	Donaghadee Parish Church Halls	Publication - Donaghadee Parish Church, Quadricentennial Anniversary, 1626-2026	72	£500
HER-PG011/2526	Portavogie Cultural and Heritage Society	Booklet - 12th Heritage Booklet Publication	79	£500
HER-PG012/2526	Friends of Columbanus Bangor	Columbanus Peace Walk	54	£0
HER-PG013/2526	Portaferry WI	Archive - Echoes from the Past: 90 Years of Portaferry WI	85	£500
HER-PG014/2526	Hollywood u3a History & Archive groups	Archive - Storage of Hollywood District u3a History Archive	85	£500
HER-PG015/2526	Boom Studios	Celtic Wheel of the Year Art and Craft Club	45	£0
Total awarded				£2000.00

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the funding awarded as outlined in the table above.

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

(Councillor Hollywood withdrew from the meeting – 7.59 pm)

Councillor Wray congratulated the organisations that had been successful in the heritage grants. He noted that those unsuccessful would be given feedback and he believed that was important. Councillor Wray asked the Director for his thoughts in terms of a review of the grants process. He was aware there was a grants review panel and he wondered if issues could be raised through that panel. Councillor Wray was keen that grants were given to community groups throughout the Borough with an even geographical spread, it was a competitive process, so he recognised that was a challenge but he felt there were ways to amend the eligibility criteria. He was keen that the applications were of good quality and were from groups that had a special expertise in the field they were applying for. Councillor Wray also felt that thought should be given if the Council should be funding larger organisations for smaller grants. For some groups, the funding kept the group going and there were groups that receiving funding elsewhere.

(Councillor Cathcart withdrew from the meeting – 8.01 pm)

(Councillor Hollywood re-entered the meeting – 8.01 pm)

The Borough relied in its volunteers and he felt they needed to be at the forefront when considering grants.

Alderman Adair welcomed the list of organisations that had received the Heritage Grants which he believed were a good spread. The groups relied on the grants, such groups were quite often run by volunteers and if the history and heritage was not documented it would be lost for future generations. He paid particular tribute to Portavogie Cultural Heritage Society along with Portaferry Women's Institute. He was disappointed that an application had not been received from Portaferry and Strangford Trust and hoped that would be forthcoming in future years.

(Councillor Cathcart re-entered the meeting – 8.03 pm)

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

14. SEALING DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED:- on the proposal of Councillor Blaney, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter,

THAT the Seal of the Council be affixed to the following documents:-

- (a) Grant of Rights of Burial; Nos D40928 – D40957
- (b) Amendment – Glen Baxter on behalf of an estate – Clandeboye SX 7249

15. TRANSFER OF RIGHTS OF BURIAL

No transfers have been received.

NOTED.

16. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix VI)

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

That was a standing item on the Council agenda each month and its aim was to keep Members updated on the outcome of the Motions. It should be noted that as each Motion was dealt with it could be removed from the report.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

17. NOTICES OF MOTION

17.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee

Responsible Dog Walking in Public Spaces

This Council, as a 'Dog Friendly Borough' recognises the increasing use of public parks and footpaths by professional and recreational dog walkers, and the need to balance animal welfare, public safety, and the enjoyment of public spaces for all of our Borough's residents.

This Council notes that:

- Multiple dogs under the control of a single individual may pose challenges to effective management and public safety;
- Excessive numbers of dogs being walked simultaneously can lead to increased risk of dog fights, interference with other park users, fouling, and uncontrolled behaviour;
- There has been an increasing number of professional dog walkers, offering services within the Borough and there is a lack of licencing, registration or other requirements which may lead to inadequate insurance, training and experience, adding further potential risks to people and pets; and
- Many local authorities across the UK, including our neighbour Belfast City Council, have introduced limits on the number of dogs that may be walked at one time.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Produce a report outlining the costs and steps required to introduce a local restriction under the relevant provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environments Act (Northern Ireland) 2011:
 - a. Limiting the number of dogs that any one person may be in charge of to a maximum of four at any given time in public spaces.
 - b. Mandating that professional dog walkers must have dogs on leads at all times to ensure dog control and accountability for dog behaviours.
2. Include in the report, the provision and cost of a complementary public education campaign, to inform residents, recreational and professional dog walkers about the new limit, about what it means to have a dog under your control in public spaces (whether on or off lead), and what promoting responsible dog control and safety in shared spaces should be.
3. To write to the DAERA Minister to ask him to introduce, and provide funding support to Councils to enforce, mandatory registration of professional dog walkers to help to ensure suitable animal welfare standards, the provision of suitable training, experience, insurance, and public safety.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Kendall, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Environment Committee.

17.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Graham and Councillor Cochrane

That this Council notes the popularity of public spaces such as beaches during the summer months.

Further to this Council will task officers to bring back a report to explore options for the extension of public toilet opening hours during the summer months to 9pm near beaches and other busy areas.

Council Officers will further bring back a report on expanding baby changing facilities within our Borough at public toilets.

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

17.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson

“That this Council agrees that:

1. Bangor Marine should be invited to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders on Marine Gardens and confirm a guaranteed start date.
2. Should it prove necessary, Council will liaise with the Department of Communities to consider alternative options for the delivery of the project, including the potential for an arms-length regeneration agency, that is publicly owned but with commercial freedom.

3. Council should work with the developer to create a commercial marketing plan to deliver at least £50m of investment for the rest of Queen's Parade. The initial plan should be brought to Committee before the end of 2025 and should dovetail with other critical developments in the area, helping to provide a catalyst for wider regeneration.

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

17.4. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Douglas and Alderman Adair

That Ards and North Down Borough Council recognises the need to tackle all sources of pollution affecting water quality in Lough Neagh and in rivers throughout Northern Ireland. Further to this Council expresses alarm at plans by the DAERA Minister Andrew Muir to impose stricter phosphorus limits on over 3,500 local farms, manage low emission slurry spreading equipment and require compulsory uncultivated buffer strips for those in the arable and horticulture sectors; believes such measures could devastate agriculture, reduce livestock numbers, add cost and undermine food security; stresses that any future nutrient management policy, which is focused on more sustainable agriculture practices, must be the product of genuine partnership, rather than punitive policies that risk the viability of our agri-food industry, further stresses the need to redouble efforts, and actions, to address the sources of pollution in wastewater treatment, and calls on Council Officers to write to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs asking him to immediately withdraw the current public consultation on the Nutrients Action Programme 2026-2029 in order to provide time and space to develop a genuine multi-sectoral and multi-agency approach that is fair and workable for all stakeholders.

As per the notification to Members, the Mayor stated that the matter was time bound and she therefore was content to hear the Motion.

(Alderman Graham and Councillor Kerr declared an interest at this stage and withdrew from the meeting)

Proposed by Councillor Douglas, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Douglas commenced by giving her full support in recognising the need to tackle all sources of pollution affecting water quality in Lough Neagh and in all rivers throughout this Borough and Northern Ireland. She felt it was unfortunate that the proposals in the Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) represented yet another blow to the rural communities within the Borough. She noted that the consultation period on the proposals had been extended however that did not address the issue. While protecting the natural environment was a shared goal, the manner in which the programme was being introduced showed a worrying disconnect between the decision makers and farmers. The farmers felt that it included a lack of genuine engagement with stakeholders, insufficient economic impact assessments and a disproportionate focus on enforcement over education and incentives. The proposals were unrealistic, unworkable and potentially damaging to the agricultural

sector. The Ulster Farmers Union had stated that the proposals were developed with insufficient consultation with farmers and other stakeholders. They also had said that the process felt more like a punishment rather than a partnership with farmers.

Councillor Douglas stated that having talked with local farmers they felt that the proposals were seen as heavily weighted towards enforcement and regulation with less emphasise on providing education, support and financial incentives for farmers to comply. Farmers were part of the solution to environmental issues, and a more balanced approach was needed, focusing on collaboration and support rather than solely on penalties. Some farmers feared the proposals could lead to a reduction in livestock numbers or even a cull if water quality targets were not met which would have significant economic and social consequences.

Councillor Douglas stated that there was deep growing concern across the agri-food sector and farming sector and further outlined those concerns. It was felt that the proposal would do damage to local agriculture, risking jobs, cutting livestock numbers and threatening Northern Ireland's ability to produce food. Other organisations who represented the agri-food sector had argued against the consultation in its current form and felt it was fundamentally flawed. Councillor Douglas stated that a new approach was needed and one which was developed alongside farmers. She called for Members support for the Motion, calling for a withdrawal of the consultation in order to provide time to develop a multi-sectoral and multi-agency approach that was fair and workable for all.

Alderman Adair stated that the farming industry and community in the Borough went back to ancient times. The Borough was constantly growing and promoting its agri-food sector and there was big concern amongst the farming community and agri-food sector on the negative impact of the Nutrients Action Programme 2026-2029. Many farmers had told Alderman Adair, that the proposals contained within the programme were unworkable, unaffordable and unjust. The farmers had advised that they would be left with no option to reduce their livestock herd, resulting in the reduction of food production in Northern Ireland, jobs would be lost and it would decimate the farming and agri-food sector.

(Alderman McAlpine entered the meeting – 8.13 pm)

Furthermore, it would increase the reliance on exports. It was not good for farming life or the rural economy. Alderman Adair felt the Minister should have withdrawn the consultation. Referring particularly to the Ards Peninsula, he highlighted that the farmers loved their land and felt they were custodians of it. One of the main polluters of the waterways was NI Water and no action had been taken against it. He referred to the dairy sector which had been working hard to reduce green gas emissions.

Alderman Adair expressed his disappointment with the recent approach from the Department of Agriculture, Environment of Rural Affairs. Farmers had been presented with red tape and instead of collaboration were receiving consultation. The Council needed to stand in opposition to the consultation and a more balanced proposal was needed from the Minister protecting the environment, the rural way of life and the economy.

Councillor Moore was of the view that the Motion misunderstood the urgent need to protect the environment. Particularly, the ecological crisis, that was trying to be overcome at Lough Neagh. She felt the Motion also undermined the very purpose of consultation with all stakeholders informing governing policy. The purpose of the Nutrients Action Programme was to improve the water quality for everyone, and the current state of the water quality was hugely concerning. Agriculture was a key industry in Northern Ireland and a significant contributor to the economy. Councillor Moore highlighted that the reality was that the agriculture practices were contributing to the pollution of the water including Lough Neagh. The Nutrients Action Programme aimed to find a way, that the crucial and interdependent elements could work together to protect the environment. Councillor Moore called for action to be taken.

Alderman Smith agreed that there were issues around the water quality and everyone agreed that something needed to be done to improve water quality in Northern Ireland. Much of the problem was due to the lack investment that was going into NI Water to improve the sewage system across the province. The proposals from DAERA were not the solution. Ulster Farmers Union had said that the proposals would devastate local farming. He alluded to some of the proposals and the potential impacts those would have with the need to cull the herds. Ulster Farmers Union would have welcomed engagement in advance of the consultation being issued. Farming was Northern Ireland's primary industry and played a key strategic role in providing food. Alderman Smith was of the view that the Minister now recognised that the proposals would not be passed by the Executive and he would now need to go back, engage with the farmers and draft new proposals and regulations.

Councillor Boyle highlighted the strength of feeling across the farming community acknowledging the very real pressures facing those who worked the land. The farmers were the backbone of the rural economy and key stewards of the countryside. They were a crucial part of the solution when it came to safeguarding the future of rivers, lakes and land. Councillor Boyle recognised that elements of the current NAP consultation had caused significant concern, particularly regarding the practicality and cost of some of the measures proposed. He also recognised that there was a serious and growing challenge when it came to water quality particularly in Lough Neagh. Pollution from a range of sources, had led to unacceptable levels of phosphorous and nitrogen entering water bodies, fuelling algal blooms and damaging ecosystems.

A revised NAP was a legal and environmental necessity under the Water Framework Directive and was a key part of the Lough Neagh Action Plan. However, any new measures must be workable, fair, and based on genuine partnership with the farming sector. That meant listening carefully to the views being expressed through this consultation and ensuring farmers were not asked to bear the burden of change without the right package of support in place. Councillor Boyle called for the Department to match regulation with incentives, advisory support and education programmes. He stated that farmers must be given access to financial assistance, practical support, and realistic lead-in times to make the changes that were being asked of them. In other jurisdictions, significant public funding had been made available for things like low emission spreading equipment, slurry storage

upgrades, and enhanced advisory services. Councillor Boyle hoped the Minister would establish an Agricultural Water Quality Working Group as a matter of urgency to bring together farming representatives, environmental experts and officials to help shape a final NAP that was effective, but also fair. Councillor Boyle believed supporting proposals to scrap the consultation outright would be careless and reckless. The purpose of this consultation was to help shape final proposals by taking into account the views of all stakeholders. Scrapping it at this stage would only further delay the rollout of a programme that was essential to tackling some of the most pressing challenges affecting water quality. Councillor Boyle believed that the immediate establishment of a dedicated Agricultural Water Quality Working Group offered the best route to delivering a balanced outcome - one that respected both rural communities and environmental responsibilities before a Final Nutrients Action Programme was rolled out.

Councillor McKee rose in opposition to the Motion. He recognised the need to support farming communities which were vital to the rural economy and food systems. However, the natural environment was in crisis and that was evident in Lough Neagh. Councillor McKee stated that Lough Neagh was dying, its water was suffocating under toxic algae, driven by excess nutrient pollution. Scientific evidence was clear, current voluntary measures were not working, and more delays could not be afforded.

Councillor McKee felt the Motion presented the NAP as an attack on farmers which he did not believe it was. He recognised the NAP may not be perfect, but it was something to work with. Stricter phosphorous limits, slurry management and buffer strips were not radical ideas instead they were basic evidence-based steps to restoring water quality, ensuring long term soil health and a path to creating a genuine sustainable food system. The measures were already standard practice in many parts of Europe. The changes required adaption, and support and assistance should be given to farmers to transition. He highlighted the need to provide financial, technical and institutional support to move away from a model that was clearly degrading the shared environment.

Councillor McKee felt the Motion fell back on the same tired narrative that environmental regulation was inherently a threat to farmers and food security. In reality there was no food security without environmental security. Polluted waters, collapsed biodiversity and nutrients soils would ultimately do more harm to agriculture than any regulation ever would. The NAP was a consultation, a space for dialogue and refinement. For the consultation to be withdrawn entirely was not constructive. Councillor McKee was supportive of the transition that supported farmers through change, not to punish them. Councillor McKee stated that he could not support the Motion and there was no more time for delay, denial and environmental decline.

Councillor Morgan was pleased the views on the NAP were being expressed though felt it would be better for those to be aired in the consultation. It was important that all the issues were heard however highlighted that the matter was a consultation and no decisions had been made. It was the first step in a very long process and was about engagement for all those interested. Councillor Morgan expanded on her views stating that it was about understanding what was possible and what needed further

consideration. The consultation had already been extended for another four weeks. Agriculture was hugely important, a cornerstone of the economy and a way of life living for many people in Northern Ireland. She understood that many farmers were concerned about the proposals. However the fact that many of the agricultural practices contributed to the pollution of the waterways could not be ignored. The Assembly had declared an ecological and biodiversity crisis in Lough Neagh in May 2024, another year on the matter was only at consultation stage. Councillor Morgan agreed that NI Water needed to take action and the Council had been vocal on that subject. Lough Neagh was green and it supplied 40% of drinking water. Councillor Morgan spoke of her experiences in farming. She reemphasised that this was just a consultation on draft proposals, no one wanted to devast agricultural and undermine food security and she believed that to be scaremongering and most unhelpful. A shared evidence based solution was needed, one that was fair and workable and she urged for all stakeholders to share their views.

Alderman McIlveen disagreed with the comments of Councillor Morgan, that this was just a consultation. It was a consultation on proposed mandatory measures. Unlike other NAPs there was co-design, working alongside the stakeholders to develop the programme, that had not occurred. The document stated that it was based on scientific evidence however that evidence had not been provided, had not been peer reviewed, unlike previous considerations of NAP. Alderman McIlveen stated that the big concern of the document was that the ramifications were devastating to agriculture. 3,500 farms/businesses were affected by the consultation yet they were not part of the consultation. Alderman McIlveen expressed his disappointment with the approach taken by the consultation which he viewed as an imposition.

To sum up, Councillor Douglas stated that the Motion called for the need to tackle all sources of pollution affecting Lough Neagh, throughout the Borough and throughout Northern Ireland. She recognised that the views differed on the Motion and she urged everyone who cared for the agri-food sector and the future of farming to support the Motion. Councillor Douglas called for a recorded vote.

A recorded vote was undertaken which resulted as follows:-

FOR (18)

Aldermen

Adair
Armstrong-Cotter
Brooks
Cummings
McIlveen
Smith

Councillors

Cathcart
Chambers
Cochrane
Douglas
Edmund

AGAINST (15)

Aldermen

McAlpine
McDowell

Councillors

Ashe
Boyle
Brady
Harbinson
Hennessy

ABSTAINED (0)

ABSENT (6)

Alderman

Graham
McRandal

Councillors

Blaney
Gilmour
Kerr
Thompson

Hollywood	Irwin
Irvine, S	Kendall
Kennedy	McBurney
McClellan	McCollum
McLaren	McCracken
Smart	McKee
Wray	Moore
	Morgan

(Alderman Graham and Councillor Kerr re-entered the meeting)

17.5 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Cummings

That this Council notes the importance of farmers and rural dwellers to our society;

Recognises that farmers, agricultural workers and people living in rural communities can have lower access to cancer services due to the nature of their work and often living in isolated areas. We also recognise the impact that a cancer diagnosis can have on a family business such as a family farm, including housing, the extended family, and the welfare of livestock.

Endorses the "Nip It In The Bud" campaign delivered by the Farming Community Network in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and acknowledges the benefits to the rural community.

Pledges to do all we can, to raise awareness and save lives, particularly using our social media platforms, to help rural dwellers in this Council area be aware of the symptoms of cancer and to seek immediate medical advice if necessary as evidence demonstrates that early diagnosis and treatment can save lives.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Corporate Services Committee.

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC/PRESS

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

(Councillor Kerr withdrew from the meeting – 8.45 pm)

8.4 MINUTES OF PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE **CONTINUED...**

In respect of Item 21 - Local Economic Partnership – Sub-Regional Economic Plan

(Having previously declared an interest in the item, Councillors Hollywood, Moore, McKee and Smart withdrew from the meeting)

18. Q1 FUNDING - CAAND AND COMMUNITY NETWORK (FILE CW177)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Schedule 6:3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person.

19. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR ADVICE SERVICES 2025-26 (FILE CDV28)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Schedule 6:3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person.

(Councillor Boyle withdrew from the meeting – 9.02 pm)

(Councillors Smart, Hollywood and Moore re-entered the meeting – 9.02 pm)

20. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND FACILITIES REVIEW (FILE CDV58)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Schedule 6:3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.06 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Community and Wellbeing Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Wednesday, 18 June 2025 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Ashe

Aldermen: Adair
Cummings (Zoom)
McRandal

Councillors: Boyle (Zoom) W Irvine
Chambers McBurney (Zoom)
Cochrane McKee (Zoom)
Douglas McClean
Hollywood Moore (7.15 pm)
S Irvine

Officers in Attendance: Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Community and Culture (N Dorrian), Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development (A Faulkner), Head of Leisure Services (I O'Neill - Zoom), Head of Parks and Cemeteries (S Daye) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

INTRODUCTION

At the start of the meeting the Chair detailed that due to the number of items on the agenda, the short turnaround time for minutes and commitments of Democratic Services Officers to events, time sensitive reports had been removed from the agenda and would be tabled instead at the June meeting of Council to pursue decisions for those in a timely manner. The minutes and remaining recommendations of the Committee would be tabled at the July meeting of the Council.

Alderman Adair congratulated Councillor Ashe on her appointment to Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee. He was glad that she had clarified the position with the minutes. He and his Party had thought that the length of the meeting and the number of items on it was unacceptable and not the way the Council should wish to do business. There was a feeling of a rush due to the coming Summer break but Members needed to be given time to read reports, debate matters and have proper scrutiny. In normal circumstances he would have suggested that the agenda be split over two meetings but for now he wished to put down a marker that he would not support such a long agenda going forward and thought that twenty items on an agenda was adequate for Members consideration.

NOTED.

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Alderman Brooks. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Moore and Councillor McBurney.

NOTED.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Chambers : Item 6 – Response to NOM 519 Queens Hall, Holywood.

NOTED.

3. **DEPUTATION – BRANCH OUT COMMUNITY**

(Appendix I)

The Chair welcomed and introduced Pamela Shaw to the meeting and Charlie Fisher, Chief Executive, Development Trust, Northern Ireland.

Pamela Shaw outlined improvement proposals for a community garden at a site at Talbot Street, Newtownards, which were attached and why that site had been chosen.

Charlie Fisher commended the work of Branch Out Community and thought that should be acknowledged. The work of that organisation aligned with the Council's Local Development Plan for the Borough, also the Regional Development Strategy and Programme for Government. An outline was given on what was needed from the Council including engagement with relevant officers and broader engagement with the community.

Councillor McKee thanked those making the Deputation and thought that it was great to see so much life in the proposal and asked if they were aware of any places where DfI land had been used in similar ways. Some examples given were York Road, Belfast, where there was a pocket park with a World War I memorial, a small park on Donegal Road, Belfast, which was an urban farm and another similar project in Brookeborough, Co Fermanagh. The Member spoke of engaging with the Northern Ireland Executive and lobbying it on the work that was being undertaken by the organisation and seeking capital for that.

(Councillor Moore entered the meeting at 7.15 pm)

Alderman McRandal appreciated the presentation and gave his thanks to Pamela for her commitment to the project and had remembered her addressing the Council in 2022. He stated that he would like to visit the site along with his Party colleagues to see the work on the ground.

Councillor Moore reiterated that comment and praised the passion being shown on what would become a great community asset and it would be a sad loss for the work not to continue.

Alderman Adair commended what had been a fantastic presentation and he was aware that his Party colleague Alderman McIlveen was very supportive of the work. He wished the organisation every success going forward.

Mr Fisher believed that it was important to recognise that these groups were picking up the roles that had traditionally been carried out by local government. It was important to consider the opportunities for funding and to tap in to those.

The Chair thanked those making the Deputation and they left the meeting at 7.20 pm.

NOTED.

4. LEISURE STRATEGY (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the Council embarked on the process of developing a new Leisure Strategy for the Borough in January 2024. Following a procurement process, Otium Leisure Consultancy was appointed in May 2024.

Significant research was carried out to determine the state of leisure within the Borough. That included;

- Online research with schools, providers and members of the community.
- Workshops with ANDBC, NCLT and SERCO officers.
- Three workshops with providers of leisure across the Borough.
- Two Elected Member workshops were held.

The level of engagement in the research and the workshops was much higher than similar engagement exercises and highlighted the level of interest in this critical area of Service delivery. That was extremely helpful for the consultant to develop the leisure strategy. It was summarised in the “What You Told Us” section of the strategy.

The leisure strategy was a ten-year strategy (2025 – 2034) and included a two year and a ten-year action plan with ambitions targets/KPI's. A budget of £100,000 for the first year of the strategy had been secured and a brief overview was detailed below.

Year 1 2025-26 Key Aspects

The delivery of the strategy was very much dependent on the Council committing much needed financial resources to ensure effective delivery over the ten years the strategy covered. As part of the 2025/26 budget setting process earlier this year

officers proposed an indicative budget of £100,000 towards the first year of delivery. That was secured and it was proposed, as detailed in the two-year action plan, that work commenced immediately on the following four key areas.

1. An update of the sport facilities strategy for the Borough. £40k indicative budget
2. The development of a sport specific strategy in partnership with the governing body, sport clubs and other key stakeholders. It was proposed to focus on the sport of athletics in light of the ongoing issues at Sportsplex, the concerns raised by the users of the facility, meetings with local athletic clubs and the governing body and the significant number of active participants who were engaging in athletics from the coach to 5k participants to Olympians. Further sport specific strategies would be developed in future years pending funding. £30k indicative budget.
3. A series of baseline data analysis to be undertaken as detailed in the two-year action plan would require a dedicated resource. It was critical baseline data was established against which the ten-year strategy would be delivered and measured against £10k indicative budget
4. A number of actual activity programmes targeted at identified areas of need and delivered in partnerships. Those would be delivered in the areas and would require support in terms of delivery staff and equipment. Indicative cost £10k.
5. The remaining £10k would be utilised across the other activities identified in year one of the two-year action plan depending on staff availability and progress on the above comprehensive programme of works.

Otium Leisure Consultancy who developed the strategy would present to the Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Council adopt the Leisure Strategy, “Getting Active, Staying Active”.

Proposed by Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

The Chair introduced Tony Morrison, Otium Leisure Consultancy, to the meeting and invited him to make a presentation on the development of the Leisure Strategy.

Tony Morrison thanked Members for the commission of the work and the opportunity to address the Community and Wellbeing Committee. He explained how local authorities were extending their reach from providing opportunities for both sport and physical activity. His organisation had carried out extensive research throughout the Borough and that had helped in the development of the Strategy which he believed would make a difference to lives in the Borough and address the barriers to being active.

Councillor Cochrane welcomed the Strategy and referring to the work proposed in areas where there was deprivation he asked how those would be chosen or scored.

In response it was noted that those actions would be down to Council officers in terms of how that would be delivered.

The Head of Leisure explained that the strategy was currently hot off the press and an implementation group would be set up to provide direction and that had not been considered at this point. However, historically those would be spread across the Borough with one in the Ards area and the other in North Down. This would be a small scheme and designed to be a quick hit.

Seconding, Councillor W Irvine referred to the partnership approach and the importance of bringing forward other organisations within the Strategic Implementation Group to have commitment. It was pointed out that this was not a Council strategy, but one for the Borough as a whole and that the Council would lead it and other key organisations who had been involved in the consultation stage and could bring expertise to the table.

At this stage Councillor Kendall who had been granted speaking rights on the item, said that she felt so strongly about the need for a Leisure Strategy and a strategic approach to leisure. She gave her sincere thanks to the Leisure Team and to Otium Leisure, who had developed the strategy following engagement with such a wide number of people and sections of the community. She said she could not remember when a consultation had produced such a high number of responses.

She had been reassured by the wide-ranging opportunities that the Strategy could provide and thought that it got to the heart of how leisure could be improved and reach more people across the Borough. It was clear that the Council would not be able to do that alone and it would need a clear commitment to working with sports groups and communities through partnerships and that was embedded in the Strategy. She cautioned that partnerships may mean that the Council was tempted to move further away from service delivery, and she pleaded with Members that the balance was maintained. Residents expected the Council to deliver services and where it was not viable or prudent to do so, it should work with communities in partnership. She expressed her hope that this Strategy could be ratified at the June meeting of Council but was advised by the Director that it would not be possible to have the minutes of this meeting ratified before the July meeting of the Council.

Councillor Chambers praised the engagement with the public and it showed the strength of feeling that the community had expressed and he hoped that the Strategy would be a success in having more people leading active and healthy lives. He asked if there were any success stories from other Boroughs.

In response Mr Morrison said he had been impressed by the way that Ards and North Down Borough Council had worked and his sense that there was a desire for change and that this was not simply a tick box exercise. He thought that there was something in the Strategy for everyone and that had been seen in other areas and people were becoming more active.

Councillor McKee welcomed the Strategy partnership focus and referred to athletics, particularly running groups which were growing in number. He felt that athletics may

have been neglected in the past and that this Strategy provided an opportunity to put that right.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2025/26 AND REVIEW OF 2024/25
(Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Food Service Plan had been produced as a requirement of the Food Standards Agency Framework Agreement on Official Feed and Food Controls. All Local Authorities were required to provide a plan of the Council's Food Control function for the Borough and review on an annual basis.

The Plan for 2025/26 and a review of the Food Service Plan 24/25 was attached for Council approval.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the delivery of the Environmental Health Protection and Development Services' Food Service Plan.

Proposed by Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Adair commended the Environmental Health team for the work it did to increase hygiene standards in food establishments across the Borough and was encouraged by what he believed to be a fantastic report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Having declared an interest in Item 6 Councillor Chambers left the meeting at 7.55 pm)

6. RESPONSE TO NOM 519 QUEENS HALL HOLLYWOOD

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the following Notice of Motion was previously agreed by the Council:

"That this Council recognises the opportunity that a return to Council management of the Queen's Leisure Complex, Hollywood 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 that opportunity, the Council resolved to facilitate engagement with relevant community stakeholders, the purpose of which would 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".

Progress to date

Community consultation took place on 24 September 2024 with a report being brought to the Committee in December 2024.

At that meeting it was recommended that Council note the report and agree to produce a feasibility study that would be brought back to the Council for consideration, subject to budget availability/rate setting process.

Subsequently it was agreed in December 2024 that the recommendation be agreed and furthermore Council undertook further community engagement to share information and to address the questions raised at the community event, via open dialogue, ensuring that the opportunity was communicated with plenty of advance notice to local groups and residents via email and social media to ensure engagement. Furthermore, the Council agreed 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 would then be brought back to the Council for consideration.

Two subsequent meetings had been held between officers and elected representatives of the Holywood DEA to ascertain the focus for the scope of the feasibility study. The initial Notice of Motion referred to Queens Leisure Complex, but further discussions had focused on the community wing of the Centre, rather than the Leisure Centre and therefore officers had focused on that part of the Centre at this time.

It was also worth noting that SERCO currently managed the running of the whole Queens Complex and that contract was in place until March 2028.

At the consultation event a number of concerns were raised in relation to the condition of the Queens Hall itself, the adjacent toilets and kitchen. It was suggested that initial works to those areas could be undertaken prior to a full feasibility study being prepared.

Costings

Officers had gathered costs for initial repairs to that area of the Centre as followed:

1. **Hall flooring:** The Hall in Queens was at the end of its lifespan. Hard boarding and carpet tiling. Estimated to be around **£10,000 + VAT**.
2. **Kitchen:** Full strip out and refit estimated to be circa **£10,500 + VAT**
3. **Staging Area:** Cost to replace what was removed and bring stage back to useable standard including stage lighting and control desk (specification in line with Queens Hall in Newtownards) estimated at circa **£83,000 +VAT**

A budget had been allocated for 2025/2026 to produce a business plan for the Centre. There was no budget at this time to carry out initial works of this scale prior to a feasibility study. A case could be made on the basis of the study's recommendation.

Next steps

Clarification was sought on the focus of the feasibility study being for the whole of the Queens Leisure Complex or the “community” part of the complex only. Once clarified, further community engagement could be undertaken by the Community Development section of the Council as requested to agree the scope of the feasibility study.

RECOMMENDED that the Council confirm the scope of the feasibility study and thereafter officers undertake community engagement on the development of a brief for the feasibility study.

Councillor McKee had an alternative proposal which was seconded by Councillor McRandal;

That Council proceed to prepare a business case to be submitted as part of the rate setting process, for repairing the Hall Floor and Kitchen, with a view to work being undertaken in 2026/27. And, that further community consultation to inform the development and delivery of an arts/cultural/community events programme, be undertaken to encourage use of the Hall and the Complex following completion of the repairs.

Furthermore, that Council commits to a full, entire facility, audit of Queens Leisure Complex, to be undertaken by appropriate consultants, to evaluate and explore the cultural and leisure needs (in line with the Leisure Strategy) of the community and QLC's fitness for purpose. The cost of this audit to be included in the budget-setting process this year, to give a two-year lead in time prior to the expiration of the current operator's contract.

Councillor McKee stated that Members would be aware that the community facilities in the Queens Leisure Complex did not meet the needs of the community and had not done so for some time. The poor state of the facilities limited public participation in Holywood and he thought that was a real shame. He believed that the Motion gave scope to the Council to provide fixes that needed to be made to those facilities but also ensured there was a link to Council strategies and operating models for the future. He said that his Party colleague Councillor Kendal, along with other Holywood Councillors had got the ball rolling on this in 2022 which had brought the Council to this point and he urged action to bring these community facilities back to something that could meet the real needs of the community.

Alderman McRandal as seconder suggested that the Council should not have allowed the facilities to deteriorate to this stage so that the kitchen in particular had become unusable. He added that the ratepayers of Holywood should enjoy the same facilities as everyone else. He hoped there would be engagement to assess the needs of the community and this was an old building that would need significant investment so he welcomed the feasibility study which would inform how the facility could be used going forward.

Alderman Cummings had some sympathy but also some questions about the financing of the improvements and if there was a budget to cover it. Listening to Members had suggested that this was a significant piece of work and he was aware that the facility was under the control of SERCO. The Director advised that under the leisure contract large building works were not generally the responsibility of the contractor and remained the responsibility of the Council. There was funding available only for the feasibility work in this year.

Alderman Adair said that he would rather see a feasibility study and community engagement before the Council committed itself to further spending.

The Head of Leisure informed the Committee that the Council had found itself in a Catch 22 position since the facility was not being fully used and therefore money was not being spent on it. Now was an appropriate time to look at the longer term use of the facilities in Hollywood.

Councillor Kendall had speaking rights on the item and was invited to speak. She was grateful to Councillor McKee and Alderman McRandal for the alternative proposal. Queens Leisure Complex had opened in 1953 and was now over seventy years old. In 2022 she had proposed the original Motion alongside Alderman McRandal, Councillor McClean and others in response to community outcry that the asset was degrading and could not be booked. They were also disappointed that there were no events put on for local people among other concerns.

She went on to say that the recommendations set out in the Hollywood Masterplan, to redevelop the youth wing and to reopen the Sullivan Place entrance had never been realised. It was clear that the facility's vitality and use as a community, cultural and arts space had waned and it was difficult to make bookings. The building's facilities had also declined or been condemned or removed.

The first part of the recommendation dealt with restoring key aspects of the floor, the kitchen, and she would have added even restoration of the stage since it was a huge asset to enable larger community events and engagements. The second part of the alternative recommendation asked that the whole complex be evaluated, including the Queens Hall Building and the pitches, a process which would take significant time and would be unlikely to be delivered for many years. Restoring the Hall would enable the building to be put to better use in the meantime.

It was clear to her and the Hollywood community, which had consistently voiced its concerns and frustrations that this Hall was a valuable asset and one which needed investment, cultivation and care. It had originally been designed as a community space, a venue for concerts, dances, flower shows and other events. However, in recent years, the complex had been run primarily as a small leisure centre, with limited wider community use beyond leisure/sport.

She concluded by urging Members to consider that although the costs looked high, that was the result of neglect and underinvestment in this asset over many years. The community had told the Council that there was a real need to restore and promote the asset, there was a significant economic, social and cultural case for

restoration and a re-think of how the asset was used both in the short term, but also over the longer term. It was of no benefit to the community nor the Council to have a degrading under-used asset, especially when there was considerable will from the community for something better.

She drew Members attention to similarities with Queens Hall in Newtownards and she hoped for similar equal treatment for the Holywood community.

Councillor McClean offered congratulations for the amendment and agreed that Queens Hall, Holywood, was an underwhelming resource and letting down the community in that town. He asked if the Hall was considered to be dangerous and the Director replied that it was not deemed to be dangerous and it was in regular use. The kitchen was closed however and was unavailable to use. The Member asked how soon the feasibility study could be completed.

In response the Director said that the feasibility study would focus on the community wing of the building and that would include Queens Hall. The Council was limited in terms of budget and scope and the preference for now was to have the feasibility study carried out. An audit of the full facility may be wider than what was budgeted for currently but that could be investigated. Councillor McClean agreed and hoped that the money would be spent wisely with a view to the long term use of the Hall and ensure that any work suggested was carried out properly.

As proposer Councillor McKee summed up and stressed that he would like to see the kitchen and floor dealt with as soon as possible since those improvements were a priority no matter what the feasibility study suggested. In his view it was unlikely that the study would write off such small investments since the Hall was likely to have the same uses as currently.

When a vote was taken with a show of hands 7 voted in Favour, 5 voted Against and 2 Abstained and the amendment was CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that Council proceed to prepare a business case to be submitted as part of the rate setting process, for repairing the Hall Floor and Kitchen, with a view to work being undertaken in 2026/27. And, that further community consultation to inform the development and delivery of an arts/cultural/community events programme, be undertaken to encourage use of the hall and the Complex following completion of the repairs.

Furthermore, that Council commits to a full, entire facility, audit of Queens Leisure Complex, to be undertaken by appropriate consultants, to evaluate and explore the cultural and leisure needs (in line with the Leisure Strategy) of the community and QLC's fitness for purpose. The cost of this audit to be included in the budget-setting process this year, to give a two-year lead in time prior to the expiration of the current operator's contract.

(Councillor Chambers returned to the meeting at 8.18 pm)

7. **RESPONSE TO NOM 549 WHITE RIBBON CHARTER**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Council agreed in December 2022 to adopt the White Ribbon Pledge to 'Never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls'.

Organisations seeking accreditation were required to develop a three-year action plan, reviewed annually, which offered achievable goals to bring about genuine change. Once a Listen, learn, lead 3 year action plan had been approved by White Ribbon NI, an organisation would be granted White Ribbon Status. After the three-year period, the plan would be revisited with the hope that all objectives had been achieved and the White Ribbon pledge could be renewed.

To take the pledge staff needed to go through a series of training to help them better understand the root causes of violence against women and girls and how to signpost to relevant agencies.

At this time Safe Place training was provided for both staff and public via the PCSP with a view of completing Listen, Learn and Lead action plan.

Current status

Ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG), White Ribbon, and Nexus all shared a core mission of promoting gender equality, preventing gender-based violence, and supporting healthier, safer communities. While each initiative or organisation operated with a distinct focus, they complemented each other.

In 2024 Council was awarded £60,000 Momentum funding from TEO to raise awareness of the Change Fund. £120,000 of Change funding was granted to the Council to undertake a tiered grants programme open to community and voluntary sector organisations and grassroots groups in the area.

As agreed by TEO, a portion of Momentum funding had been used to procure the delivery of training to all employees in ANDBC to raise awareness of the End Violence Against Women and Girls and the associated behaviours.

Following a procurement exercise, Nexus was the successful applicant and it would roll out a programme of training to staff throughout 2025-2026 as followed:

- Specialist Workplace and Organisational training to raise awareness of the root causes of violence against women and girls
- Help ANDBC to create safer environments by developing and embedding best practices, policies, and procedures to prevent violence against women and girls.
- Identify EVAWG Champions who would be nominated representatives within the organisation who would be trained on handling disclosures of abuse and signposting survivors to specialist organisations.

The points listed above complete the requirements necessary to sign the Nexus Ending Violence Against Women and Girls pledge and therefore Nexus had approached the Council to request that it formally endorse the EVAWG pledge.

The EVAWG pledge included:

- A Pledge Certificate and physical and digital 'sticker' to display to highlight ANDBC's commitment to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls in NI.
- ANDBC logo would appear on Nexus' website and social media platforms to highlight that it has ANDBC signed up to the EVAWG Pledge (this is optional).

Next steps

To progress, Council should consider adopting the Nexus regional pledge and continue to support the White Ribbon appeal, and then at a point in the future it may wish to give further consideration to applying for accreditation status.

Nexus are also one of the eight community and voluntary sector organisations who were successful in receiving regional funding from TEO. The aim of Nexus and the other 7 organisations, Women's Aid Federation NI (WAFNI), Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA), Relate NI, White Ribbon NI, Youth Action, NSPCC, and Barnardo's NI would be to raise awareness of the EVAWG strategy and to bring expertise and learning across Northern Ireland to make a difference.

The Council's Draft Domestic and Sexual Violence policy would be updated to include that commitment and brought to a future meeting of Council for approval.

RECOMMENDED that the Council adopts the Nexus Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Pledge.

Proposed by Councillor Douglas, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Douglas was happy to support the recommendation and believed that anything to help and raise awareness had to be a top priority.

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

8. CHRISTMAS GRANT SCHEME APPROVAL (Appendices IV & V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Christmas Festival Programme was available for those towns and villages in the Borough that received a Christmas Tree from Council. The purpose of the programme was to enable communities to run local festivals to celebrate the festive period and **MUST** include switching on of Christmas Lights.

The following towns and villages were eligible to apply for funding:

Villages – Ballygowan, Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter, Carrowdore, Cloughey, Conlig, Greyabbey, Groomsport, Helens Bay, Killinchy, Kircubbin, Millisle, Portaferry and Portavogie

Towns – Donaghadee, Comber and Holywood

The maximum amount of funding for each of the villages was £1,000 and £3,000 per town.

Under the new Grants Policy, the scheme required approval from the Council prior to launching. The updated application form and guidance notes were attached.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the Community Development Christmas Grant Scheme attached.

Proposed by Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cochrane referred to the very successful Donaghadee and Groomsport switch-on and was happy to support the recommendation. Councillor Douglas was happy to second and agreed with Councillor Cochrane adding that the Christmas lights switch-on were one of the few events in the calendar that brought the whole community together and in one place.

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

9. UPDATED GOOD RELATIONS ACTION PLAN 2025-2026 (Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailed that the Council approved the Good Relations Strategy 2025 – 2028 and Annual Action Plan in March 2025.

Following submission to the Executive Office officers were notified that funding for 2025 – 2026 would be reduced by £42,513.38 and officers were asked to amend the Action Plan accordingly and resubmit TEO before a Letter of Offer would be issued. A significantly reduced Action Plan for 2025-2026 was therefore attached.

Table 1 outlined the impact of the proposed budget reductions across each activity area. The first line indicated the originally proposed amount and the lines below highlighted in bold/red was the new reduced allocation proposed. Furthermore, it was proposed that AND04 and AND07 be removed from the programme due to TEOs reduction in funding.

	100%	75% TEO	Council funding
Total cost of Action Plan delivery 2025 - 2026	£226,738 £185,925.16 £170,053.49	£170,053.50 £139,443.87 £127,540.12	42,513.37
Total programme costs	£107,738 £66,925.16	£80,803.50 £50,193.87	
Programme costs breakdown			
Children and Young People	£26,738 £17,071.33	£20,053.50 £12,803.50	
Shared Community	£10,000	£7,500	
Safe Community	£6,000 £3,666.66	£4,500 £2,750	
Cultural Expression	£65,000 £36,187.17	£48,750 £27,140.37	
Total staff and other expenses costs			
Staff cost breakdown	£119,000 £103,128.33	£89,250 £77,346.25	

Table 2 outlines the impact of the reduction on the planned programme:

Code (2.02)	Programme name (2.01)	Key Aim (2.13)	Total Cost (2.06)	Total TEO Contribution (2.07)	Outcome for 2025 – 2026
AND01	Shared Education	Children and Young People	£10,738	£8,053.50	To be delivered
AND02	Shared Voices	Children and Young People	£1,000	£750	To be delivered
AND03	Youth Empowerment Programme	Children and Young People	£7,000 £5,333.33	£5,250 £4,000	Programme reduced - lack of funding
AND04	Community Relations Through Sport	Children and Young People	£8,000	£6,000	Programme removed -lack of funding
AND05	Living History	Our Shared Community	£10,000	£7,500	To be delivered

AND06	Holocaust and Other Genocides	Our Safe Community	£3000 £2,666.66	£2250 £2,000	Programme reduced -lack of funding
AND07	Getting to Know Your Councillors/ Intergenerational	Our Safe Community	£2000	£1500	Programme removed - Lack of funding
AND08	No Hate Here	Our Safe Community	£1,000	£750	To be delivered
AND09	Cultural Expression Programme	Cultural Expression	£60,000 £33,333.33	£45,000 £25,000	Programme reduced - lack of funding but support available through related Council decision to top up
AND10	History Talks	Cultural Expression	£5000 £2,853.84	£3750 £2,140.37	Programme reduced - Lack of funding
Total			66,925.16	50,193.87	

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the updated Good Relations Action Plan and budgetary allocations for 2025-2026.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine welcomed the Good Relations Action Plan but was disappointed to note the reduced funding with no money available to top that up. Councillor Hollywood thought that the reduction could not have come at a worse time while he did accept the budgetary constraints at this time.

Councillor Boyle asked the Head of Community and Culture to explain why the Game of Three Halves was not included and she replied that she hoped that would be funded elsewhere for example through PEACEPLUS.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the recommendation be adopted.

10. ULSTER SCOTS ACTION PLAN 2025-2026

(Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in December 2023, the Council agreed to develop an Action Plan to develop the Borough's Ulster-Scots heritage and to provide, subject to annual rates setting, a £10,000 budget for the Action Plan.

Officers from the Good Relations, Tourism and Arts and Heritage section, in consultation with the Ulster Scots Community Network, had produced an Action Plan for the 2025 -2026 financial year based on the £10,000 budget awarded by the Council. The plan was based on a review of the 2024/25 programme and those engagements that proved successful or popular in the programme.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees the attached Ulster Scots Action Plan for 2025-2026.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine welcomed the report and said many would identify with this culture and he asked about music and in particular the Lambeg Drums. The Head of Community and Culture drew his attention to the top of the second page detailing that it had been considered and she would come back to him directly with further information.

Councillor Cochrane was delighted to see another excellent programme of events and Councillor Hollywood also welcomed the plan that showcased the Ulster Scots culture in a positive way. It was unfortunate that it was often derided but it was very rich and he hoped that the programme would be a resounding success.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

11. ITEM WITHDRAWN

12. COMMEMORATIVE TREE PLANTING FOR SOUND AROUND ARDS TALKING NEWSPAPER

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the Council had facilitated the planting of commemorative trees on Council land in conjunction with local groups and organisations in Line with the Commemorative Tree Planting Policy.

The policy aimed to provide a consistent and fair approach to the decision-making process on whether to approve any request to plant a commemorative tree on Council property. It was critical that all tree planting contributed to the Council's overall Tree and Woodland Strategy. Members were advised that the

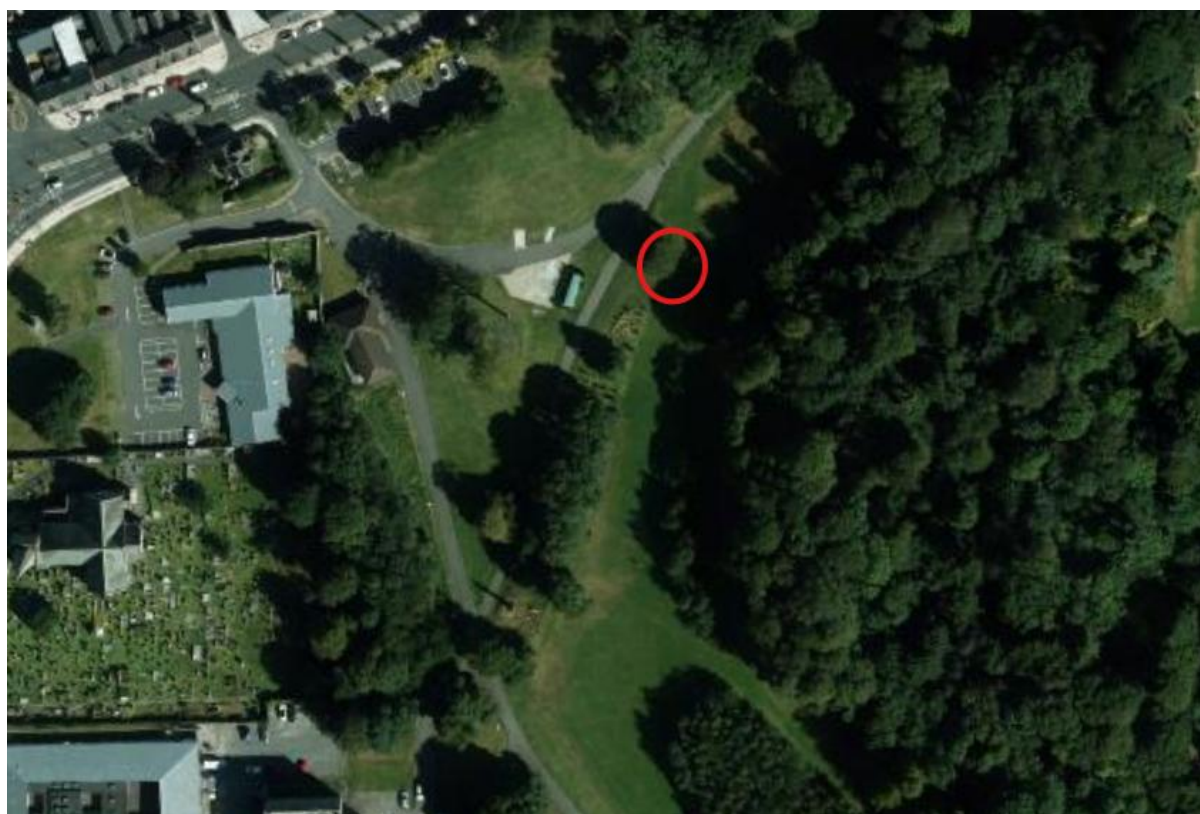
Commemorative Tree Planting Policy did not apply to or replace the memorial tree planting which took place in Council cemeteries.

The Council had received a request for commemorative tree planting as detailed below:

- Sound Around Ards Talking Newspaper – 40th Anniversary Tree. Wished to have a *Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea' (Purple Beech) tree planted in Castle Park, Bangor.

Location of Tree Planting

(What3Words: ///look.motel.mercy)



Officers could confirm that the request complied with the criteria in the policy. Planting would take place during the next planting season.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the Commemorative Tree Planting request as outlined in the report.

Proposed by Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

It gave Alderman Adair great pleasure to propose the recommendation and he congratulated Sound Around Ards on its 40th anniversary. It was a great programme for people who were experiencing sight loss and many looked forward to the

programme increasing. Indeed many nursing homes had signed up to it and it was making a huge difference to the lives of many people.

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

13. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2024 -2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that under the Council's Scheme of Delegation and in order to allow for timely service delivery, the application of legislation relating to Environmental Health matters had been delegated to officers to implement. A condition of that delegated authority was that related activity was reported to the Council from time to time. The following was the report for the 2024-2025 year and included such delegated activity.

Summary of Activity

The role of the Environmental Health Protection and Development Service was to contribute to ensuring a better quality of life for all. From the Health Protection perspective, the service monitored, advises and enforced compliance with Food, Public Health, Pollution, Health and Safety at Work, Consumer Safety and Housing legislation and standards to protect the public from physical, chemical and biological agents, and conditions that may cause ill health or harm.

Functions within the department

The range of statutory and non-statutory functions delivered on behalf of the Council were as followed:

1. Food Control (including food manufacturing and fisheries)
2. Consumer Protection. (safety of consumer goods)
3. Health and Safety at Work
 - Health and safety in workplaces
 - Caravan Site Licensing
 - Petroleum Licensing
 - Sunbeds
 - Fireworks
4. Pollution Control
 - Noise
 - Air quality
 - Radiation Monitoring
 - Pollution Prevention and Control
5. Public Health and Housing
 - Public Health Nuisance
 - Pest Control
 - Private Rented Housing
 - Bathing Waters

6. Health and Wellbeing / Health initiatives including:

- Tobacco Control
- Home Safety
- Community Planning lead for Age Friendly, Community Resuscitation,
- Whole Systems Approach to Obesity
- Health Development including Employee Health and Wellbeing

Service Provision

Service provision included

- service requests,
- planned inspections & proactive visits to commercial premises and
- wellbeing intervention activities.

Service Requests

Service requests related to individuals' requests for assistance for example in relation to pest control, or when the activities of one party caused an adverse effect on another for example in relation to nuisance and pollution.

The number of service requests by category 2024-25.

Department Function	Number of Requests
Pest Control	825
General Environmental Health	600
Food Hygiene and Standards	433
Pollution Control	962
Private Tenancies Complaints	147
Health and Safety	110
Consumer Protection	28
Tobacco Control	31
Caravan/Petroleum Licensing	6
Total	3140

A total of 100 statutory notices were issued under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, to secure environmental improvements and abatement of nuisances.

The performance indicator target for a response to service requests is 94% within two working days. For the year 2024/25 the objective was achieved, with 95.2% of requests responded to within the target period.

The number of service requests received in 2024/25 was 433 lower than for 2023/24, a decrease of 12%.

Planned Inspection and Proactive visits to commercial premises

There were currently 3984 operating commercial premises on the Environmental Health database. During the year 3730 inspections were made to assess

compliance with legislation, to educate business operators on new legislation and requirements and to obtain samples. In order to reduce the burden on businesses many of those visits were carried out concurrently with officers assessing a range of legislative compliance - for example food hygiene, food standards and tobacco control addressed by an officer during one visit. Businesses and premises were risk assessed to ensure that those which might present the greatest potential risk to public health were visited most frequently.

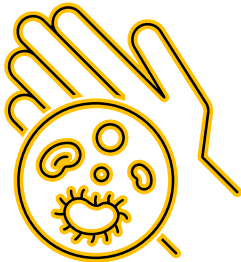
The following sections provided a breakdown of activities per service unit.

Food and Consumer Protection Activity and Successes 2024 - 25

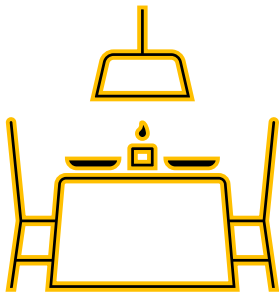
Food Hygiene, Standards and Safety



Food Hygiene Premises inspected:
All **3** Category A premises
63 Category B
430 Category C & D
191 Category E
159 new food businesses



Investigated **90** Food Poisoning identifications on behalf of PHA and **10** alleged food poisoning complaints



Actioned **411** complaints regarding premises hygiene and **84** complaints regarding allergens, composition and labelling irregularities



Sampling Collected **547** food samples for microbiological analysis and **141** for chemical analysis



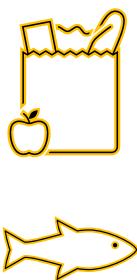
Served **1** Hygiene Improvement Notice **4** Fixed Penalty Notices
2 Emergency Prohibition Hygiene Notices
2 voluntary closures
1 successful prosecution



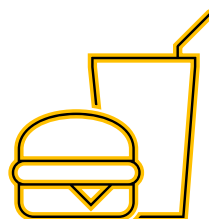
Food Standards Inspections **5** A rated premises inspected **69** B rated premises inspected

C&W 18.06.25PM

57



Undertook **2 Northern Ireland** Surveys for identification of peanut protein in garlic granules and illegal dyes in chilli powders.

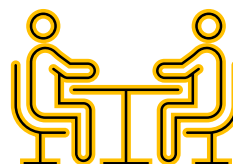


Completed an in-house survey for gluten free products and participated in sampling sausage rolls for nutritional analysis

Consumer Protection



4 market surveillance projects:
E -scooters/E-bikes
Christmas Lights
Electric Blankets and electric throws
Cosmetic products- nail varnish



84 new premises registered
82 Butane visits
61 Product alerts dealt with.
3 Port referrals

Health & Safety, Noise and Petroleum Activities and Successes 2024-25

Health and Safety at Work



2558 Health and Safety premises registered

391 H&S Visits completed including;

241 Inspections & Revisits



56 Accidents reported with 0 fatal accidents

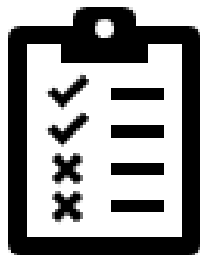
55 accident investigations (1 not reportable)

27 Visits to investigate accidents



8 visits in response to requests for advice &

19 visits in response to complaints about premises or work activity



47 Inspections as part of a Workplace Transport Initiative

30 Overstocking Visits

9 Inspections of Sunbed premises



Issued 14 improvement Notices for serious contraventions or continuing non-compliance

5 Prohibition Notices for imminent risk to injury



3 Firework Licence applications

3 Firework Display application Visits



2 prosecutions were completed re unsafe premises and work activities and consistently recurring contraventions of Health and Safety legislation. The cases related to a company owning residential and holiday caravan parks, and the owner of a premises made available as a workplace.

Planning



255 consultations from the Council's planning department were responded to on planning matters that could potentially affect public or environmental health

Noise Control



605 noise complaints received
41% proceeded after initial contact
118 resulted in formal investigation
3 Noise Abatement Notices served



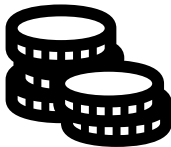
3 prosecutions completed; 2 in relation to barking dogs and 1 regarding loud music and bass beat



Pollution Prevention and Control

2 PPC permits were issued during 2024/2025 1 for a mobile crusher and 1 for a cement manufacturer

The total number of permits issued by the end of 2024/25 was 39;
30 Filling stations
4 dry cleaners
3 cement manufacturers
2 mobile crushers


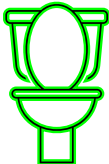

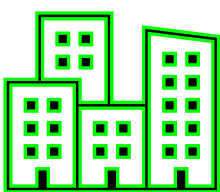
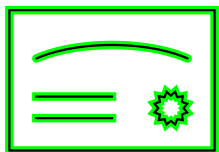
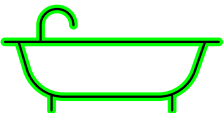


These premises were inspected during the period and application and/or subsistence fees collected

Caravan Site and Petroleum Licensing

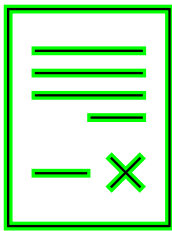
	All 27 Caravan Sites inspected for licensing		48 inspections and 13 revisits of petroleum filling stations for licensing
			45 Licences issued

Public Health & Housing Key Activities and Successes 2024-25

	825 service requests relating to pest control, with 522 rodent and 239 flying insect complaints		504 service requests relating to housing/drainage
	72 wasp nest treatments carried out with a £50 charge £3600 income generated		406 service requests relating to neighbourhood nuisance (excluding noise)
	Private Rented Housing Issued 49 Certificates of Fitness 13 properties deemed unfit with Notices of Refusal issued		Interactions with around 150 landlords and letting agents each year to ensure compliance with housing standards legislation.



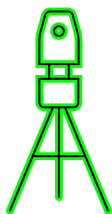
97 Notices served under Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 following service requests or housing standards inspections



2 Notices of Unfitness and 1 Notices of Disrepair served on landlords in private rented properties



Radiation Monitoring at our Argus station in Portavogie, as well as regular sampling to monitor radiation levels in our environment.



Air Quality Shared Service with LCCC. We carry out regular monitoring at 16 sites in ANDBC, including an automatic site in Hollywood.



Act as beach operator for 7 designated bathing waters in the borough, providing important information to beach users.

Health and Wellbeing Activities and Successes 2023/24



AGE FRIENDLY

Review of AF Strategy & Action Plan 2019-23
AF Alliance - 4 meetings & 1 workshop
1 Positive Ageing Roadshows
Newtownards: 13 attendees and 58 exhibitors



307 homes visited
(197 older people, 110 families with children under 5)
Provided over 1,911 pieces of equipment and 346 leaflets.
168 onward referrals to partner agencies
Targets met or exceeded
98% clients rated service as Useful, Important, Very important or Vital
100% rated the professionalism of the staff as V
Good/Excellent
36 talks & events to 900+ people



October Positive Ageing Brochure
Delivery of AF Strategy & Extended Action Plan 2023-27
2 Council Tea Dances with 188 attendees
1000+ copies of Big Guide distributed



DEMENTIA FRIENDLY

Consultations with various Dementia Groups for the new Dementia Garden at Ward Park
Information Session (15 exhibitors and 30 attendees)
30 businesses engaged with



TOBACCO CONTROL

685 Smoke-Free inspections
69 Test Purchasing exercises with 16 sales
177 Age of Sale advice visits
43 Licensed premises inspections

providing
resources,
information and
support
3 Dementia
Awareness
sessions for 44
ANDBC staff
2 awareness
sessions for
Translink staff
(Ards & Bangor)
5 Dementia
Friendly
Partnership
meetings
3 Dementia
Safeguarding
Scheme
meetings

190 signposted
to smoking
cessation
45 AED (defib)
registration visits
Service Level
Agreement
targets met or
exceeded



**OVER 50s
COUNCIL**
8 meetings with 6
guest speakers
17 consultations
36 information
sharing and 15
co-production
opportunities
2 walkability
audits at castle
park by 8
members
Christmas Lunch
7
Intergenerational
Project
Workshops and 4
Recording
sessions



**MIND.BODY.
BUSINESS**
12 businesses
received the
workplace
health and
wellbeing
initiative small
grant,
benefitting 738
staff.
27 businesses
availed of free
health checks
(75 places)
16 businesses
attended the
free first aid
courses (23
places).



EMPLOYER PLEDGE

Progressed with the employers Pledge
 878 staff March 2024
 49% staff aged 50+
 (140 Female & 286 Male)
 Committed to improving recruitment, retention and development of older workers



EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Quarterly Meetings
 26 staff from 16 service units

Promotion of Staff Webhub – StayWell
 Access to health articles, news, staff events, campaigns, support services, etc.
 Monthly StayWell Focus circulated for staff



WHOLE SYSTEMS APPROACH TO OBESITY

We remain actively engaged in the project, although commencement of regional-level activities has experienced some delays. A number of preliminary local-level interventions have taken place. 2 Slow Cooker training and 1 'Cook It' training course held over a number of weeks. 4 Healthy Education talks in 1 school. Summer Scheme Healthy Eating Programme (14 sessions to over 200 children). Health Stands at 2 events.

ANDBC is the First Early Adopter site in Northern Ireland. A PHIRST research study has been completed and results are imminent. There has been a delay in progressing to



EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Delivery of 28 wellbeing activities with over 300 staff participating
10 Be Active events
8 Learning opportunities
4 Take Notice activities
7 Give/volunteering opportunities
All these offered a chance to Connect – Activities give this opportunity

158 health checks at 14 sites (1/3 of appointments allocated to the hard-to-reach groups)
56 flu jabs
Fruit boxes and healthy breakfast mornings

C&W 18.06.25PM

66

stage 3 and 4
and this is being
progress early in
2025 with QUB
leading on the
systems
mapping.



BEE SAFE

1,600+ P7 children from 42 Schools
4 Schools unable to attend the event were provided with the BeeSafe resources to allow them to facilitate the learning of the key safety messages for the children within the classroom setting.
6 Safety Scenarios covering internet safety, home safety, bus/road safety, fire safety, community safety & mental health.
1700+ work booklets and supporting videos distributed
Event rated as:
Excellent (88%)
or Good (12%)
100% commitment from schools to return next year



MENTAL HEALTH CHARTER

27 Mental Health First Aiders Refresher training provided.
Mindful Manager Training arranged for CLT and HoST

Promotion of Here2Help app to staff

Summary

During the 2024-25 year the service met the majority of KPI's and targets and had a significant positive impact on the community planning outcomes despite the challenges faced with staff shortages.

Work to address recruitment challenges was a priority for 2024/25 and mid-year the Council successfully reached 100% of permanent posts filled. That had contributed to the successful delivery of the service plan and KPIs.

The service units had remained focussed and committed to delivering a high standard of service to residents and businesses alike.

The key successes and activities of the service units as detailed in this report demonstrated the depth and breadth of work undertaken by EHPD and the positive impact it had on Ards and North Down.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine highlighted the wide range of work that this department undertook on behalf of the Council and asked if there were any particular difficulties at the moment. The Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development said that currently the section was probably in its best position for a while in terms of availability of officers. A really good recruitment programme had been undertaken with almost every post now filled. In addition the team were working in a more innovative way trying to avoid duplication so were in a good place.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

14. UPDATE ON BATHING WATERS IN ANDBC – BROMPTON BAY AND DONAGHADEE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the Environmental Health Protection and Development Service had been working with DAERA to increase the number of designated bathing waters in the Borough. The formal bathing season in Northern Ireland operated between 1 June and 15 September each year. During this period, DAERA regularly monitored water quality at designated sites. The Council acted as bathing water operator (BWO) for several beaches in the Borough, which required it to display and communicate water quality information to the public, and included rapidly responding to any poor results.

At the Community and Wellbeing Committee meeting in June 2023, Members agreed that the Council would accept the role of BWO at two new candidate sites, namely Brompton Bay and Donaghadee, following a formal request from DAERA.

Since accepting the role as BWO, Council staff had communicated water quality information to the public at the two candidate sites, alongside our existing designated beaches.

DAERA had recently written to the Council to say that the two candidate beaches had be formally identified as designated bathing waters, from the commencement of the 2025 bathing season. That would increase the number of designated bathing waters in the Borough to 9, the most of any local authority area in Northern Ireland, with the Council acting as BWO at 7 beaches.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Cochrane that Council agrees the recommendation and further submit an application for Ballyhalbert and Portavogie beaches to be considered for designation.

Alderman Adair welcomed the report noting that there were many swimming groups in the Borough, in fact, it had the most in Northern Ireland and nine had achieved good bathing water quality. He asked the Director what the policy would be in having further beaches designated and was informed that that could be done at any time. The Director advised that Council could write and make a request to the Department.

Alderman Adair thought that it was important to encourage the wider participation of open water swimming and he had been impressed by the growth in numbers to date on the Ards Peninsula. He was keen to have Ballyhalbert and Portavogie also designated. He stressed the need for the Council to continue to market its beaches, the great outdoors, and its open water swimming. The Council's coastline was a beautiful asset and a free natural resource.

Councillor Cochrane agreed with the recommendation and asked about promoting the beaches from a tourist perspective and developing them if possible through the national Blue Flag beaches scheme.

Councillor McKee also welcomed the changes and suggested that the road to get to this point had been too long. He had been advocating on behalf of Swimmers at Brompton since 2019 and it was great to see the monitoring of water quality would continue at Brompton and Donaghadee but there was still much work to do. Some areas on the coast were only rated as sufficient and he thought that DAERA and DfI needed to take bolder steps to ensure that the Executive at Stormont would provide safe water for swimming throughout the year and not just the testing season.

Councillor Chambers said it was fantastic to see two more areas designated and he fully supported Alderman Adair's proposal. He asked how often the water quality was measured around the coastline and was informed that work was carried out by DAERA which took measurements daily and it was the Council's role to communicate that information to the public through social media and other forms of communication.

Alderman Adair thanked Members for their support.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Cochran, that the recommendation be adopted and further submit an application for Ballyhalbert and Portavogie Beaches to be considered for designation.

15. RESPONSE TO NOM 595 BANGOR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Council previously agreed the following Notice of Motion –

“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”.

Progress to date

A site meeting was held on 9 August 2024 and was attended by officers from Parks and Leisure, Tourism and Community and Culture.

A further site meeting was held on 26 November 2024 with Councillor McCracken, and officers from Parks and Leisure, Community and Culture, Tourism and Assets and Property in attendance to walk the site and discuss plans for the site.

The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group took place on 7 April 2025 where the following actions were discussed.

Action	Update	Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none">uplighting of Fluctus Angelorum at night, -	Lighting has been repaired	Complete
<ul style="list-style-type: none">uplighting of St Malachi’s Wall to make more of this historic feature (the oldest standing structure in Bangor).	Discussions ongoing with HED	Ongoing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A better link / wayfinding / signage between St Malachi's Wall and the first Bell of Bell's Walk. 	A signage audit is to be undertaken for the whole of Castle Park	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of Bangor Abbey, with improved access and new interpretative signage. 	A signage audit is to be undertaken for the whole of Castle Park	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluctus Angelorum – a staging post for an enhanced walk to Smelt Mill Bay via Stricklands Glen (St Columbanus Walking Trail). 	A signage audit is to be undertaken for the whole of Castle Park	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New wayfinding between Wall and first Bell. 	A signage audit is to be undertaken for the whole of Castle Park	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three existing Bells – sculptures to be cleaned and signage replaced 	Cleaning has taken place Included in the signage audit	Complete Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First repositioned Bell (St Gallen Bell) to create a new pathway into Castle Gardens. 	Discussions ongoing with original sculpture in relation to movement and re siting of some bells	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of Castle Gardens and the monastic sundial. 	New path to be put in place in 2025-2026	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second repositioned Bell (Milano Bell) at Cross Hill. 	New path to be put in place in 2025-2026	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross Hill to be cleared / landscaped with new interpretative signage installed to explain the significance of the site. 	New path to be put in place in 2025-2026	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Bobbio Bell at entrance to the 	Discussions ongoing with original sculpture in	Ongoing

Museum and Café Cure.	relation to movement and re siting of some bells. QR codes are to be added to each of the Bells which will link to the Heritage literature available for the site.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Option for a further walk to explore Bangor's Victorian Heritage via the Walled Garden and Ward Park. 	Will be considered as part of the Parks departments plans for Castle Park	Ongoing

RECOMMENDED that the Council note this report and further updates be brought to Council in due course.

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McRandal was pleased to see this coming forward recognising that the Borough had a rich Christian heritage. He referred to the new path over Cross Hill with plans for it to be in place 2025-2026 and he asked how that would be funded. The Committee was informed that the Head of Parks and Cemeteries had submitted a business case and the Council had the money in the current financial year to do that and the tendering process would begin soon subject to the business case being signed off. Seconding, Councillor W Irvine welcomed the progress to date and the promotion of the Borough's Christian Heritage.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

16. ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework 2024-31 was launched by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on 16 September 2024. The Strategy would support those organisations working to prevent and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and culture that could lead to violence against women and girls.

The Council was awarded £60,000 of Momentum funding to be used from January to March 2025 to raise awareness of the Change Fund. Funding of £120,000 was allocated for the Council to deliver the Change Fund in 2025 – 2026. That was allocated via competitive grants process.

Momentum funding had been used to deliver:

3 Change Fund grants workshops to community and voluntary sector across the Borough, including Greyabbey (18 participants), Holywood (22 participants) and Newtownards (24 participants).

1 Change Fund online workshop to community and voluntary sector across the Borough, with 15 participants.

1 Business Breakfast in Bangor to businesses and schools across the Borough, with 54 participants.

1 Change Fund Launch Event including panel discussion in Bangor to statutory organisations and community and voluntary sector across the Borough, with 113 participants.

Momentum funding had also been used to support the 'Power to Change' message from PSNI and to develop a suite of training for Council staff.

Following the workshops the Change Fund was opened for applications on Thursday 6 March 2025 and closed on Thursday 3 April 2025.

22 applications were received totalling £315,886.

Applications were scored on Tuesday 8 April 2025 by a scoring panel consisting of Donna Mackey (Externally Funded Programmes Manager), Nicola McClurg (Community Grants & Funding Coordinator) and Emma Keenan (PCSP Officer).

All applications were scored in line with set criteria and £120,000 Change Fund awarded to the following groups, with reductions applied to meet the available budget:

Tier 1- £1000-£5000	Applications	Applications	Amount of
Group Name	received	Awarded	funding
	9	5	
Enler Amateur Boxing Club			£4,466.00
Ards Peninsula YFC			£4,336.00
BCM Community Family Support			£2,242.00
Bowtown Community Development Group			£4,482.00
North Down Craft Collective			£4,635.00
TOTAL TIER 1			£20,161.00
Tier 2 - £5001-£15000	Applications	Applications	Amount of
Group name	received	Awarded	funding
	4	3	
Neurodiversity UK			£9,108.00
North Down YMCA			£13,200.00
VOYPIC			£11,894.00

TOTAL TIER 2			£34,202.00
Tier 3 - £15001-£25000	Applications received	Applications Awarded	Amount of funding
Group name			
	9	3	
Gifted Enterprise			£22,000.00
Lisburn YMCA			£21,644.00
North Down & Ards Women's Aid			£22,000.00
TOTAL TIER 3			£65,644.00
TOTAL AMOUNT AWARDED			£120,007.00

The following applications were received, but were unsuccessful:

Tier 1- £1000-£5000	Amount of funding requested
Group Name	
Girlguiding Ulster	£3850
Glenside Farm Comber CIC	£5000
Greyabbey & District Community Association	£2370
The Outdoor Partnership NI	£5000
TOTAL TIER 1 Unsuccessful	£16,220
Tier 2 - £5001-£15000	Amount of funding
Group name	
Inspiring Yarns	£14,965
TOTAL TIER 2 Unsuccessful	£14,965
Tier 3 - £15001-£25000	Amount of funding
Group name	
Recharge CIC	£24,856
Field Studies Ireland	£22,500
Kilcooley Women's Centre	£25,000
Ladybirds Children's Services	£25,000
Redburn Loughview Community Forum	£25,000
Sustainability Education	£25,000
TOTAL TIER 3 Unsuccessful	£147,356
TOTAL AMOUNT Unsuccessful Applications	£178,541

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

17. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN SPORTS FORUM GRANTS

(Appendices VIII, IX & X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Ards and North Down Sports Forum administered grants for sporting purposes on behalf of the Council under the Council's Grants Policy agreed in 2024.

£70,000 had been allocated within the 2025/2026 revenue budget for that purpose.

During April 2025, the Forum received a total of 61 applications: (2 Coach Education, 1 Goldcard and 58 Individual Travel/Accommodation).

A summary of the **56 successful** applications were detailed in the attached 2025/26 Successful Coach Education and Successful Individual Travel/Accommodation Appendices.

2025/26 Budget £70,000	Annual Budget	Funding Awarded May 2025	Remaining Budget
Anniversary	£2,000	£0	£2,000
Coach Education	£3,000	*£300	£2,700
Equipment	£22,000	£0	£22,000
Events	£10,000	£0	*£6,181.20
Seeding	£2,000	£0	£2,000
Travel and Accommodation	£28,000	*£9,840.71	*£15,242.42
Discretionary	£1,000	£0	£660
Schools/Sports Club Pathway	£2,000	£0	£2,000
0 Goldcards Awarded in April 25 (8 Goldcards in total during 2025/26)			

*The remaining budget for coach education of **£2,700** was based on an award of **£300**

*The remaining budget for Travel and Accommodation of **£15,242.42** was based on a proposed award this month of **£9,840.71**

The remaining budget for 2025/26 is **£52,783.62** (75% of the 2025/26 budget)

The report outlined April grants that had been administrated and approved by the Ards and North Down Sports Forum and is for noting purposes only in line with the Councils Grant Policy effective from 5 December 2024.

RECOMMENDED that the Council note the attached report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor S Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

18. RESPONSE TO NOM 545 MOVILLA COFFIN LIDS UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Council agreed the following Notice of Motion in March 2023:

“that Officers write in response to Historic Environment Division (HED) expressing concern that a reinstallation of the Movilla Stones to the Movilla Abbey walls might risk further damage to the stones, what reassurance can HED give that this will not be the case, whether alternative means of display of the stones has been given consideration and, if so, that Council offers assistance in this regard”.

Council further agreed in June 2023:

“that the Council, upon completion of conservation repairs, work closely with the Historic Environment Division for return of the objects for display at Movilla Abbey and for them to be located as described in the report”.

Update

Ongoing communication had taken place between the Council’s Heritage Development Officer and HED representatives to ascertain when the coffin lids would be returned to Movilla Abbey.

In April 2025 the following update was provided by HED:

“As you may know HED was unable to take forward the conservation and relocation project in recent years due to existing staff pressures, budgetary settlements and more pressing conservation works required across the State Care Estate. However, we are hoping to put the conservation works out to tender in this financial year 25/26 as this will require stone conservation specialists.

Once conserved, HED will liaise with Ards and North Down Borough Council to return the grave slabs to Movilla and install them in an appropriate protective shelter which will be accessible to visitors. This being said, as with all planned expenditure, this project is subject to budget allocations in what has been an extremely challenging budget situation for the Department for Communities in recent years”.

Further updates would be brought to Committee in due course.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Adair welcomed the report and thanked Alderman McIlveen and Michelle McIlveen MLA for their work in relation to this. Councillor McKee was encouraged that the right comments were being made to progress the work and hopefully it would be completed soon.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

19. QUEST – ARDS BLAIR MAYNE AND WELLNESS LEISURE CENTRE AND COMBER LEISURE CENTRE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Quest was Sport England's recommended Continuous Improvement Tool for leisure facilities and active communities. Both legacy Councils historically utilised the process for their leisure centres and since merger both the in-house team and NCLT have continued to avail of the process for the majority of Centres within the Borough. (The value in applying this process to the smaller facilities was difficult to justify).

Members may recall that both ABMWLC and Comber Leisure Centre (CLC) were previously accredited with a **Very Good** rating which was the highest they could achieve on the one day assessment process. As part of the in house teams continuous improvement journey and as identified as part of the business case for the build of ABMWLC the team upgraded to the Quest plus two day assessment for both ABMWLC and CLC in 2024 and secured the rating of "**Very Good**" in May of last year. That was deemed a major success following Covid and with staff transformation ongoing.

NCLT also secured a **Very Good** rating for Aurora on the two day Quest plus process and also for Queens on the one day assessment process (highest grading possible) in October 2024.

As part of this enhanced process both centres, Aurora and ABMWLC were subjected to both a Quest Mystery Visit and an unannounced directional review visit by Quest Assessors. Those visits occurred between March and May of 2025. The assessor identified that both centres achieved an improved overall assessment banding of **Excellent** which was the highest rating that a centre could achieve.

That was a very encouraging endorsement from an external assessor and one that was achieved by the in-house leisure team who received critical support from colleagues across Council and particularly Assets.

The full two-day assessment process would be undertaken around May 2026 at which time the Council's in-house team would seek to achieve an **Excellent** banding for both ABMWLC and Comber.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Douglas, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

20. RESPONSE TO NOM 581 CEMETERY MAINTENANCE – SIX MONTH UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in September 2023 the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council:

“That Council notes the increasing complaints regarding the poor condition and appearance of our cemeteries across the Borough and tasks officers to bring back a report on options to improve the maintenance of our cemeteries which are places of special significance to those who have lost loved ones.”

A response to the Notice of Motion was tabled at the Community and Wellbeing meeting in December 2023 and Members requested a further detailed report to be presented on tangible options to improve the maintenance within Cemeteries. A further report was submitted in June 2024 and again in January 2025. It was further agreed by the Council that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council review in six months.

Service Overview

The Parks and Cemeteries Service had responsibility for the maintenance and development of approximately 300 hectares of Parks and other open spaces including responsibility for burials in 12 active cemeteries and the maintenance of a total of 19 cemeteries, spread across the Borough. In the management of the 19 cemeteries the operational Parks and Cemeteries team carried out service activities regarding the burial process and overall cemetery grounds maintenance. That was currently delivered by a multidisciplinary skilled team who worked to a suite of Standard Operating Procedures.

The burial service was dictated by the Burial Grounds Regulations 1992 (NI) and all service elements were carried out in line with the legislation. All gravedigging was carried out by skilled in-house teams. Working to the Standard Operating procedures, this element of the service included the opening and subsequent closing of graves along with the interment service. An update was provided on the current status of cemetery maintenance and the team had made significant progress in ensuring that the Council's cemeteries were safe, tidy, and well-maintained.

The basis of the report was to detail current operational practices and highlight how those had been adapted to ensure continuous improvement and respond to the

issues which had been raised and the impacts of changing climate patterns over recent seasons.

Cemetery Management & Maintenance Team

Collaboration and Efficiency: The Parks and Cemeteries Service had been implementing an agreed Transformation process with significant structural changes. Through effective teamwork and communication, the Council had streamlined its maintenance processes, allowing it to address tasks more efficiently and thoroughly. That collaborative approach had created a positive work environment and enhanced the overall productivity by utilising both Parks and Cemeteries operational staff to cover busier times and areas.

Team	Cemeteries Covered	Staff Composition
North Cemeteries	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clandeboye 2. Bangor New 3. Ballyvester 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area Manager • Assistant Area Manager • Cemetery Team Leader • Senior Gravedigger x 6 • Assistant Gravedigger x 3
South Cemeteries	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Movilla 2. Comber 3. Loughview 4. Redburn 5. Priory 6. Kircubbin 7. Kirkistown 8. Greyabbey 9. Whitechurch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area Manager • Assistant Area Manager • Cemetery Team Leader • Senior Gravedigger x 6 • Assistant Gravedigger x 4

Utilisation of New and Additional Resources: The Council had successfully integrated new staff members and resources into its maintenance operations. Those additions had provided the Council with the necessary support to manage the workload effectively. The utilisation of those resources had enabled the Council to maintain high standards of care and attention to detail across all cemetery sites.

Monitoring: following the previous report and the success of our monitoring system to track progress and ensure the effectiveness of maintenance efforts, we were introducing an even more robust monitoring system with a dedicated member of staff using the new task management system 'PSS Ultimate' to monitor and report. That system had allowed the Council to identify areas for improvement and celebrate successes. The positive feedback that had been received from visitors was a testament to the team's hard work and dedication. Users had complimented the current upkeep, noting the noticeable improvements in the appearance and safety of the cemeteries. The PSS Ultimate System would:

- Centralize and streamline the scheduling, tracking, and management of maintenance tasks across all cemeteries.
- Improve accountability by providing real-time updates on task completion and staff assignments.
- Enable data-driven decision-making by integrating historical and current maintenance records into a single platform.
- The phased rollout of PSS Ultimate is well underway, with trials in select locations showing results of improved coordination among maintenance teams and a reduction in response times for urgent tasks.

Safety and Tidiness: ensuring the safety and tidiness of the cemeteries remained a top priority. The team had been updating its Risk Assessments and Standard Operating Procedures to ensure safe and efficient working practices throughout. Regular inspections were carried out to identify and address any potential hazards promptly. Additionally, the Council had focused on upkeep, including landscaping, waste management, and general cleanliness, to create a serene and respectful environment for its visitors.

Infrastructure Improvements: the Council had also carried out significant resurfacing and drainage work in Greyabbey Cemetery Lane. We were also able to resurface a significant amount of the roadway in Comber Cemetery which needed to be repaired. Those improvements had dramatically enhanced the visitor experience, making the cemeteries more accessible and pleasant to visit. We also had started work on a new section in Whitechurch Cemetery with surfacing works also completed. The Council was seeking to complete the new section within 2025/2026. With the following criteria in mind to create efficiencies in the maintenance requirements while also improving the appearance of the site. Those included: the installation of drainage solutions to avoid flooding; and the increase in spacing within new sections and installing ground reinforcing pathways to reduce the impact of machinery on the grounds.

New Equipment Purchases: to further support the maintenance efforts, the Council had invested in new equipment for both cemetery areas. That included advanced grass cutting machinery that enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in maintaining the grounds. The aim to replace some outdated plant equipment in the year 25/26 through the machinery replacement strategy to ensure burial services were carried out efficiently with up-to-date modern equipment. We were also researching options for up-to-date shoring equipment to assist in areas with cave ins were likely to help reduce the impact for staff and grave owners.

Ongoing Challenges: whilst the Council had made substantial progress, it continued to face ongoing challenges including environmental factors, busy burial schedules, and seasonal staff recruitment. The Council continued to actively address those issues through continuous improvement initiatives including strategic planning and resource allocation to ensure that the Council's cemeteries remained well-maintained and safe for all visitors.

Alignment with new Corporate Plan: the Council's efforts aligned with the Ards and North Down Borough Council's Corporate Plan, which emphasised the importance of creating a sustainable, well-maintained, and welcoming environment

for all residents and visitors. Specifically, the maintenance activities supported the Council's goals of enhancing community wellbeing, promoting environmental stewardship, and ensuring the efficient use of resources.

Ongoing Improvements: that was now the third report since the original NOM, and the Council was pleased to highlight the significant ongoing improvements that had been made. The continuous efforts and dedication had resulted in noticeable enhancements in the upkeep and safety of cemeteries, and that was reflected in positive comments from users.

In conclusion, the combined efforts of the dedicated staff, the strategic use of new resources, and the Council's commitment to continuous monitoring had significantly improved the cemetery maintenance operations. The Council was committed to maintaining those high standards and continuing to provide a safe and fitting cemetery environment at all locations.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Alderman Adair asked to make an alternative recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Douglas;

That Council agree the report but continue to keep the Maintenance of cemeteries under six month review.

Alderman Adair put on record his thanks to the Head of Parks and Cemeteries and his team noting that there had been a vast improvement in the appearance of the cemeteries. He stressed that cemeteries were special places for those who had lost loved ones and he thanked the team for addressing the concerns of constituents.

Councillor Douglas also thanked officers for the report and referred to matters in the Comber cemeteries that had been dealt with promptly and well.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the Council agree the report but continue to keep the maintenance of cemeteries under six month review.

21. RESPONSE TO NOM 630 SPORTS PITCH MAINTENANCE SIX MONTH UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in September 2024 the following Notice of Motion was agreed by the 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."

A response to the Notice of Motion was tabled at the Community and Wellbeing meeting in November 2024 and Members requested a further report to be presented in June 2025. The update report outlined the current state of sports pitches, assesses maintenance strategies, and proposed actions aligned with the Council's commitment to sustainability and community needs.

Through that, the Council aimed to ensure that its outdoor 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 and cricket.

That update provided a summary of progress made on the actions previously outlined in the report to committee in November 2024, which was ratified in December 2024. It highlighted key developments in maintenance practices, contractor engagement, and investment in equipment, all of which supported the Council's strategic objectives under the Corporate Plan: A Sustainable Borough. Progress on Key Actions were below:

Enhanced Maintenance

In line with the proposed shift toward more responsive and sustainable maintenance practices, Parks had invested in a new direct seeding machine. That enabled Parks staff to carry out direct seeding operations internally, eliminating reliance on external contractors for that critical task. Following the removal of goalposts during the week ending 17 May 2025, all pitches were successfully seeded within one week. That rapid turnaround would significantly improve the likelihood of successful seed establishment and reduced the risk of delays due to weather or contractor availability. Goal posts were removed as scheduled for any repairs and painting prior to the re installation dates in August.

Contractor Engagement and Delivery

The Parks Service engaged early with contractors to ensure timelines and expectations were met. That proactive approach included pre-season planning meetings, clear communication of pitch handover dates, and contingency planning for weather-related disruptions. All contracted renovation works were completed ahead of schedule. Contractors began work on 19 May 2025, and all pitches had end of season maintenance operations completed before the beginning of June—well in advance of the scheduled reopening date of August 2025. Contractors completed the full suite of end-of-season renovation tasks, including Verti-Draining, topdressing with sand, chain harrowing, and direct re-seeding. Parks staff would supplement that with fertilisation and post-renovation care. The early completion would allow for extended establishment time, improving pitch quality and resilience.

Feedback from staff and users had been very positive, with noticeable improvements in operations from previous years.

Investment in Equipment

The purchase of new seeding equipment represented a strategic investment aligned with the Council's equipment replacement strategy. That not only enhanced operational capacity but also supported long-term cost savings and service quality. By internalising key maintenance tasks, the Parks Service had increased its flexibility and reduced exposure to contractor delays, particularly during critical seasonal windows.

Outcomes and Benefits

The combination of internal seeding and early contractor engagement had streamlined the maintenance process, reduced downtime and improved pitch availability. Early seeding and extended establishment periods would hopefully result in visibly healthier playing surfaces, with better grass coverage and root development. Internal delivery of seeding had the potential to reduce long-term costs and improve quality control, while also building internal skill sets for staff.

Ongoing Challenges and Community-Based Solutions

Despite recent improvements in pitch maintenance and scheduling, two persistent challenges continued to impact the quality and usability of sports pitches across the Borough: adverse weather conditions and unauthorised use by the public, particularly during rest and renovation periods.

Weather-Related Impacts

Unpredictable and increasingly extreme weather patterns - particularly prolonged rainfall or drought continued to pose a significant challenge. Waterlogging or extreme dry conditions could delay maintenance operations, reduce playable days, and compromise the effectiveness of renovation works. While drainage improvements had been implemented at several sites, including Crommelin Park, some locations such as Islandview Road in Greyabbey remained vulnerable due to their proximity to the coast and rising sea levels. Mitigation Measures include:

- Continued investment in drainage infrastructure and site-specific solutions.
- Strategic rest periods and rotational use of pitches to allow recovery.
- Long-term planning for potential relocation or redesign of pitches at high-risk sites.

Unofficial Use and Community Impact

Unauthorised use of pitches - particularly by dog walkers, casual players, and other non-booked users remained an issue, especially during closed periods when pitches were undergoing renovation. That activity could severely disrupt seed establishment, damage playing surfaces, and undermine the investment made in maintenance.

Examples of Impact:

- Foot traffic during seeding periods could prevent grass from taking root.
- Dog fouling and littering created health hazards and increased maintenance burdens.

- Informal play during rest periods accelerated wear and reduced recovery time.

Community Monitoring and Stewardship

To address those challenges, a more collaborative approach involving local clubs and community groups was being undertaken. Those stakeholders were well-placed to act as stewards of their local facilities and could play a key role in promoting responsible use. Actions included:

- Club Engagement: Ask clubs to assist in monitoring pitch use, reporting unauthorised activity, and promoting awareness among members and spectators.
- Community Education: staff were working with the Council's Communications team to create awareness and inform the public about the importance of rest periods and the impact of misuse.
- Signage and Access Control: Improve signage around pitches during renovation periods and explore options for temporary fencing or barriers where appropriate.

By encouraging shared responsibility and building stronger partnerships with local users, the Council could better protect and ensure pitches remained in good condition for all users.

Next Steps

The Parks Service would continue to monitor pitch conditions throughout the summer period. The introduction of the PSS Ultimate software would further enhance inspection and reporting capabilities. Engagement with clubs and users would continue through biannual meetings and surveys to assess satisfaction and identify areas for further improvement. Lessons learned from this season would inform future maintenance schedules, contractor engagement strategies, and capital investment planning. Planning for more future investment in pitch maintenance activities, through learning opportunities for staff and more investment in new technology.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Alderman Adair proposed seconded by Councillor Cochrane:

That Council welcome the process to Maintenance of Sports Pitches across the Borough but keep under review with a progress report coming to Council in September 2025 following the completion of scheduled works.

Alderman Adair referred to the previous complaints he had received about summer maintenance and the lack of it in the Borough's football pitches but proactive maintenance was now in place and the positive results were evident and had received praise across the area. The Alderman's only concern was with the pitch at Portavogie which was sand based and maintenance there had taken a bit more time. He offered his sincere thanks to the Head of Parks and Cemeteries and his team for the proactive response. He wished all of the Borough's clubs success in the year ahead.

Councillor Cochrane added his thanks to the team for the works to Crommelin Park and Councillor Boyle agreed stating that the pitches were looking great at the moment and that showed the importance of making an early start. He was pleased that there was a rest period built in to allow the pitches to recover.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council welcome the process to Maintenance of Sports Pitches across the Borough but keep under review with a progress report coming to Council in September 2025 following the completion of scheduled works.

22. RESPONSE TO NO, 629 CLANDEBOYE PARK AND PITCH UPDATE

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 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.”

A report was submitted to the Community and Wellbeing in January 2025, with a number of options and a recommendation. Elected Members decided to progress Option 2 i.e. reinstate the football pitch to intermediate dimensions with full size goal posts. A budget was agreed separately and within the 2025/6 financial year.

Programme of Works for the Pitch

The following programme of works had been developed following agreement to proceed with the project. The timescale for the programme of works was to prepare the pitch for an opening on the 9 August 2025. That was to coincide with the commencement of the football playing season across all Councils maintained pitches Borough wide.

- New full-size goalposts and sockets had been ordered, and delivery was expected in June.
- An independent assessment from iTurf of the playing surface had been received and determined the long-term maintenance plan for the surface.
- Along with the outcomes of the long-term plan, and in readiness for the August 2025 opening, the following works would be carried out:-

- Application of spring/summer fertilizer in April and another in July.
- Regular grass cuts (including steady reduction of grass height) to improve the sward (ongoing throughout the growing season)
- Overseed the playing surface with 100% perennial rye grass seed mix. formulated with cultivars appropriate to sports pitches of this type. (Took place in May and being monitored)
- Verti-Drain and Top Dress the pitch with 30 tonne of sand.
- Erect new goalposts and remark the pitch (1st week in August)

Clandeboyne Park Wider Engagement Plan

Part of the Council decision was to have further engagement with the local community. The purpose of the wider Engagement project was to consult the local community regarding the long-term maintenance and future enhancement of Clandeboyne recreational area.

The current position of the recreational area consists of a Play Park, a MUGA and a non-bookable grass pitch. Open greenspace around those facilities equated to approximately 4500m² with pedestrian access between Avonlea Park and Chester Park. There was an active community group representing the area, as well as a Primary School, nursery schools, churches and a sports club with youth teams.

Target Groups

- Clandeboyne Primary School
- St Andrews Presbyterian Church
- Bangor Football Club
- Snuggles Day Nursery
- Clandeboyne Community and Village Association
- Bangor Abbey Pre-School
- St Malachy's Primary School & Nursery Unit
- Little Acorns Pre-School

Engagement Approach

Clandeboyne Primary School: Practical engagement activity with small groups from each year group would take place, using a map of the site and photos or a site walk, asking what they thought and what was good/important, what was missing or could be better and what could be changed. We would use colour post it notes to add their ideas to the map

St Andrews Presbyterian Church: We plan to work with the Community Litter Picking Group, undertake a site walk and discussion, followed up by more practical feedback on opportunities and use of the space on return to the church.

Drop in Sessions

The following groups could be targeted by drop-in sessions by Council staff, by having informal discussions on how much they used the space, if not why not and what they would like to see:

- Families - Early Birds 8-9am – Term time – mini café as part of school run
- Mums & Tots

- Sparks (preschoolers)

Adults – Homegroup; Connects (20s & 30s), Knit and Knatter; Sunshine Hour; PW; Blossom; Lads, Dads and Grandads; Mens' Shed; Bowling Club; Book Club

Teenagers - Youth & YFC & Ignite

Bangor Football Club: We plan to work in partnership with ANDBC Leisure with a focus on sport, in particular football. That could be done as a site visit or at the Club premises focusing on what was available for local children in sport and football and if the space provided an opportunity.

Nurseries / Schools: Posters with QR code asking families and staff for feedback, questionnaire via Citizen Space

Clandeboyne Village Community Association: That would be pivotal engagement with regular updates to the group on progress made throughout the process and presentation of findings from engagement sessions and consultation sessions.

Timeline

In May 2025 the Parks Development Team engaged with Clandeboyne Village Community Association and updated the group on progress, consultation proposals etc. Several group engagements would take place in June:

- Clandeboyne Primary School
- St Andrews Presbyterian Church
- Bangor Football Club
- Snuggles Day Nursery
- Bangor Abbey Pre-School
- St Malachy's Primary School & Nursery Unit
- Little Acorns Pre-School
- Additional Drop-In Engagement as required

July / August

- Re-Engage Clandeboyne Village Community Association, update group on progress to date and presenting group with wider engagement findings to association and consultation session.

Autumn

- A further report to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.
- Development of business case for financial year 2026/2027 if required

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McClean thanked the officers and thought this was an excellent report and the community would be pleased with the results since there had been a

sincere effort to understand what the community needed. Councillor Hollywood was in agreement and looked forward to the outcome along with the other Members representing Bangor West.

Councillor McKee agreed and asked what the pitch surface would need in the longer term and would the consultant carry out the work. In response it was noted that because it was a tricky pitch to manage expertise was brought in from Iturf and there was confidence that progress was going according to plan.

Councillor McBurney thanked officers for the excellent report and particularly for the wide consultation in the community which she thought was very important for Clandeboye.

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

RECESS 9 pm
RECOMMENCED 9.10 pm

23. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3/Q4 2024-2025 LEISURE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil that requirement the Council had in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan 2024-2028)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved annually in March)

The Council's 18 Service Plans outlined how each respective Service would contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Reporting Approach

The Service Plans would be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 2 (Q2)	April – September	December
Quarter 4 (Q4)	October – March	June

The report for Quarter 4 was attached. At time of compiling the report some critical financial information was not available in time to calculate the relevant KPIs (the first two detailed below). However based on period 11 financial data the leisure team

had its most successful year against budget since ABMWLC opened and both leisure and CCHs continued to build up the attendance levels surpassing historical figures and showing full recovery post Covid.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to all seven outcomes as followed:

Outcome 1

An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment

Key achievements:

- There were 7 engagement sessions held with key stakeholders
- The leisure strategy development provided significant opportunity for all stakeholders in leisure provision.

Outcome 2

An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets

Key achievements:

- The Leisure and CCHs sites continued to encourage recycling
- The level of recycling rather than landfill continued to increase across the portfolio.

Outcome 3

A thriving and sustainable economy

Key achievements:

- A number of local business continued to operate from Council facilities
- Leisure continued to develop partnerships with private business for example Origin.

Outcome 4

A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors

Key achievements:

- Leisure contributed to providing a sustainable Borough for all residents and visitors with its management of accessible and affordable services and facilities.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that were flourishing

Key achievements:

- Leisure provided all communities with access to safe, inclusive facilities and services across the entire Borough.

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- Over 2.3 million visits to our leisure and Community Halls highlighted the opportunities for residents to be active and healthy.
- Over 100 sport clubs being supported by the Council's Sport Development team to provide opportunities for residents to be active.

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- The inhouse team had delivered a quality service significantly under budget

Emerging issues:

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement the annual Service Plan was reviewed on a monthly basis. The Service Risk register had also been reviewed to identify emerging issues and agree any actions required detailed below:

- The service was experiencing significant turn over. Quality Staff were deciding to work away from leisure or within leisure but in different organisations.
- The revisit to potential outsourcing in 2025 would provide a major challenge in recruiting/retaining quality staff as it produced uncertainty for the workforce.

Action to be taken:

- The decision on the future leisure operation model needed to be taken as early as possible.
- Further analysis required on how the Council attracted and retained quality staff.
- The facility maintenance programme needed to be reviewed both in terms of latent defects in our new buildings and investment in the Council's aging buildings across the leisure estate.

RECOMMENDED that this report is noted.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Hollywood noted that the use of the community halls had exceeded its target. He referred to the Sunday morning church services held within some of those and asked the Director if use of those on Bank Holidays would be part of that review

since he hoped that the Sunday worship could be accommodated. The Director explained that a support consultancy had gone out to tender and was due to be awarded soon, and this could be looked at as part of the review which was to begin in early Autumn. To address this query a full review was needed both of the churches that used the communities centres regularly and the other users.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

24. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3/Q4 2024-2025 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil that requirement the Council had in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan 2024-2028)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved annually in March)

The Council’s 18 Service Plans outlined how each respective Service would contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Reporting Approach

The Service Plans would be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 2 (Q2)	April – September	December
Quarter 4 (Q4)	October – March	June

The report for Quarter 3 and 4 was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to;

Outcome 1

An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment

Key achievements:

- Monthly survey to service users to assess levels of satisfaction and areas of improvement achieving target rate.

- Processed a significant number of service requests made by members, MLAs and MPs particularly relating to public health, housing and pest control matters.
- Quarterly meetings of the Over 50s Council (2 afternoon and 2 evening meetings) with representations from NI Public Services Ombudsman Office, NI Assembly Engagement Team and Capital Projects Team, ANDBC

Outcome 2

An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets

Key achievements:

- Air pollutants in the Borough remained below the threshold for action throughout the year
- Nitrogen Dioxide sampling tubes changed weekly at 18 sites throughout the Borough with no actionable levels recorded
- Over 400 pledges from pupils in Primary 5 classes to help the environment through the “Engine Off – No Idling” campaign
- During the reporting period supporting Air Quality assessments were considered as part of the planning consultation process for large residential developments.
- Responded to planning consultations for sustainable projects including, Electric Vehicle Charging Points, Biofuel Electricity generation and Storage Units, Wind Turbines and Air Source Heat Pumps which contributed to the Council’s commitment to the path to net zero.
- The assessment, through the planning process, of the associated risk assessments for several brownfield sites. That assisted in the promotion and reuse of land affected by contamination, resulting in the return to use of vacant and underused land which could help address local housing need in areas well served by existing infrastructure.
- Inspection of premises licensed for the storage and use of petroleum and assessed compliance with requirements of the relevant permits issued for vapour recovery under the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013

Outcome 3

A thriving and sustainable economy

Key achievements:

- Fully eliminated the food inspection backlog
 - Supported businesses providing advice and guidance on compliance with food safety, health and safety and consumer safety;
 - Awarded Mind, Body, Business, Health & Wellbeing Grants to 14 businesses
 - Engaged with 30 businesses in Newtownards - Dementia awareness raising for staff and information sharing for public
- 89% of planning consultations received were responded to within the target time of 15 working days. Timely and thorough responses impact the overall ability of the Council to provide a planning service that was fit for purpose and attracted developers to the Borough.

Outcome 4

A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors

Key achievements:

- Inspected 100% of our caravan parks
- All 9 designated beaches remained safe for swimming in during the bathing season.
- Carried out Fitness Inspections of rented homes in the Borough including an assessment of the heating systems.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that were flourishing

Key achievements:

- Joint sessions between Youth Voice and Over 50s Council with focus on ageism, intergenerational work and development of future projects
- Dementia Awareness sessions to staff and development of training on eLearning portal for all staff.
- Tea Dance in Queens Hall
- Representation at all anti-social behaviour forum monthly meetings
- Home Safety Checks provided to older people, vulnerable adults and 46 Under 5/Vulnerable children) including home safety equipment being provided and onward referrals to organisations including NIFRS, OT, falls team etc.
- Visited tobacco/vape retailers to promote compliance with age of sale legislation and test purchased 25 for vapes (4 sales)

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- BEE Safe delivered to local schools
- Delivered slow cooker training courses to communities
- Mind, Body Business health stand at SERC Skills for Success event
- Undertook walkability sessions in Castle Park

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Meeting and exceeding KPI's
- Responded to over 95% of service requests within 2 working days (exceeding the target)
- Improved staff attendance level, bringing the service into the target range.

Emerging issues:

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement the annual Service Plan was reviewed on a monthly basis. The Service Risk register had also been reviewed to identify emerging issues and agree any actions required detailed below:

- No amendments

Action to be taken:

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
% spend against budget	Vacant posts Underspend in Food Control budget	All posts are now filled Creation of nutrition post across food and HWB	Julie Davidson	September 2025
% of PTO applications completed within 180 days	Access properties was delayed by agreement, due to known fitness issue. One tenant refused entry to Council staff (both issues now resolved)	None – now resolved	N/a	N/a

RECOMMENDED that the Council note this report.

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

25. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3/Q4 2024-2025 PARKS AND CEMETERIES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil that requirement the Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (current plan 2024-2028)

- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually and published in March

The Council's 18 Service Plans outlined how each respective Service would contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Reporting approach

The Service Plans would be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Yearly 1	April – September	December
Half Yearly 2	October – March	June

The report for Parks and Cemeteries was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to outcomes as followed:

Outcome 1: *An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment*

Key achievements:

- Ards & North Down in Bloom Community Competitions took place over the summer with categories for local people, groups and businesses with a Community Awards event delivered in November.
- Community Engagement for Ward Park Projects undertaken including out of scope initiatives such as the Dementia Friendly Sensory Garden and moving the existing play park to a used tennis court.
- North Down Coastal Path Working Group meetings with new membership of the group extended to external groups, business organisations etc.
- Attendance at Local Area Forest School Networks meetings.
- Engagement with local communities along the new Greenway.
- Engagement at Bangor City Advisory Group, Age Friendly Forum and AND Heritage Cluster.
- Engagement & Development of Friends of Groups at Linnear Park and Hunts Park including volunteer days.
- AND In Bloom grant funding released improving local communities.
- Attended the Economic Development Conference and a Parks Service stand promoting the teams work and promoting Corporate Volunteering Days.
- Our Service worked with Community Planning Sustainable Tourism group

Outcome 2: *An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets*

Key achievements:

- 'Go Peat Free' campaign promoted to stakeholders.

- 15,500 plus trees planted in multiple locations including Jacks Cut (Newtownards) - 5000, Greyabbey - 650, Londonderry Park - 1260, Ballywalter - 700, Upper Crescent, Comber - 2500, Cloughey – 1500, Castle Park - 3717 and many more sites.
- A programme of Winter Events including Tree Week (tree tours, woodland crafts and tree seed gathering sessions), weekly tree planting at Lower Crescent Comber in January, Cloughey and Greyabbey in February and Valentine Playing Fields in March, with additional planting sessions in Valentine by local schools and groups.
- Final tree planting event at Londonderry Park including tree, orchard and hedgerow planting with local school groups.
- Tree Walk at Cairn Wood and Ballymenoch as part of the Winter Walk series
- New Orchards planted at Groomsport, Linear Park, Ward Park and Helens Bay
- Orchard Clean up events at Hunts Park and Greyabbey Village Hall with the local communities.
- Agreement reached with DFI on installation of Urban Street trees when project timescales allow.
- Allotment celebration day held in October.
- Installation of first robotic machinery at Bangor Castle Walled Garden.
- Grassland Management Strategy agreed by Elected Members.
- Successful tender completion for new, more efficient machinery.
- BTO Seabird Report Launch
- Celebration of World Rewilding Day with introduction of new signage and information boards promoted with the Mayor.
- Vigorous removal of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed.

Outcome 3: A thriving and sustainable economy

Key achievements:

- Over 90 events held to increase skills and knowledge for local people.
- Successful free family Halloween and Christmas events attracting 15,000 visitors to the Bangor Castle Walled Garden.
- Partnership working with tourism and local businesses to host events such as Chilli Festival, Garlic in the Garden, Awaken the Garden, Open House etc
- Tree Asset Valuation report compiled and reported to Council Committee.

Outcome 4: A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors

Key achievements:

- Floodgates Park progressing towards planning application, surveying work undertaken.
- Charles Brand Limited the appointed as greenway contractor working on the Newtownards to Bangor (Green Road) stage of the Greenway project.
- Ward Park new Play Park, resource centre building artwork and Dementia Friendly sensory garden started.

- Whitespots Country Park – team working through RIBA Stage 2 with further environmental surveys being prioritised to inform the concept design.
- Memorandum of Understanding with Peninsula Healthy Living Partnership agreed and Members updated regarding Community Trails.

Outcome 5: Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- 5 schools registered for 2024/25 school year i.e. Alexander Dickson, Killard, Kircubbin Integrated, St Patricks – Ballygalget and Loughries Primary. Theme agreed: growing a pizza garden. Plus ongoing support continues for some schools from previous years.
- Shared education programme between Strangford Integrated College and St Columbas, Portaferry. That involved two classroom based and two practical outdoor workshops across 80 children. In collaboration with Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership
- Engagement with Dementia support groups undertaken to aid the effective design of our new Ward Park sensory garden.
- Celebrated National Nest Box Week with nest box building with Castle Gardens Primary and North Down Red Squirrel Group.
- Bird Identification Workshop with two local school groups and at Crawfordsburn Glen as part of the RSPB Garden Bird Watch week.

Outcome 6: Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- Responded to DFI Active Travel Plan consultation.
- Play Park improvements planned for Millisle Outdoor Gym, New Harbour Road (Portavogie), Londonderry Park, Seapark (Holywood) and Ward Park.
- Organised events for the UK wide PlayDay, with events at Londonderry Park, Ballywalter Beach & Castle Park.
- A series of pop-up creative play events were delivered in Autumn/Winter.
- Funding for In Bloom Projects delivered to local groups.

Outcome 7: Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Chilli Festival makes Irish Times top 25 food and drinks festivals in Ireland.
- Greenkeeper nomination for NILGA Employee of the Year.
- Walled Garden ranked 7th in UK's most beautiful gardens by 'Love Exploring'.
- Green Flag Awards retained for Castle Park, Londonderry Park, Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Linear Park and Ballymenoch Park. Plus two additional green flags for Clandeboyce Cemetery and Cairn Wood.
- Ulster in Bloom awards received for Donaghadee (Town Winner) and Comber (Town Runner-up)
- Northern Ireland Amenity Council Awards for Comber (Best Kept Medium Town), Bangor (Best Kept City) and Donaghadee (Best Kept Small Town).

- Staff Business Planning Day on 29 November took place with 80 plus Parks and Cemeteries staff attending to influence the Service Plan for 2025/6 and ensure we continued to meet and exceeding KPI's.

Emerging issues:

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement the annual Service Plan is reviewed monthly. The Service Risk register has also been reviewed to identify emerging issues and agree any actions required as detailed below:

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
% staff attendance	Although staff absence rates have improved, it remains challenging.	Service management team continues to meet regularly with HR, vigorously implement procedures and changed made to reporting sickness has improved rates.	Head of Parks & Cemeteries	October 2025
Amount of herbicide used (litres)	Increased usage of herbicides on pitches and control of invasive species.	Improved training, alternative products continue to be identified including use of stem injection for invasive species. Progressing the centralisation of chemical management.	Head of Parks & Cemeteries	October 2025
% spend against budget	Income favourable variances of 33.3%.	Team to continue to monitor monthly the budget.	Head of Parks & Cemeteries	October 2025

RECOMMENDED that the Council note this report.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

There was recognition that the team was focused on maintenance and so much more which could only be of benefit to residents and the environment. Councillor McKee asked about the vigorous removal of invasive species including Japanese Knotweed. It was noted that in Bangor West, there were sections of that on the coastal path, that were a concern but potentially more significantly, Stricklands Glen was being taken over by Salmonberry.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that the control of that was an ongoing matter and it would take many years to be effective. The Council over sprayed in the Autumn and injected a chemical in to the stems of the plant and that had been very effective. It was time consuming but had been impactful but it would never be completely overcome due to its invasive nature.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

26. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3/Q4 COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil that requirement the Council had in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan 2024-2028)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved annually in March)

The Council's 18 Service Plans outlined how each respective Service would contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Reporting Approach

The Service Plans would be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 2 (Q2)	April – September	December
Quarter 4 (Q4)	October – March	June

The report for Quarter 3 and 4 was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to;

Outcome 1

An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment

Key achievements:

- Consultation completed and a new Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan developed.

- Consultation completed and a PCSP Strategy and Action Plan developed.
- Staff continue to attend community meetings to represent Council across the whole Borough.
- Community Development continued to fund and engage with the Youth Council – Youth Voice.
- A series of public information stands had been held in large stores across the Borough.
- Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Momentum funding has been used to raise awareness of this issue in different locations around the Borough and to promote £120,000 of Change Fund monies which were awarded via a grant funding programme.
- PEACEPLUS Plan – moving forward towards receipt of a Letter of Offer
- A full Arts Programme continued throughout the year including exhibitions, Creative Classes and Workshops, Events, Music (Friday Night Live), Music in the Chamber, Aspects Festival Club, Young Aspects, Theatre presented by Terra Nova Productions, Arts Night at the Museum, Arts Bursaries, AND Arts Network, Arts Project Grants and Individual Artist Grants and support for externally Funded projects - Arts for Older People Programme, Rural Engagement Arts Programme and Beach of Dreams – Our Siren Song.
- The North Down Museum continued with the delivery of its forward Plan including exhibitions, Heritage talks, Tours of the Museum, Outreach visits and a very successful Education Programme.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- Continue to work with North Down YMCA to offer service to all newcomers
- Weekly patrols carried out by the Community Safety Officers
- Monthly meetings held with the ASB Forum
- Monthly meetings held of the Support Hub
- Shared Voices Programme underway in schools around the Borough.

Emerging issues:

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement the annual Service Plan was reviewed on a monthly basis. The Service Risk register had also been reviewed to identify emerging issues and agree any actions required detailed below:

- Recruitment to fill vacant posts had been difficult and that had led to an underspend in the staffing budget.
- The introduction of a new CD Strategy and Action Plan had been paused to bring consultation in line with the review of community centre provision.
- No Letter of Offer had yet been received for PEACEPLUS.

Action to be taken:

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
------------------------	--	--------------------	--------------------	-----------------

Implement a new CD Strategy and Action Plan	Consultation will be carried out in line with community halls review	Work will progress in Q4.	Nicola Dorrian	31.3.25
---	--	---------------------------	----------------	---------

RECOMMENDED that the Council note this report.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McRandal thanked all of the Heads of Service and noted that there had been no letter of offer received for PEACEPLUS. The Head of Community and Culture thought that hopefully there would be more clarification in the next month. The Council had gone out to tender with a number of revenue projects which had gone through the Committee but those could not be carried out without the overall offer.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

27. RESPONSE TO NOM 626 RECOGNITION OF US REGIMENTS BASED IN ARDS AND NORTH DOWN

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing Committee detailing that in September 2024 following consideration at the Corporate Services Committee, the Council agreed that following the 80th anniversary of D-Day, recognised the service of US regiment(s) stationed in Donaghadee and the Borough prior to D-Day and officers would bring a report back looking at ways in which our Borough could provide a lasting memory to them.

Introduction

The Arts and Heritage Manager had consulted with a US military specialist, who was a Council member at the Northern Ireland War Memorial and author of a book specifically on the US Army in Northern Ireland (publication in 2026), to ascertain the significance of the US regiment(s) stationed in Donaghadee and any connections that they had to D-Day.

Background

166th Signal Photographic Company

There was only evidence of one US regiment connected in any way with the Borough and that was the 166th Signal Photographic Company. Headquartered at Groomsport House, a company later evidenced in a report (after they moved to England) as having approximately 154 men.

As the 166th was a Signal Corps making film and taking photographs, they would have been attached to the larger units based in Northern Ireland. In the case of the detachment unit based at New Road, Donaghadee the exact number of men was

unknown, and the aforementioned report recorded three detachments, numbering seven and six men, then one detachment with a single soldier so it was not believed the numbers based there were substantial. They were not involved with D-Day.

Field Force Replacement System (FFRS)

The Field Force Replacement System had a depot (FFRS Depot No. 8) located at Bangor. That branch of the Army supplied replacement men to other units to bring them up to numerical strength. Depot No.8 was believed to be a largely administrative depot. After basic training in the US, the men came in, were arranged into companies, before assignment to units in England and then were quickly sent off again.

Undoubtedly there were men among them who took part in D-Day, but the Replacement Company ID was a transitional designation before they were absorbed into another unit. It was therefore extremely difficult to trace where they went.

There were four depots each overseeing several camps. Depot No.8 at Bangor had ten camps, seven in North Down and three in County Antrim.

Sites used by Depot No.8 were Bangor, Rockport, Crawfordsburn, Portavoe, Rathgael House, Clandeboye, Prospect House, Red Hall, Castle Dobbs and Mount Stewart. Each site averaging 150 men in capacity so not entire regiments and they were not involved with D-Day.

The total of the FFRS camps, if assumed around company sized, would be no more than 1500 US Army personnel in the whole of the Ards Peninsula.

The 166th and FFRS would have been in the Borough between January to April of 1944. There was no fixed presence by the US Military before or after that.

There was a war memorial in Portstewart that commemorated the residents of Portstewart who were killed or missing in World War I, World War II and the War in Iraq, it also paid honour to the men of the 508th Parachute Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division of the United States Army. The division arrived in early January 1944 and were leaving by early March of the same year.

They were the only US Army division based in Northern Ireland that took part in D-Day.

The Northern Ireland War Museum had undertaken an oral history project. Over one hundred interviews had been recorded so far and were freely available to researchers, students, and members of the public interested in hearing first-hand accounts of life in Northern Ireland during World War II. A similar project locally may duplicate what already existed.

There were existing resources that Council promotes related to the stationing of US Military in Northern Ireland and in Ards and North Down specifically:

1. **World Wars Trail** qs available at Visit Information Centres (VICs) and online to download: <https://andculture.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020->

[07/Great War Trail online download %281%29 0.pdf](#) A trail highlighting the many sites of interest where one could learn how the Borough played its part in World War I and World War II.

2. **GI Trail NI** available at VIC's. The GI Trail NI mapped out the sites and locations at which the American GIs were based in Northern Ireland during the Second World War. 3 separate heritage-tourism trails had been created covering Armagh and Down, Antrim and Londonderry and Fermanagh and Tyrone. Ards and North Down was featured in the Armagh and Down map.

Officers had requested a PDF of the GI Trail that could be downloaded from the Council's Culture and Tourism websites and would ensure that hard copies were readily available in Donaghadee.

Therefore it appeared from the research undertaken that there were no US regiment(s) stationed in Donaghadee. However, officers would continue to review details about US regiments in the Borough prior to 6 June 1944 and bring a further report back in the Autumn.

RECOMMENDED that the Council note the report.

Proposed by Councillor Chambers seconded by Councillor Cochrane that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Chambers explained that he and Alderman Brooks had brought the Notice of Motion and it was a shame at this stage that it had reached a dead end. He would like to thank those who had undertaken the research and noted that some positive information had come from that.

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

(Councillor W Irvine took the role of Chair at this point in the meeting).

28. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

28.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Morgan and seconded by Councillor Ashe

We are all aware that dog ownership has increased significantly over the past years. There is a fenced off area on "Muckers" in Comber, which is currently being used by NIW which when they have finished their work might lend itself to creating a dog park. The Council should bring back a report that explores the options for creating a dog park in Comber.

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

Councillor Morgan introduced her Motion stating that it was simple and had come about due to people enquiring of the possibility of having a dog park in Comber.

She was aware of a fenced off area on “Muckers” in Comber, which had been used by NI Water which when they have finished their work might lend itself to creating a dog park.

The Muckers area was a popular dog walking route and it was her view that had stimulated the enthusiasm for a park. She explained that the area had very recently been grassed over but she felt that the level of interest being expressed warranted the Council to look at options positively and with some urgency.

Dog ownership had increased substantially over the past years; in 2024, 36% of UK households owned a dog compared to between 2010 and 2020 when it ranged between 22 and 26% and she felt that dogs needed to have facilities.

Dog parks provided an off-leash space where dogs could get exercise and socialize with other dogs and people. There was a well-used dog park in Bangor and a new one had recently been put in at Londonderry Park in Newtownards. Those received very positive feedback from users and so Comber should have the same.

People loved their dogs and having good facilities where they could be exercised was very important for their well-being.

Councillor Morgan referred to the Council’s Leisure Strategy where there were various themes including;

- That more people should enjoy active leisure
- There should be a growth in active leisure opportunities
- There should be a growth in use of green/blue spaces.

She thought that the provision of a dog park fitted that well. The Motion mentioned the Muckers area which had stimulated the thought but she asked that the report consider other possible areas that might be suitable in Comber. She also hoped that the report would propose how demand might be understood, what could be learned from other areas and an idea of costs.

She hoped that the Committee would be able to support such an initiative for Comber.

Seconding the Motion Counsellor Ashe knew of other areas that had these dog parks and she called for a report on how that could be incorporated into Comber. She suggested that a dog park would be a safe space for dogs when they were off the leash and she hoped that other Members would give their support.

Councillor Douglas was happy to support the Motion and explained that the MLA Michelle McIlveen had previously met at this site with Council officers to look at it and consider its future and she and her colleagues had also be approached about a dog park there. NI Water had left the area and the Council had replanted trees and she was happy for consideration to be given to that area or others within the town.

Alderman Cummings thanked the Members for bringing forward the Motion and while he understood that not everyone shared a common opinion when it came to dogs he thought that a consultation would be helpful and inform decision making.

Councillor Chambers was aware of the success of the dog park at Kingsland in Ballyholme and one of the benefits was the social aspect for dogs and their owners within a secure perimeter. He was not familiar with the Comber site but thought it would be well used as a dog park.

Councillor Morgan thanked Members for their useful contributions and it was important to understand all views following a full consultation. She concluded that Muckers field could be reseeded and while it may not be the ideal place for a dog park the Council could consider other options for Comber. She thanked everyone for their support.

AGREED.

(Councillor Ashe resumed the Chair)

28.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Hollywood

Council amends funding eligibility criteria to allow for voluntary dance groups to avail of grants within either the arts or sport funding streams.

Council acknowledges the opportunities performance arts bring in terms of community wellbeing, education, tourism, and our local economy.

Officers will provide a report on how Council can further grow performance art across Ards and North Down.

Proposed by Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Wray thanked Members for the opportunity to attend the Community and Wellbeing Committee and he began outlining his Motion which he said was clear, straightforward and hopefully deserving of all Members support.

He said that a dance group had approached him for help in terms of funding and thought that he had become aware that dance groups could not avail of funding from the Council because dance did not sit within either arts or sport. He began liaising with the Director and Council officers around the matter and it was apparent that a Notice of Motion was required to remedy the anomaly.

He had posted on social media asking for local dance groups to get in touch with him so he could establish the popularity of dance groups and their desire for support. He explained that looking on his social media analytics that post was the most reactive post on social media that he had ever made. Many people from across the Borough wanted to tell him about their dance group, or the group their children attended.

That included disco, hip-hop, Irish dancing, Highland dancing, ballet, line dancing, ballroom dancing and so much more.

He made it clear that constituted and not for profit groups should be able to apply for funding, for equipment, tutoring, building hire and items that were necessary. He understood that private businesses should not be funded.

He gave an example of one such group that should and would benefit from Council funding if his Motion was passed and that was LCDD HipHop. That group operated in Kilcooley although young people from across the Borough attended it. LCDD stood for La Chance Du Dance (The Chance of Dance). In other words regardless of one's background, location, or finances, everyone should have the chance to be able to dance. He indicated that the group delivered weekly lessons to over 60 young people and the tutor did that on a completely voluntary basis. Parents paid for their children to enter competitions and for travel. In fact the group were selected to represent Northern Ireland at the World HipHop Competition taking place next month in Birmingham. The associated costs of that were funded by parents and delivered by volunteers (equipment, costume, transport, hotels, entry fees etc). The group currently used West Church, Kilcooley, to practice because they could not afford to use the Council building in Kilcooley. He explained that parents were paying, Council were not supporting (as they would if it were a sporting group), and Kilcooley Community Centre was empty.

Councillor Wray said he could talk about so many other groups like the Jive Dancing in Greyabbey Village Hall, or the Irish Dancing in Portaferry.

He appealed to Members saying that he was confident that they would be aware of the benefits of dance, its exercise, its social interaction, the building of confidence and other transferable life skills.

The Motion was not asking for a separate fund, rather it was asking for the funding criteria within the Council's arts or sports grants to be amended to allow dance groups to avail of the funding that he believed they rightly deserved. A report back to Members would enable them to clearly articulate to groups within their areas which they could apply for, and from what stream they could apply from.

In terms of the second section of the Motion he had brought another Motion to this Committee the previous year that had asked for the Council to support increased funding to the Arts sector from the Northern Ireland government, that had received unanimous support.

Since then the Northern Ireland Executive had been restored, and Minister Lyons had spoken about this very positively. Yesterday there was a debate in the Assembly brought by the SDLP asking for multi-year funding for the arts. It received unanimous support in the Chamber yesterday. He had listened to the debate, and had heard a lot about the positive impact that the arts had within our local economy.

The Motion under discussion was coming at a time when there was an organisational re-structure within the Council and arts would move into a Directorate focusing on prosperity, tourism, and the local economy. He said that he welcomed

that and wanted to encourage Members to see that this was the perfect time for a report by officers into how that sector could be grown.

A contractor had recently been appointed for Queens Hall, Newtownards, and that would help in terms of additional performance space, but he said he would appreciate a breakdown of how officers intended that facility to be used.

He thought that the plan for the Open House Festival this year was incredible, and he was pleased that the Council was able to support that, however, he believed that the Council needed more suitable locations for the arts within the Borough because the demand was high. A strategic plan for the arts was needed and he was also asking for that within the Motion.

Councillor Hollywood was delighted to support the Motion saying that those groups played an invaluable role in the community and represented the Borough, locally, nationally and internationally. It was right that the Council recognise and provide fair access and support for those groups.

Councillor Chambers had been quite surprised to learn that dance did not fall in to the Arts or Sports categories. He thought that was a great injustice that dance groups were being excluded and missing out on funding streams so in his view the Council should do all it could to ensure the clubs were successful and could grow.

Councillor McClean was supportive but thought that there was something ambiguous about whether a dance could receive a grant from either Arts or Sports and in some ways it conferred an unfair advantage. He thought that a debate should take place with the tweaking of inflexible criteria so that groups could be included. The Director explained that some dance could be defined as sport but not all so there was work to be done on the definition. The Council looked to the Sports Council Northern Ireland which had a guide and a recognised list on its website including some disciplines of dance.

Councillor McClean did not feel that it was the role of the Council to help the Arts to flourish but a report would provide the option to discuss the matter in a deeper way.

Councillor Moore spoke in support of the Motion but viewed tea dancing as an event and a social interaction rather than a sport. She thought that all had value and dance could be done for enjoyment and did not depend on a person's proficiency. There was also the need to be mindful that girls and women could feel excluded from sports and dance could be inclusive.

Councillor Wray thanked Members for the feedback and looked forward to a report coming back to the Committee.

AGREED.

29. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

ORDER OF BUSINESS

In order to facilitate the attendance of Mr Will Carson (Serco), the Chair requested a proposer and seconder to hear Item 42 at this stage.

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor McClean, that Item 42 be heard at this stage of the meeting.

(Councillor Chambers left the meeting having declared an interest in Item 42 – 10.01pm)

(Mr Carson joined the meeting remotely – 10.01pm)

42. NCLT QUARTERLY REPORT

(Appendices XIII & XIV)

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that as part of the leisure services management contract the Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT) provided Council with quarterly reports on performance. Those reports contained information pertaining to participation, key performance indicators, marketing and PR, sports development, health and safety, customer feedback and technical issues.

The purpose of the report was to provide the Council with a high-level update on the Trust's performance for Q4 2024/25 (January 2025 to March 2025).

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine referred to the Active Aging programme and noted its success with the availability of external funding. He asked for a brief outline on how the programme had reached its current level and the benefits it was bringing to participants.

Mr Carson explained that the programme delivered 22 sessions per week, having started with just seven, and was aimed at people aged 55 and over. The programme was tailored to suit that demographic and had grown to its current level of over 800

participations per month. Activities featured strength and balance and falls prevention classes along with dementia friendly, tai chai, walking football and walking netball sessions. The feedback had been positive and the programme continued to grow.

Councillor W Irvine wondered if the Council had adopted this as good practice across its own leisure services and the Head of Leisure Services explained that he oversaw all of the services across the Borough including those delivered by Serco. Active Aging was delivered in all leisure centres across the Borough and had expanded to meet a growing need. It was particularly pleasing that the programme's range of activities had developed as users branched out in to other sports where there was traditionally low uptake for that particular demographic. He added that it was one of the most successful programmes across the Borough and he agreed that Serco's delivery model was particularly good for older people.

Mr Carson alluded to some of the social benefits that the programme brought including use of the café as a popular meeting point for participants.

(Mr Carson left the meeting – 10.06pm)

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

30. REGIONAL TENDER FOR HOME SAFETY EQUIPMENT

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the reduction of accidental deaths and injury in the home was of great importance, as every week, two people or more died in Northern Ireland as a result of an accident in the home, and more accidents occurred in the home than on the roads and in the workplace combined.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves that the Contracts for the provision of Home Safety Equipment are awarded to the top scoring companies:

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

31. TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE EQUIPMENT REPAIRS AND SERVICING – JUNE 2025

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in line with an approved business case, Parks and Cemeteries Officers identified the need for the Provision of Grounds Maintenance Equipment Repairs

and Servicing to be carried out to ensure the safety of the staff and public and the protection and effective use of Council owned grounds maintenance equipment. The contract would be awarded for an initial period of 1 year, with an option to extend for a further 3 x 12-month periods, to be reviewed annually and subject to satisfactory performance.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves that the contracts are awarded to the top scoring companies:

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

32. TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF MEMORIAL TESTING – JUNE 2025

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in line with an approved business case, Parks and Cemeteries Officers identified the need for Memorial Testing to be carried out to ensure the safety of the public and the protection of memorials. The contract would be awarded for an initial period of 1 year, with an option to extend for a further 3 x 12-month periods, to be reviewed annually and subject to satisfactory performance.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves that the Contracts for the provision of Home Safety Equipment are awarded to the top scoring company:

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

33. TENDER EXTENSION – GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SUPPORT SERVICES

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the tender for the provision of Grounds Maintenance Support Services was awarded in June 2024 for a period of a year from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, with an option to extend for a further 3 x 12-month periods. The tender was split into the following Lots:

RECOMMENDED that the Council extend the contract detailed for 12 months (1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026), in line with the terms set out in the original tender and subject to the increases requested.

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

34. TENDER EXTENSION – PROVISION OF A KEYHOLDER RESPONSE SERVICE AND OPENING AND LOCKING OF VARIOUS COUNCIL AREAS

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the tender for a Keyholder Response Service and Opening and Locking of various Council areas was awarded in March 2024 for a period of a year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, with an option to extend for a further 3 x 12-month periods.

RECOMMENDED that the Council extend the contract detailed for 12 months (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026), in line with the terms set out in the original tender and subject to the increases requested.

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

35. RESPONSE TO NOM 525 SPORTING GRANTS

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that a Notice of Motion was agreed by Council in October 2022 as followed;

“That Council Officers bring back a report on relevant Council Policies with a view to withdrawing funding to any sporting organisation 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”

Legal advice was sought in 2024 on the matter and following receipt of advice in April 2025, the aforementioned officers collectively developed the report.

RECOMMENDED that further legal advice is sought and a further report brought back.

On being put to the meeting with 9 FOR, 5 AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED and 1 ABSENT, the amendment was CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Adair.

36. ITEM WITHDRAWN

37. ITEM WITHDRAWN**38. ITEM WITHDRAWN**

(The Vice Chair, Councillor W Irvine, declared an interest in Item 39 and left the meeting – 10.32pm)

39. REQUEST TO CHANGE OPENING HOURS AT BANGOR AURORA

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that at the end of May 2025, Council leisure officers were contacted by NCLT management with a request to implement a temporary change to opening hours at Bangor Aurora across the period of the school summer holidays in July and August 2025.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the minutes.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

40. PEACEPLUS PARTNERSHIP MINUTES
(Appendix XI)

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

41. PCSP MINUTES
(Appendix XII)

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

43. UPDATE ON STORM EOWYN DAMAGE AT AURORA

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware of the storm damage that occurred during Storm Éowyn on 24 January 2025 to the roof of Bangor Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex and the subsequent report to Council in March 2025.

The report aimed to update Members on the insurance claim, the legal case, the repair works and the operational impact.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the recommendation be adopted.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 10.42 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Audit Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, on Thursday, 26 June 2025 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: -

In the Chair: Councillor Thompson

Alderman: McAlpine

Councillors: Harbinson McKee (Zoom)
Hollywood Wray (Zoom)
Morgan

Independent Member: P Cummings

In Attendance: NIAO – Brian O'Neill

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

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman (Councillor Thompson) sought apologies at this stage and none were received.

NOTED.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman commented that this his first time Chairing the Committee and continuing he welcomed the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) representative Brian O'Neill as well as Independent Member, Paul Cummings.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest at this stage.

No Declarations of Interest were declared. Members were reminded that they could declare throughout the meeting.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Hollywood, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

4. INVESTIGATION INTO LEAK OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FOLLOWING COUNCIL MEETING ON 30 APRIL 2025

****IN CONFIDENCE****

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

The Committee was asked to consider a report detailing an investigation into a recent leak of confidential information relating the Queens Parade project.

The recommendation was to note the report. The recommendation was agreed.

5. DRAFT FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR 2024/25 (Appendix I)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

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

A report was presented detailing the Councils financial and overall revenue performance for the year. Once audited, those would be published before 30 September 2025.

The recommendation was adopted.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.55pm.

ITEM 7.3**116****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 1 July 2025 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor McClean

Aldermen: Graham
McAlpine
McDowell
McIlveen
Smith

Councillors: Cathcart McKee (Zoom)
Harbinson Morgan (Zoom)
Kerr (7.09 pm) Smart
Hennessy (7.10pm Zoom) Wray

Officers: Director of Place (B Dorrian), Head of Planning (G Kerr) and
Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend were received from the Mayor (Councillor McCollum) who was on Council business, Councillor Kendall and the Director of Prosperity. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Kerr and Councillor Hennessy.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Alderman McAlpine and Councillor Smart declared an interest in Item 6 - BT Group – Decommissioning/Removal of Telephone Kiosks.

NOTED.

**3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PLANNING COMMITTEE
MINUTES DATED 10 JUNE 2025**

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the minutes be noted.

4. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

4.1 ITEM WITHDRAWN

The Head of Planning advised the Committee that the item had been withdrawn due to the late submission of information which needed further consideration.

NOTED.

4.2 LA06/2024/0532/F - Lands located approximately 120m east of 284 east of 284 Bangor Road, Newtownards (Appendices II & III)

DEA: Newtownards

Committee Interest: Council Interest

Proposal: Proposed extension to the Ark Open Farm consisting of indoor play barn, including ancillary café, kitchen, party rooms, retail/reception area, toilets, offices, and storage. New access/egress to Bangor Road, internal roadway, car parking, attenuation pond, landscaping, and all associated site works (Farm Diversification)

Site Location: Lands located approx. 120m east of 284 Bangor Road, Newtownards

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Head of Planning (G Kerr) outlined the detail of the application. It was for a proposed extension to the well-known Ark Open Farm. The proposal consisted of an indoor play barn, including ancillary café, kitchen, party rooms, retail/reception area, toilets, offices, and storage.

There would also be a new access/egress to Bangor Road, internal roadway, car parking, attenuation pond, landscaping, and all associated site works.

The applicants were also active farmers and the proposal was also a farm diversification project.

All consultees were content and there were no objections from third parties to the proposed extension of this established business.

A slide was shown showing the site layout which was 0.9hectares and was part of a larger agricultural holding including the Ark Open Farm. It was located on the eastern side of Bangor Road approximately 170m back from the public road. The site was located in the open countryside beyond the development limit of Newtownards.

The wider area was predominately rural in nature with a number of rural dwellings, farm groups and commercial properties located in the wider countryside.

As this was already a popular tourism destination it was welcome that the proposal also included a car park for 102 car parking spaces including 5 disabled spaces, cycle parking and a layby for buses. The proposed parking would be a significant improvement to the current parking arrangements and would greatly benefit both the visitors and the nearby residents on Bangor Road.

Proposals for farm diversification had certain criteria to comply with as set out in policy CTY 11 of PPS21 including:

- a) The farm business is currently active and established;
- b) In terms of scale and character, it is appropriate to its location;
- c) It will not have an adverse impact on the natural or built heritage;
- d) It will not result in detrimental impact on the amenity of nearby residential dwellings including potential problems arising from noise, smell and pollution.

The proposal fulfilled all the criteria set out within the policy.

A further slide showed the elevations and those were considered to be acceptable, the proposed building was to be set approximately 170m back from the public road and to the rear of the existing ribbon of development consisting of residential dwellings.

The building had a footprint of 1,000sqm and a ridge height of 8.5m (6.6m eaves). The materials included dark green profiled metal cladding and rendered blockwork at the lower levels of the walls. The materials and finishes were consistent with the rural locality, surroundings, and character and commonly used in agricultural/commercial buildings in the countryside.

The proposal would not harm the amenity of nearby residents with the nearest dwellings approximately 145m away from the application site. The main entrance into the building and the outdoor seating associated with the café were at the eastern gable end which was furthest away from the dwellings, which would reduce noise levels travelling towards the dwellings.

The proposed access lane would pass alongside the boundary of No.284 which was in the ownership or control of the applicant.

With regard to Tourism, the proposal fulfilled criteria set out in policies in PPS16 which dealt with tourism development in the countryside.

With regard to ecology a Biodiversity Checklist was completed by Sterna Environmental Ltd. The report included an Ecological Statement which concluded that no protected sites were present and no impact on protected sites was predicted. No priority habitats or priority species were present and therefore no impact on priority species was predicted.

In summary the proposal would improve and ensure the continuity of one of the Borough's main tourist attractions, linking in with the adjacent Greenway and in close proximity to Whitespots Regional Park, all part of the overall development of the tourism offer of the Council. The proposal was policy compliant with all consultees content and no third party objections.

The recommendation was to grant planning permission.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee and Councillor Cathcart had noticed that the application had a Council interest and he asked what that was. The Head of Planning explained that the Council had transferred a portion of land over to the farm.

There were no further questions and the Chair invited those speaking in support of the application to take their place to address Members. Those included Andy Stephens, Matrix Planning, and Lyndy and Stuart Birse who were the applicants.

(Councillor Kerr entered the meeting at 7.09 pm)

Speaking on behalf of the applicant, Andy Stephens thanked Members for giving him the opportunity to speak in support of the application and the officer's recommendation to grant planning permission.

He welcomed the officer's report and recommendation to grant permission, for this significant investment project to expand and enhance the tourist offer at the Ark Farm. The Ark Farm was a great example of a family-owned indigenous business. It was originally founded 34 years ago, by Stewart and Lorraine Donaldson when it first opened to visitors on 14 August 1990. Since then, the Ark Farm had grown organically to become one of County Down's favourite family attractions with approximately 85,000 visitors per annum. One of those had included Her Royal Highness (HRH) the Duchess of Cambridge in 2020 to commemorate the 30 year anniversary of the Ark Farm.

(Councillor Hennessy entered the meeting at 7.10 pm)

This planning permission sought a new indoor hard play barn including a new café, toilets, party rooms (for birthday parties/educational visits etc) ancillary shop/reception area, offices, and 102 car parking spaces, coach parking, and cycle parking. The proposal would enhance the Ark Farm's offering by providing improved access and linkages to the existing attractions and animal pens whilst enabling increased capacity particularly during the popular seasonal events.

Critically the Ark Farm would have the ability to retain visitor numbers dwell time on wet days to achieve the target of 100,000 visitors per annum. The proposal would also secure The Ark Farm's existing workforce of 28 local employees, and see it increase by 4-6 additional employees. That would ensure the Ark Farm continued as one of the Borough's top destinations and would link with the Council's Greenway project and Whitespots Regional Park, assisting in the delivery of the overall integrated blue/green tourism strategy for the District.

The planning application was front loaded and supported by a significant volume of environmental, drainage and traffic reports with additional information provided during the processing and in response to the statutory agency's comments. That had resulted in a timely determination with no objections from any of the statutory consultees to the proposal on traffic, environmental impact, flooding or residential amenity grounds.

There had been no third party objections to the proposal, and that was resultant from neighbouring properties seeing the clear benefits of the additional parking, and reconfiguration of the entrance along with new access/egress. That would alleviate the existing parking pressure, which the Ark Farm had experienced during season events and peak holiday periods, and result in operational efficiencies.

The 23 page Committee Report before Members was comprehensive and robust. It engaged with all the relevant matters, considered them with balance and against the correct evidential context. It confirmed the proposal was compliant with all aspects of the local development plan, prevailing regional planning policy and that there were no sustainable objections from any of the statutory consultees to the proposal on traffic, biodiversity, drainage, or residential amenity grounds. Planning decisions could only be taken in an evidential context and all the evidence including the responses from the statutory agencies would indicate that there was a lack of sustainable objections, or demonstrable harm and that planning permission should be granted.

He fully supported the recommendation to grant permission and would asked that the Committee resolve to endorse the conditional grant of planning permission for the expansion of this local business.

The Chair thanked Andy Stephens for his presentation and invited Members to ask questions.

Councillor Cathcart referred to the slide which showed the proposed new site layout and welcomed the increased parking of 102 spaces included in the proposal. It was confirmed that that would make a total of 162 parking spaces when included with those existing. He also referred to the improvement of an additional entrance point from the other side of the site which would permit the swift and efficient movement of traffic.

Councillor Hennessy explained that he had taken many school trips there over the past 20 years and asked Andy Stephens if he thought the farm would be able to be run during the development period and would schools still be able to access the existing facilities. In response it was confirmed that the farm would continue to operate since the proposed building would be situated away from the working farm so could be constructed easily and allow the farm business to continue to generate revenue.

Alderman McDowell welcomed the proposal and thought that it was exciting for the area. He asked if cycle parking was forward planning from a business point of view. Mr Stephens agreed that it was and plans showed a coffee hatch to serve cyclists who would be using the Greenway and was a further diversification of the farm's customer base. The Alderman considered this to be a win / win position for the Ark Farm and the Greenway and would enhance the overall tourism package and it also tied in with the Council's aspiration for that area with Whitespots and The Somme Centre.

The Chair thanked Mr Stephens and the applicants for their presentation and they returned to the public gallery.

Proposed by Alderman McDowell, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that planning permission be granted.

Alderman McDowell was delighted with the proposal and thought it a fantastic example of improvement in the area's tourism offering. It would work very well with the extended Greenway and the additional facilities at the farm would allow for more visitors.

As seconder Alderman McIlveen was happy to endorse what Alderman McDowell had said agreeing that it would serve as a real enhancement to the area. The proposal for the farm was well thought out and would address the parking issues that had existed there for many years.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McDowell, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the recommendation be adopted and that planning permission be granted.

4.3 LA06/2025/0336/A - Land 38m NE of Ballycrochan Baptist Church (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor East and Donaghadee

Committee Interest: Council Application

Proposal: Council City Entrance Sign

Site Location: Land 38m NE of Ballycrochan Baptist Church, Donaghadee Road,

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Head of Planning (G Kerr) outlined the detail of the application, the site was located on land 38m North East of Ballycrochan Baptist Church, Donaghadee Road, Bangor. The location of the site was shown on the site location plan. It occupied a small plot of land adjacent to Ballycrochan Baptist Church, on the Donaghadee Road (a protected route), marking the settlement limit of Bangor. The site was undeveloped, consisting of grassland to the side of the road. The images showed the area of where the sign was to be located.

The following slide showed the proposed signage and photograph of the site. The proposal consisted of 1 No. freestanding sign (non-illuminated), measuring approximately 2m in height, with a width of approximately 1.5m. The sign was to be set 1m from the edge of the road, and was finished in perspex and acrylic, with a powder coated metal frame.

The relevant policy context was provided by Planning Policy Statement 17 Control of Outdoor Advertisements. As detailed in the Case Officer's Report, it was considered that the signage respected the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area, would not result in cluttering of signage and would not be overly dominant in the street scene. DfI Roads had been consulted and returned no objection on the grounds of road safety.

It was therefore recommended that consent be granted.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cathcart said people were always welcome to the City of Bangor but noted that signs were missing from other routes leading into the city.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted, that planning permission be granted.

5. UPDATE ON PLANNING APPEALS (Appendices V & VI)

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

Appeal Decisions

1. The following appeal was withdrawn on 10 June 2025.

PAC Ref	2024/E0055
Council Ref	LA06/2022/0246/CA
Appellant	Mr John Curell
Subject of Appeal	Alleged i. Unauthorised change of use of the land and change of use of agricultural buildings to facilitate a Dog Kennelling Business; ii. Unauthorised erection of metal dog's kennels
Location	Land and buildings adjacent to 16 Ballie Road, Bangor

2. The following appeal was dismissed on 30 May 2025:

PAC Ref	2024/A0115
Council Ref	LA06/2019/0996/F
Appellant	Abdeljaouad, Tarik
Subject of Appeal	Non-compliance with Condition 2 of approval LA06/2019/0996/F - Hot food take away, which states, "The business shall not remain open for business outside the following hours: Monday - Sunday 16:00hrs - 23:00hrs."
Location	26 New Street, Donaghadee

Retrospective planning permission (ref: LA06/2019/0996/F) for a hot food takeaway at No. 26 New Street, Donaghadee, was granted on 20 May 2021. Condition No. 2 of the planning permission restricted the business hours as follows:

“The business shall not remain open for business outside the following hours.
Monday – Sunday 16:00hrs – 23:00hrs. Reason: to ensure there is no impact upon residential amenity”.

An application was made pursuant to Section 54 of the Act seeking to extend the business hours from 23:00hrs to 01:00hrs (11pm to 1am) on Fridays and Saturdays. The main issue was whether the appeal development would adversely impact the amenity of existing residents.

Paragraph 2.3 of the SPPS advised that the planning system operated in the public interest of local communities and the region as a whole and encompassed the present as well as future needs of society. It did not exist to protect the private interests of one person against the activities of another, although private interests may coincide with public interest in some cases. It continued that the basic question was not whether owners and occupiers of neighbouring properties would experience financial or other loss from a particular development, but whether the proposal would unacceptably affect amenities and the existing use of land and buildings that ought to be protected in the public interest.

DCAN 4 advised that whilst residential areas were likely to be sensitive to noise disturbance, it could also be a serious problem in town centres and in areas where commercial activities dominated but where there may be residential accommodation beside or over the proposed use. Noise associated with restaurants, cafés and fast-food outlets could emanate from a variety of sources, the main ones being vehicles, people and use of equipment associated with catering establishments. The guidance continued that those sources of noise were especially noticeable in the later evening when residents had a legitimate expectation that surrounding background noise levels would remain low. In that respect, take-away uses, which often generated frequent vehicle and pedestrian movements, could be particularly annoying and unacceptable.

The Commissioner recognised that after 11pm, with other commercial businesses closing there would be a reduction in the background noise levels within the environs of the appeal premises. Therefore they must consider the noise from activities from vehicles movements together with pedestrian movements during the proposed period for extended business hours on Fridays and Saturdays.

Whilst commercial businesses were dominant throughout much of New Street, and given its town centre location, most of those were closed between the hours of 11pm and 1am. The Commissioner was not persuaded that noise associated with kitchen activities would cause demonstrable harm to residential properties or have an adverse impact on amenity during the hours of operation as conditioned. However an 80% increase in delivery orders after 11pm at night would correspond to an increase in vehicular activities associated with the premises. Indeed, in the evidential context of this appeal, the increase of the delivery service activities during 11pm and 1am would be the dominate business taking place at the appeal premises during a period of time when residents had a legitimate expectation that surrounding background noise levels would remain low.

Whilst acknowledging that the appellant was not responsible for the noise that patrons coming and going from other premises caused the Commissioner was not provided with any cogent evidence that customers calling on his commercial operations and vehicles used for deliveries associated with the business would not unacceptably affect amenities of local residential buildings and that the extended hours from 11pm to 1am on a Fridays and Saturdays would cause harm to residents through impact from noise associated with the business.

Whilst the economic benefits provided by the appellant carried some weight, they did not outweigh the objections to the appeal proposal pursuant to the provisions of the SPPS and thus were not determining in this case. The Council’s reason for refusal was sustained, so far as stated, and the proposal was contrary to the provisions of the SPPS. Thus, the Council’s reason for refusal, so far as stated, was sustained and was determining in this appeal. Consequently, the appeal must fail.

3. The following appeal was dismissed on 29 May 2025:

PAC Ref	2024/AO114
Council Ref	LA06/2023/2149/O
Appellant	Alexis Clarke
Subject of Appeal	2 No. in-fill dwellings with domestic garages
Location	Lands between 40a and 42 Deer Park Road, Newtownards

The main issues related to whether the development was acceptable in principle in the countryside and would adversely impact on rural character.

The appeal site was located on agricultural lands between Nos. 40a, adjacent to its southern boundary, and 42 Deer Park Road, next to its northern border. The appellant contended that there was a substantial and continuous built-up frontage of three or more buildings consisting of the dwelling at No 40a, the dwelling and associated garage at No. 42 and the dwelling and associated/outbuilding at No. 44 Deer Park Road. There was no disagreement between the parties that the above referenced dwellings had frontage onto the Deer Park Road. However, the Council contended that there was not a substantial and continuous built-up frontage of three or more buildings because the Abbey Road dissected the frontage between Nos. 42 and 44 and the garage within the curtilage of No. 42 had frontage with Abbey Road rather than Deer Park Road.

Policy CTY8 defined a substantial and continuously built-up frontage as including a line of three or more buildings along a road frontage without accompanying development to the rear. Whilst the Commissioner acknowledged that each of the properties outlined above had frontage onto the Deer Park Road, they sided with the Council that there was a definitive discontinuity provided by the public road between the properties at Nos. 42 and 44. As a consequence of the break in the road frontage development, provided by the Abbey Road, those buildings to the north of Abbey Road, from No. 44 Deer Park Road, were not qualifying buildings in line with

the policy. Consequently, for the reasons outlined above, there was a break in the frontage of the development along the Deer Park Road.

No. 42 Deer Park Road, and its associated garage, was located at the junction Deer Park Road and Abbacy Road. The frontage of that property was angled so that it fronted onto both roads, with its access taken from the more minor Abbacy Road. The garage, which was set back from the dwelling, was located next to the north-westerly gable wall of the house. In transit, in both directions along the Deer Park Road, due to its position and boundary treatments associated with No. 42, the garage was unseen, only becoming partially visible once one arrived at the junction of the Abbacy and Deer Park Roads. Furthermore, whilst the dwelling at No. 42 had frontage onto the Deer Park Road, given its orientation, the garage faced onto, and its frontage ran along that of the Abbacy Road. Hence, for the above reasons, the garage building was not a qualifying building for the purposes of the policy.

Thus, for the reasons outlined above the appeal site did not lie within a substantially and continuously built-up frontage which included a line of three or more buildings along a road frontage without accompanying development to the rear.

Numbers 42, 44 and 46 were all visually linked and a ribbon of development existed at that location. The appeal proposal would develop the gap between No. 42 and 40a thereby visually linking Nos 46 through to 40a and extending the existing ribbon of development. Thus the appeal proposal would add to a ribbon of development along this section of the Deer Park Road.

The Council advised the Commissioner that the gap between buildings measured some 96m and the appeal site could accommodate three dwellings with garages. The Appellant advised that provision had been made for an agricultural lane, running adjacent to the northern boundary of No. 40a to provide access to the land behind the appeal site. Considering the provision of that laneway, the Council advised that the gap would still measure some 80m and that the average plot width (frontage), considering Nos 40a through to 50 Deer Park Road, measured some 31.8m. Therefore, even allowing for the agricultural lane, the two frontage widths of 40m would not reflect the existing pattern of development.

The Commissioner concurred with the Council that two dwellings with an average frontage of 40m each would appear larger than those plot widths found along that stretch of the Deer Park Road and would not respect the existing development pattern along the frontage in terms of plot size. The Commissioner determined that the proposed site did not represent a small gap as referred to within the policy and accordingly there was no exception to Policy CTY8.

The Commissioner determined that the introduction of two additional dwellings would remove the important visual break in the developed appearance of that section of the Deer Park Road. Subsequently, the proposal would be contrary to Policy CTY8 of PPS21 and the Council's second reason for refusal was sustained.

Given that the Commissioner found that the appeal development would add to a ribbon of development because the two sites would have common frontage with No. 40a and 42 Deer Park Road, and would be visually linked with those properties,

together with Nos. 44 and 46 the Commissioner reasoned that the proposal would lead to a suburban style build-up of development. The Commissioner stated that the proposal did not meet with criteria b) and d) of Policy CTY14. The Council’s third reason for refusal was therefore sustained.

Given the development did not meet with Policy CTY8, the principle of development in the countryside had not been established. No overriding reasons had been presented as to why the development was essential and could not be located in a settlement. Therefore, the proposal was contrary to Policy CTY1 of PPS21. Thus, the Council’s first reason for refusal was sustained.

The appeal proposal was contrary to Policies CTY1, CTY8 and CTY14 of PPS21. Thus, the appeal must fail.

Appeals Lodged

- 1. The following appeal was lodged on 29 May 2025

PAC Ref	2025/A0023
Council Ref	LA06/2024/0438/O
Appellant	Ryan Doherty
Subject of Appeal	Erection of shed for the storage and maintenance of agricultural machinery, yard and relocation of access
Location	Lands between 40a and 42 Deer Park Road, Newtownards

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

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report and attachments.

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

(Having declared an interest in Item 6, Councillor Smart and Alderman McAlpine left the meeting at 7.23 pm)

6. BT GROUP – DECOMMISSIONING/REMOVAL OF TELEPHONE KIOSKS
(Appendices VII & VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity detailing that the purpose of the report was to inform Members on BT Group notification of future decommissioning/removal of telephone kiosks within the Borough.

The Chief Executive and Planning Department were contacted in relation to the planned decommissioning (and in most cases, removal) of 23 public telephone kiosks throughout the Borough and was attached.

The Planning Department was leading on the response to which it should advise that planning consent was not required for the removal of a non-listed telephone box.

However, a telephone kiosk in Main Street, Greyabbey was B2 Listed as being of special architectural or historic interest and therefore a Listed Building Consent application would be required for any alterations to it, including the removal of the telephony inside.

This application would be processed by the Council's Planning Service, with expert input from DfC Historic Environment Division (HED). An informal preliminary discussion with HED suggested that its preference would be for the preservation of the telephone unit (albeit disconnected from the network) as it positively contributed to the understanding of the listed structure.

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

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

Councillor Cathcart referred to many of these kiosks which had been long abandoned and he would support their removal. Asking about community adoption of the telephone boxes it was noted that that was for the older red ones. He asked the Head of Planning to send Members the link so that the information could be circulated within the different communities.

Councillor Harbinson spoke of the modern glass telephone boxes housing defibrillators and Councillor McKee referred to a telephone box in Bangor West which he had been trying to have removed since 2022 so he cautioned Members not to hope that this work would be undertaken soon. Some of those telephone boxes had been long abandoned and took away from the streetscape in many places.

Councillor Wray explained that he had been working with Greyabbey Community Association over preservation of the telephone unit. He asked if there was any flexibility in the terms and the expected timescales. The Head of Planning stated that that would be for BT to explain and it had put out a consultation which would close on 17 August. Planners were taking the lead in that.

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.29 pm.

Unclassified

128

ITEM 8.1**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 July 2025
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	30 June 2025
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	Deputation Request - Portaferry Town Boys Football Club
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Deputation Form

A deputation request has been received from Colm Doran of Portaferry Town Boys Football Club.

The request is in relation to how the Club can work in partnership with the Council and other stakeholders to upgrade the playing surface and continue to provide much needed facilities for the health and wellbeing of the local community.

The request is for the deputation to be heard at the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers this request.

Deputation Request Form

A 'deputation request' refers to a person or group of persons asking to appear in person before the Council or a Council Committee in order to address the Council or Committee (as the case may be) on a particular matter.

The procedure governing deputations is contained within section 12 of the Council's Standing Orders, a copy of which is set out below.

If you wish to make a deputation request, please complete this form and return it to Ards and North Down Borough Council via the following email address: member.services@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk, providing us with a contact email or postal address and contact telephone number when doing so (please do not include your personal contact details on this form – see privacy notice below).

Please note that it will be for the Council to decide whether to accede to your request and, if it does, to determine when and where the deputation will be heard. The Council will draw upon the information you provide in this form in order to reach its decision, therefore you are encouraged to clearly outline the topic of your request and the reason why you wish to raise the matter before the Council or a Committee.

Applicant Details

We apply to Ards and North Down Borough Council to make a deputation and should this application be successful, I/we agree to comply with section 12 of the Council's Standing Orders.

Name of person(s) making the deputation request:	Colm Doran
Date of request:	30/6/25
If making the deputation on behalf of an organisation or a group of individuals, name of the organisation / individuals:	Portaferry Town Boys Football Club
Name of Committee (if known) to which you wish to make your deputation:	Health and Wellbeing?

Please summarise below (continuing onto an additional page if required) the subject matter of your deputation request and the reason why you wish to raise the matter before the Council or a Committee.

Portaferry Town Boys Football Club was established in 1995.

Since 2004, the club has had a lease from Ards and North Down Council (Ards Council at the time) for the land at High Street Portaferry, adjacent to the Integrated Primary School. The club applied for and was successful in securing grant funding to upgrade the facility to 3g Astroturf with floodlighting and perimeter fencing which is available to over 120 young boys and girls on the Club teams. The facility is also available for hire by other sports clubs, community groups and individuals.

The surface has an expected lifespan of 15 years and now needs to be replaced. The lease which was originally for 21 years is also up for renewal and the Council has provided a draft for consideration by the Club.

We would like to make a representation n how the Club can work in partnership with the Council and other stakeholders to upgrade the surface and continue to provide much needed facilities for the health and wellbeing of the local community.

Extract from Ards and North Down Borough Council's Standing Orders, Version 12, January 2025

12. Deputations

(1) Deputations, from any source, shall only be admitted to address the Council provided the Chief Executive has received seven working days notice of the intended deputation and a statement of its objective, and subject to the agreement of the Council.

(2) In the case of an emergency, deputations, from any source, shall only be admitted to address the Council provided the Chief Executive has received one working day's notice of the intended deputation and a statement of its objective, and subject to the agreement of the Mayor.

(3) The deputation shall be confined to the presentation of a statement, or copy of resolutions, and shall not make more than two short addresses by any two members of the deputation. The totality of the address shall not exceed 10 minutes followed by a maximum 15 minutes question and answer session.

(4) Deputations should not be repetitive and, where possible, issues of a similar or linked nature should be contained in one deputation. Where a deputation has made a presentation to the Council, the Council will decline to accept another deputation on the same issue from the same individual or group for a period of six months.

(5) No further discussion or proposals beyond questions shall take place at a Council or Committee meeting until after the deputation has withdrawn (members of the deputation will remain subject to Standing Order 8). Any subsequent proposal made should be limited to a request for officers to bring back a report on the matters raised by the deputation.

Privacy notice – how we will use information about you

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a Data Processor under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for the personal data it gathers when receiving and administering deputation requests.

You are providing your personal data to the Council whose lawful basis for processing it falls within the following three categories:

- a) **Consent** - you consent to the information being processed for the specific purpose of the Council considering your deputation request;
- b) **Public task** - the processing is necessary in order for the Council to consider your request in line with its Standing Orders which were established under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014; and
- c) **Legitimate interests** - the processing is necessary for your legitimate interests (or the legitimate interests of a third party) in order that Council may consider your deputation request.

The personal data you provide when making a deputation request may be shared internally within the Council with staff who are involved in decision making and administration in respect of Council and Committee meetings. This includes both the data contained within this form and any other data, such as an email address or other contact details, we may gather when you send the form to us.

The information you provide on this form only will be provided as a report to Council and potentially thereafter as a report to a Committee (depending on whether Council accedes to your request). Any such report will not usually be heard 'in confidence' and therefore the report will also be published on the Council website prior to the meeting. Members of the press and public may attend the Council (and Committee) meeting at which the report is discussed. An audio recording and written minute will be made of the meeting and both will be published on the website.

Your personal data will not be shared or disclosed to any other organisation without your consent, unless the law permits or places an obligation on the Council to do so.

Personal data is held and stored by the Council in a safe and secure manner and in compliance with Data Protection legislation and in line with the Council's Records Retention and Disposal Schedule.

If you have any queries regarding the processing of your personal data, please contact:

Data Protection Officer
Ards and North Down Borough Council
City Hall, The Castle
Bangor
BT20 4BT
Email: dataprotection@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
Tel: 0300 013 3333

Unclassified

133

ITEM 9.1**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 July 2025
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	02 July 2025
File Reference	CX249
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Invitation to the Commemoration of the 110 th Anniversary of the 10 th (Irish) Division's actions on the Gallipoli Peninsula
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Letter to the Chief Executive

Background

On 10 June 2025, the Chief Executive received a letter from the Dalaradia Cultural and Historical Society outlining that this August marks the 110th anniversary of the landing of the 10th (Irish) Division at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula during the First World War. A copy of the letter is enclosed at Appendix 1. They have reached out to all Councils in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to invite them to be represented on a special commemorative Tour to Gallipoli and participate in an Act of Remembrance. The tour will include visiting major battle sites and war cemeteries on the peninsula as well as experience the history and culture of Turkey.

The anticipated dates for the trip are 13 – 18 October 2025 with flights departing and returning to Dublin. As outlined in the letter, they are unable to finalise an itinerary or price until numbers are confirmed but they estimate the cost to be in the region of £1,650 which is inclusive of travel, hotel accommodation in twin rooms and most

Not Applicable

134

meals. They have requested that responses are received by 31 July, including a deposit of £500 per person nominated.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council consider the request.



Dalaradia Cultural and Historical Society @ The Whitehouse , 28-34 Whitehouse Park, BT37 9SQ

whitehouse21@gmail.com 02890 801690

10 June, 2025

The Chief Executive
Each County Council
Northern Ireland
Southern Ireland

Dear Sir/Madam,

Commemoration of the 110th Anniversary of the 10th (Irish) Division's actions on the Gallipoli Peninsula

This August marks the 110th anniversary of the landing of the 10th (Irish) Division at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula during the First World War. The Division was the first volunteer Division to be raised throughout Ireland from both communities and the first to see action. The Division served only a few weeks on the peninsula but suffered some 3,500 casualties.

We would like to commemorate this important common Anniversary by inviting each Council in Ireland and Northern Ireland to be represented on a special commemorative Tour to Gallipoli and participate in an Act of Remembrance. The Tour will visit the major battle sites and war cemeteries on the peninsula and experience the history and culture of Turkey.

We are anticipating the Tour being organised for 13 – 18 October, 2025 with flights departing and returning to Dublin. We cannot finalise an itinerary and price until we get a feel for final numbers but we estimate the cost to be in the region of £ 1,650 (E 1,800) to include all travel, hotel accommodation in twin rooms, and most meals.

We would cordially invite your Council to be represented on this unique pilgrimage to honour those from our communities who volunteered for service and to assist the process of reconciliation on our island. It would greatly assist our planning if you could respond by 31 July, 2025 with a deposit of £ 500 or E 500 per person nominated.

Yours faithfully,

Robert Williamson
Chair



Mayor's Office
Councillor Oliver McMullan
Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Susie McCullough, Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council
via Email: frances.thompson@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

9 July 2025

Dear Chief Executive,

At its Council Meeting held Thursday 26th June 2025, Council considered a Notice of Motion and adopted the undernoted resolution:

This Council notes the impact of second homes and short-term holiday rentals on the housing stock supply for residents of the Borough and the character of many local communities, which are changing beyond recognition; notes with concern that there is no formal audit of such properties throughout the Borough and resolves to complete such an audit to inform the development of an agreed lobbying plan for Council in discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive.

Council believes that any plan should recognise the need to address regulatory gaps in managing short-term holiday accommodation and consider the impact of second homes and short-term holiday rentals as part of the implementation of the Housing Supply Strategy.

Once developed and adopted, an update on the matter will be a standing item on the agenda of the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee. Additionally, the Mayor and Chief Executive will write to all other councils in Northern Ireland to encourage them to engage in similar lobbying efforts.

I would appreciate your urgent attention to this request.

Mayor's Office, Cloonavin, 66 Portstewart Road, Coleraine, BT52 1EY
Telephone: 028 7034 7010 ~ Email: mayorsoffice@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk

Yours faithfully,

137



Councillor Oliver McMullan
Mayor



David Jackson
Chief Executive



Our ref: TJ C260/25

Susie.mccullough@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Dear Chief Executive

At a meeting of Derry City and Strabane District Council held on 25 June 2025, the following proposal was passed:

That Members recognise that data centres are major consumers of electricity that currently threaten Ireland's energy security as well as this Council's commitment to play its part in meeting our obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as set out in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement, our Local Development Plan 2032 and the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Given Ireland operates a single electricity market, this Council notes with concern the significant demand that data centres in the 26 counties now impose on the national grid, which is expected to rise dramatically over the next five years. Moreover, this Council is concerned that the absence of any overarching government policy or guidance on planning for data centres in the Six Counties is not conducive to monitoring and managing energy security and greenhouse gas emissions at a strategic level.

Therefore, in the national interests of energy security and climate change, this Council will write to the Ministers for Infrastructure and the Economy calling for their Departments to: Urgently develop a co-ordinated strategic policy on how planning applications for data centres across all council areas are to be managed and monitored for; their impacts on climate change; their demands on the national grid; including whether proposals that are large scale emitters should be considered as regionally significant developments.

Further, this Council will write to other local authorities calling on them to support our call for a central government policy and guidance on applications for data centres.

Derry

C/o Council Offices
98 Strand Road
Derry
BT48 7NN

Strabane

C/o Council Offices
47 Derry Road
Strabane
BT82 8DY

John Kelpie MEng., CEng., MStructE., MIEI

Chief Executive
Derry City and Strabane District Council

+44 (0) 2871 253 253
chiefexecutive@derrystrabane.com
www.derrystrabane.com

f Derry City & Strabane District Council
t @dcsdcouncil

I would appreciate your consideration in this important matter and would be grateful for a response at your earliest opportunity.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Kelpie', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

John Kelpie
Chief Executive
Derry City and Strabane District Council

Unclassified

142

ITEM 11.1.

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	31 July 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community and Culture
Date of Report	11 July 2025
File Reference	ASB - PCSP
Legislation	The Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Consultation - Drinking in Public Bye-Laws and Powers
Attachments	None

Background

In April 2018, the Department of Justice (DoJ) carried out a public consultation to review the criminal legislation framework to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Following that consultation a multi-agency, cross-governmental ASB Delivery Group was formed to take forward the outworking's of the consultation. The group was tasked to consider five powers that were consulted upon, as well as four additional powers that were raised as a result of the 2018 consultation.

The ASB Delivery Group considered nine legislative powers as follows:

- Criminal Behaviour Orders (post-conviction order to stop individuals engaging in ASB by placing prohibitions and requirements on them);
- Public Space Protection Orders (order imposing conditions on use of designated areas);
- Closure Powers (power to close premises that are being used, or likely to be used, to commit nuisance or disorder);

Not Applicable

143

- On-Street Drinking (commencement of sections 68 to 72 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008);
- Powers in section 54 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 to address noise nuisance through seizure of sound producing devices;
- Civil Injunctions (power to stop individuals engaging in ASB by placing prohibitions and requirements on them);
- Absolute Grounds for Possession (power for possession of secure and assured tenancies where ASB / criminality has been proven by another court);
- Dispersal Powers (power to direct a person who is in a public place to leave the locality and not return for a specified period); and
- ASB Case Review /Community Trigger (power for victims of ASB to request a review of actions taken to address ASB).

Conclusions of the ASB Legislative Review Delivery Group

The ASB Delivery Group undertook a detailed scoping exercise to identify, where possible, an evidence base that would indicate how successful some of the proposed legislative measures were in addressing ASB in other jurisdictions. It was also necessary to compare the powers under consideration with those already in place in Northern Ireland to ascertain whether their introduction would bring any tangible benefit.

Not all of the powers were deemed suitable for progression and the Delivery Group concluded that legislative amendments could be progressed for four of the nine powers. Therefore, together with the Department for Communities (DfC), DoJ sought views on those four pieces of legislation, policy responsibility for which falls across both departments, with a view to ensuring relevant authorities have effective and proportionate powers to help address ASB and its effects with our communities. The proposals relate to:

- Amendments to the Anti-Social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 (amendments to ASBOs) - DoJ
- Amendments to the Criminal Justice (NI) Order (amendments to on-street drinking legislation) – DoJ / DfC
- Amendments to Housing (NI) Order 2003 (amendments to ASB Injunctions for housing providers) – DfC
- Amendment to the Housing (NI) Order 1983 (introduction of Absolute Grounds for Possession of secure tenancies) – DfC

The purpose of the consultation was to seek the views of stakeholders on these proposed amendments to ensure that powers available to relevant authorities (Councils, Police and Social Housing providers) were proportionate, effective and would have an appropriate impact on addressing ASB and its effects within our communities.

Letter dated 6th June 2025 has been received from DfC requesting responses by 29th August 2025 in relation to suggested amendments to Articles 68-72 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008.

Not Applicable

144

The letter states that following the consultation a response document was published by DoJ on 4th April 2025 outlining a summary of views shared by respondents regarding drinking in public and the current legislation.

The responses to the consultation clearly indicated that the current legislative framework to tackle drinking-in-public and associated ASB needs to be updated to ensure it is fit for purpose, with an overwhelming majority of respondents agreeing that an explicit power to seize and dispose of alcohol should be available in certain circumstances.

Four councils submitted formal responses to the joint consultation, as did AND PCSP. These responses were dominated by the following positions:

- there is a need for legislative change to streamline the current system, potentially by commencing the powers in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 ('the 2008 Order');
- additional powers to seize and dispose of alcoholic drinks would be beneficial;
- areas where drinking-in-public is prohibited should be confined to an area designated by the council;
- that police officers should have sole responsibility for enforcement of the rules on drinking in public.

In light of the responses to the consultation, and after undertaking further engagement with DoJ colleagues, DfC is proposing that Articles 68-72 of the 2008 Order should be commenced with the following amendments:

- To provide a specific power to police officers allowing the **seizure** and disposal of open and closed containers of alcoholic drinks in designated areas and in certain public order situations. It is **not** proposed that council officers would be provided with this power.
- To extend the powers conferred on police officers requiring individuals to stop drinking alcohol in a designated area, and **surrender** any alcoholic drinks in their possession, to council officers. Anyone refusing will be committing an offence and may be issued with an FPN. However, it should be noted that this will be a power which councils **may** use, and each council district will be provided with the option to "opt in".

Allowing councils to "opt-in" to using this power in the future is intended to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed legislative change. Council may decide that it requires this power at some point in the future.

In the event the proposals for legislative reform are approved, DoJ will be responsible for bringing forward primary legislation amending the 2008 Order.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council welcomes the proposed amendments to Articles 68 – 72 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 and agrees to consider the option to opt in once legislative reform has been approved.

Unclassified

145

ITEM 11.2.

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 July 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Corporate Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Adminstration
Date of Report	01 July 2025
File Reference	
Legislation	Section 75 The Northern Ireland Act 1998; Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2005
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 on Audit of Inequalities and the DoF draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan (2025 to 2030)
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Consultation on an Audit of Inequalities and associated Action Plans Appendix 2 – Draft Consultation reposonse on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan (2025 to 2030)

The Department of Finance is seeking feedback on its Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan for the period of 2025 to 2030. This consultation (Appendix 1) is essential for the Department to meet its statutory duties under Section 75(1) and 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which require them to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The Council has been asked to provide a response in its capacity as a consultee.

The Council's draft response to this consultation is provided in Appendix 2.

Not Applicable

146

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council agrees the draft consultation response as detailed in Appendix 2.

June 2025

 Finance

147

Consultation on an 'Audit of Inequalities' and associated 'Action Plans'

(closing date for receipt of responses
is 25 August 2025)

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Department of Finance (the 'Department') aims to help the Northern Ireland Executive secure the most appropriate and effective use of resources and services for the benefit of the community. In pursuing this aim, the key objective of the Department is to deliver quality, cost effective and efficient public services and administration in the Department's areas of executive responsibility.
- 1.2. The Department provides the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and other public bodies with money, staff, professional services and business support systems, helping them to deliver excellent, value for money public services. We do this by:
 - **Managing public money** – effectively allocating resources to where they are most needed to support the delivery of public services;
 - **Supporting our people** – recruiting, developing and supporting the best people for the NICS and providing opportunities for individuals to reach their full potential;
 - **Transforming and innovating** – improving effectiveness across the public sector by transforming the way we work;
 - **Providing evidence and insights** – supporting evidence-based policy and informing public debate, through high quality, trusted, meaningful data, evidence and research; and
 - **Delivering public services** – collecting rates revenue to provide funding towards public services such as health, education and infrastructure, as well as council services.
- 1.3. In undertaking these actions, the Department has statutory duties arising from Section 75(1) and 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which are to have:
 - due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and
 - regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
- 1.4. The Equality Commission (the 'Commission') requires each Public Authority to produce an Equality Scheme (the 'scheme') setting out how they will meet these statutory duties, which should be approved by the Commission. The Department's current scheme is available on our website at [Department of Finance Equality Scheme](#). It describes the arrangements the Department has established and which it is obliged to apply and follow as a means of fulfilling its statutory duties.

- 1.5 The scheme refers to the work of individual business areas within the Department, in support of our statutory duties, being found in an audit of inequalities ('audit').

2. EXISTING s75 ACTION PLAN

- 2.1 The existing s75 Action Plan, can be accessed on our website at [Department of Finance Equality Scheme](#).
- 2.2 This s75 Action Plan covered the period 2018-2023 (extended to 2024) and was developed following an audit of inequalities undertaken within DoF. Key policy areas addressed in the Action Plan included:
 - Human Resource Management – for example, s75 data gaps and under-representation of groups within the NICS; and
 - Services to the Citizen – for example, access to digital services and legislative differentiation due to marital status/ gender.
- 2.3 Progress against these actions were reported to the Commission in the Department's annual progress reports; these are available on our website at [Annual Report to the Equality Commission](#).

3. 2024 AUDIT OF INEQUALITIES

- 3.1. The Department has since undertaken a further audit of inequalities in 2024, analysing the work of the Department to determine which of its business areas impact upon equality and good relations, and to scrutinise those areas where improvement could be made. This analysis included a review of our existing s75 Action Plan, and our Disability Action Plan¹ ('action plans'), considering progress made and outstanding action.
- 3.2. In addition, as the Department has responsibility for delivering the Civil Service's equality, diversity and inclusion agenda as an employer, an assessment of the profile of the Civil Service workforce across the Section 75 groups (where available) was undertaken, taking into consideration the latest (i) [Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2023 report](#) and (ii) statutory monitoring reports ([Article 55 and gender reviews](#)). Feedback from external benchmarking exercises such as the Diversity Mark; Stonewall Workplace Equality Index; Onus Workplace Charter and

¹ Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act places a duty on public authorities to prepare a plan outlining how they propose to have due regards to the need to: i. promote positive attitudes towards disabled people, and ii. encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive Accreditation, as well as feedback from staff networks, has assisted in identifying areas of inequalities to address to help fulfil the Civil Service's commitment of being a diverse and inclusive employer.

3.3. As noted above, throughout the period of the existing plans (2018-2024), significant progress has been made by the Department through delivery

of these action plans, progress which has been reported to the Commission on an annual basis. The following section provides an overview of the key themes emerging from our 2024 audit, which have informed our new s75 Action Plan and Disability Action Plan (attached at **Annex A** and **Annex B**).

Findings of audit

NICSHR and People and Organisational Development

3.4. The function of the Department that has the most potential to see s75 impact is in servicing the NICS as an employer. Since the last audit, changes were made to the human resources service delivery model. A further reorganisation in 2022 led to the formation of two separate and specialist HR and organisational development functional areas:

- **NICSHR** – the Civil Service's HR shared services function provides operational advice and service to government departments including employee relations, Occupational Health Service and Wellbeing and Learning; Resourcing, Civil Service Pensions and HR Business partnering; and
- **People and Organisational Development** - responsible for all Civil Service HR, Pay and Industrial Relations policy and is responsible for the new five-year Civil Service People Strategy (2025-2030) and a range of associated strategic HR interventions/projects. People and Organisational Development delivery includes significant activity relating to HR policy; workforce analytics and statistics; pay; industrial relations; talent management; and diversity and inclusion.

3.5. Since the last audit, the Department has worked with these two functional areas to deliver key interventions and actions to strengthen the NICS' commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion:

- **Diversification of the NICS workforce** - a concerted effort has been made since the last audit to diversify the NICS workforce through:

- delivery of a range of initiatives to expand the NICS resourcing mix - new entry routes to the Service through apprenticeship schemes; a Graduate Management Programme and a Skills Academy; increased student placement offerings and external recruitment; and removal of qualifications for general service entry grades;
 - delivery of a programme of outreach to under-represented groups including disabled people; young people; LGBTQ+ and minority ethnic communities, as well as increased engagement with the education sector;
 - expansion of advertising channels, positive action advertising and targeted advertising to help attract the widest applicant pool;
 - launch of a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for disabled applicants; ○ development of a Ring-Fencing Policy for successful disabled applicants; and
 - facilitation of work experience opportunities.
- **Increased visibility and understanding of diversity & inclusion** – attendance at a comprehensive series of events (including PRIDE, Belfast Mela, the Harkin International Summit), alongside communications and initiatives to raise awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion across the NICS.
 - **Policy and Peer Support** - existing policies have been updated to ensure they use inclusive language; a range of new policies and provisions have been introduced including a Menopause Policy; Domestic and Sexual Abuse Policy; enhanced paid special leave arrangements for victims of domestic and sexual abuse; for those who experience pregnancy loss through miscarriage (which extends beyond the statutory provision of parental bereavement leave for a baby stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy); as well as two weeks' paid paternity pay; NICS Trans Equality Policy and Transitioning at Work Guide; Guide for Allies; as well as development of resources to support an inclusive workplace culture including an LGBTQ+ Role Models Guide; Neurodiversity Line Managers' Toolkit; Guide for Supporting Carers and an Inclusive Language Guide. In recognition of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the organisation established a new Disability Staff Network and Race and Ethnicity Network which joined the existing LGBTQ+ Network and Women's Network. More recently a Cancer Support Network and Student Network have been established.
 - As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the organisation also adapted to new ways of working and implemented a new Hybrid Working Policy accompanied by new Connect2 regional hubs which provide flexible

working options for colleagues, helping reduce their travel time and supporting better work life balance.

- **External benchmarking** - the NICS continues to benchmark its employment practices via independent external assessments including the Diversity Mark for gender initiatives; the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index in respect of LGBTQ+ initiatives; the Onus Workplace Charter regarding domestic and sexual abuse support; and
Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive accreditation. In recognition of the interventions delivered to support inclusive workplaces, the NICS has achieved a number of accolades including Stonewall's Silver Employer Award, the Platinum Onus Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence and the Silver Diversity Mark. The NICS was also awarded the 2022 CIPD NI award for best Diversity and Inclusion initiative for the work undertaken to provide domestic and sexual abuse support. In 2023, the NICS was awarded the CIPD Award for Best Resourcing and Talent Management Strategy in recognition of the collaboration between DoF, DfE and TEO to develop and deliver the NICS Skills Academy.
- With regard to **learning and development**, NICS HR has undertaken a number of steps to address its training materials/ delivery methodologies being seen to be unsuitable for those staff with a disability and/ or with dependents. Some of those steps have been:
 - to ask staff on their enrolment for training to provide details of any specific needs (disability requirements/ adjustments). As a consequence, course materials/ methodologies and venues are adapted to ensure needs are met.
 - regional training and virtual learning options/ events exist, where possible. All L&D e-Learning products and virtual events can be adapted to be compatible with screen reading software, if required, for staff with visual or hearing impairments.
 - start times are normally 9.30 to accommodate staff and many courses are also scheduled on different weekdays to accommodate alternative working patterns. Again, virtual events are available.
 - the Civil Service has a policy in place to cater for childcare provision.

3.6 Since the last audit there have been positive changes in the NICS workforce composition, specifically, in areas identified in the previous audit of inequalities for example,

- the number of NICS staff from a minority ethnic background has increased from 0.3% in 2017 to 0.5% in 2023;
- female representation at senior levels has risen from 37.6% in 2017 to 42.8% in 2023;
- female representation in NICS apprentices increased as a result of the introduction of the new Procurement and Operational Delivery apprenticeship schemes in 2021 (17% increase in female representation at 1 April 2022); and
- the community background representation in certain General Service grades and Specialist and Technical groups has improved, for example the proportion of Roman Catholics at Grade 5+ level has increased from 39% in 2017 to 41.3% in 2023.

3.7 It should be noted the Covid-19 pandemic impacted recruitment activity which limited potential further changes in workforce composition – for example in the calendar year 2019 there were 839 appointments made, whereas there were 135 made in 2020. The NICS also has a high proportion of Agency Workers (14.5% at March 2024).

3.8 There remain areas of inequalities that continue to impact upon the work of the Department for the **Civil Service as an employer**. These include:

- An improved reasonable adjustment process to better support disabled applicants and colleagues and to meet the duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995);
- Under-representation of males and females in certain General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups;
- Community background imbalances in certain General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups;
- The Civil Service has an older age profile than the comparator economically active population aged 16-64 years;
- The proportion of Civil Service staff who have declared a disability is lower than the economically active population; and
- The equality composition overall of the Civil Service workforce could be more diverse.

The Department has set goals and timetables to address the existing inequalities listed above, available in sections 3.24 and 4.23 of the [NICS 2019 Workforce Review](#). The next review is anticipated to be published in Spring 2025 subject to Ministerial approval.

3.9 The audit has also identified **continued gaps in s75 data**, particularly with regard to:

- Disability data (at 1 January 2024 data was missing for 44.5% of NICS staff); and
- Sexual orientation data (at 1 January 2024 data was missing for 66.4% of NICS staff).

To help address these gaps, a communications campaign was launched in November 2023 to increase declaration rates of equality data to help provide an evidence base to monitor progress and inform future actions. This campaign helped reduce the level of missing data from January 2023 to January 2024, with a reduction of 2% for disability data and 7% for sexual orientation data. Further action however is required.

3.10 NICSHR is responsible for policy areas such as civil service pensions and learning and development. The audit found that, **in respect of pensions**, NICSHR had introduced legislation to remedy discrimination caused by transitional protections introduced as part of Pension Reforms. Further areas of inequality identified relate to issues of:

- male survivors of opposite sex marriages & civil partnerships being treated less favorably than survivors in same sex marriages & civil partnerships, and
- same-sex partners being excluded from spousal benefits paid before December 2025.

Legislation will be introduced in later in 2025 to address these issues, however, in the interim, NICSHR apply the policy intent.

3.11 NICSHR is addressing the over 40% of working days lost due to mental health related absence in a number of ways, including but not limited to the recent launch of a Health and Wellbeing strategy and Action Plan, with a focus on what is impacting the mental health of our staff. NICSHR has recently developed Management Information dashboards, to identify areas with higher levels of absence related to mental health much earlier and allowing NICSHR to be more proactive in implementing appropriate support interventions. NICSHR has also initiated a cross-departmental Mental Health Forum, to share learning and best practices across the NICS and to identify evidence-based effective interventions.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

- 3.12 Action had been taken to address the low level of data available to its statisticians in the areas of sexual orientation and political opinion. This work included engagement with various section 75 groups in planning for, and running, the 2021 Census.
- 3.13 NISRA is working with the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to ensure that (where they exist) cross-government harmonised standards and guidance for s75 variables are reviewed, refined and updated to reflect the needs of NI users. These are promoted as the default definitions, question and output categories in government surveys and increase the usefulness of data collected across different surveys (in the UK and NI) and in different regions by improving comparability.
- 3.14 NISRA statisticians, in conjunction with policy colleagues, have developed [Guidance on the collection and reporting of section 75 categories](#) which includes recommended questions for monitoring and reporting on s75 groups. This will further improve coherence, comparability and suitability across NI data sources.
- 3.15 Previous surveys of all NISRA users indicated provision of an excellent service to Government, Academia, business and the general public, and maintenance of high customer satisfaction and return customers from all s75 groups. Notwithstanding this indication, NISRA plan to continue to raise awareness of NISRA, increase trust in, and the value placed on, its statistical/ research products by all sections of the NI population.

Finance Division

- 3.16 Since the last audit, Finance Division has engaged with the Equality Commission to ensure its development of an annual budget for the Department of Finance is consistent with our Equality Scheme commitments. In doing so, more informed and better budgeting decisions should be made.

Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services

- 3.17 Although improvements have been reached due to actions taken after our last audit, access to government services remains an area of inequality, particularly with regard to those within the 'Age' and 'Persons with a disability' s75 groups. The actions planned are:

- Digital Inclusion Programme activities, including Safer Internet Day, Get Online Week, Positive Ageing Programme and similar initiatives with organisations to encourage digital participation. The Go ON NI programme highlights the benefits of being online, and brings together all the initiatives, places and tools to help and encourage off-liners to become internet beginners.
- Increased working in partnership with organisations represented on the Digital Assist Steering Group, to deliver bespoke training, awareness and information sessions; continuing working relationships with Age Friendly Network and inroads into other organisations.
- Engagement with organisations representing elderly, socially excluded and people with disabilities organisations on further training/ awareness and review of signage and communications; sharing good practice with other public facing areas of the Department.

Strategic Policy and Reform (SPAR)

3.18 The work of SPAR involves providing economic advice in response to various requests from its stakeholders, including the Finance Minister, HoCS, Permanent Secretary, Senior Management Team, Supply and other Departments. It should be noted that the guidance involved with providing such advice includes recognition of s75 requirements.

Land and Property Services

3.19 Although the audit did not produce evidence of inequality on s75 grounds in LPS's operational delivery, it does continue to work across its functional areas to make things easier for its customers in response to the needs of particular customer groups, for example permitting payment of rates by cheque, providing tailored support, staggered public office opening hours, translation services etc.

3.20 LPS is also committed to further improving its understanding of its customers to help inform design and delivery of its services to meet their needs. Work is underway to develop a new strategic business plan for LPS, which will include business and transformation activities to improve the administration of rates and services to meet the needs of all customers. As part of this, the customer complaints procedures will be reviewed and updated and a Frontline Customer Framework will be developed, with inbuilt consideration given to vulnerable customers. LPS will continue to engage directly with the community through their well-established LPS Outreach team, helping to ensure a clear and consistent pathway for communications.

LPS also have a Corporate Style Guide which details standards to be adhered to by all staff in all written information and communication activities in line with accessibility standards, to ensure it meets s75 commitments.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1 As part of our commitment within the Department's Equality Scheme, we are consulting on these renewed action plans, the purpose of which is to seek your views to inform their finalisation and our compliance with our statutory duties for the benefit of the public in Northern Ireland.

Questions

4.2 To aid your consideration of the action plans and inform your response, the following questions might be helpful:

Question 1 – do the proposed action plans demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties?

- to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations; and
- the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Question 2 – are the proposed actions appropriate to meet that compliance? If not, why and what actions should the Department be taking?

- are there any further actions required, or
- are any of the proposed actions not required?

5. CONSULTATION RESPONSE

5.1 This consultation has been issued by the Department of Finance and is also available on our website at [Department of Finance Consultations](#).

5.2 The Department looks forward to receiving your comments and views. Please send them to equality@finance-ni.gov.uk.

We ask you to exercise care and refrain from the inclusion of any potentially defamatory material as we may publish responses on the Department's website. Should we do so, we will not publish the names or

contact details of respondents but will include the names of organisations responding.

Your opinions are valuable to us. Thank you for taking the time to read this document and respond.

- 5.3 If you require a hard copy of this consultation document or have any other enquiries, please e-mail your request to equality@finance-ni.gov.uk or you can write to us at:

Central Support Team
Department of Finance
2nd Floor Craigantlet Buildings
Stormont Estate
Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3SX

The Department will consider all the responses to this consultation received on or before the closing date, **Monday 25 August 2025**. ***Submissions made after this date cannot be considered.***

6. NEXT STEPS IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 6.1 We will consider the responses received to this consultation and provide the Minister with a summary of responses, seeking his agreement of a consultation response document and action plans for delivery. This consultation response will be published on the Department's website.
- 6.2 We will also provide a copy of the consultation response document to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Finance Committee and directly to our equality consultees.
- 6.3 All information received during this consultation will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 If you ask for your response to be regarded as confidential and not to be published within the Department's consultation response document, you will be asked to explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential.
- 7.2 Notwithstanding the above, information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, will be published or disclosed in

accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection ACT 2018 (DPA), the EU General Data Protection Regulation, and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). If we receive a request for disclosure of confidential information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

- 7.3 The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the law and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties. The Department's privacy notice is available on the [Department of Finance website](#).

Annex A



DRAFT DoF Section 75 Action Plan 2025-30

POLICY AREA: Recruitment, Advertising, Marketing and Outreach

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: To diversify the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) workforce so that it is more reflective of the society it serves.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
------------------	-----------------------------------	-----------	----------	-----------	------------------	---------------------

Under-	Persons of	By Autum 2025, deliver a	People and OD	Ongoing	Encourage	The NICS monitors the
--------	------------	--------------------------	---------------	---------	-----------	-----------------------

[Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)
[Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)

representation of Protestants and Roman Catholics in General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups as identified in the NICS 2019 Workforce Review .	different religious belief	<p>communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity informed by data.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to target underrepresented groups.</p> <p>Review and analyse the community background composition and submit a Fair Employment Return to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on an annual basis.</p> <p>Review workforce composition and employment practices affecting recruitment, promotion etc by community background every 3 years, as required under Article 55 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.</p>	NICSHR		applications from under-represented groups to try and address religious imbalances and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	community background composition of: - its workforce on an annual basis ² ; - the applicant pool in each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis ³ ; - its workforce and applicant flows on a triannual basis (NICS Workforce Review).
--	----------------------------	--	--------	--	--	--

² 3

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

[Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)
[Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)

		<p>Develop an Affirmative Action Plan to address objectives and agreed positive action measures.</p> <p>Engage with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) on an annual basis to review and assess progress.</p>				
Under-representation of males and females in certain General Service grades and Professional and Specialist groups as identified in the NICS 2019 Workforce Review .	Men and women	<p>By Autum 2025 deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity informed by data.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels as well as Positive Action Advertising to target underrepresented groups.</p> <p>Review and analyse the community background composition and submit a Fair Employment Return to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on an annual basis.</p> <p>Review workforce composition and employment practices</p>	People and OD NICS HR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from under-represented groups to try and address gender imbalances and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the gender composition of: - its workforce on an annual basis ³ ; - the applicant pool in each recruitment competition on an annual basis ⁴ ; - its workforce and applicant flows on a triannual basis (NICS

³ [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

⁴ [Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Statistics](#)

						Workforce Review ⁵ .
--	--	--	--	--	--	---------------------------------

⁵ [Article 55 and gender reviews](#)

		<p>affecting recruitment, promotion etc by gender as part of the tri-annual Workforce Review.</p> <p>Develop an Affirmative Action Plan to address objectives and agreed positive action measures.</p> <p>Engage with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) on an annual basis to review and assess progress.</p>				
The NICS has an older age profile than the comparator economically active population aged 16-64 years.	Persons of different age	<p>By Autumn 2025, deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity informed by data including strengthening existing links with the education sector, in particular post primary school children.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to reach a wide an applicant pool as possible.</p> <p>Revise and promote the NICS Work Experience Scheme to increase uptake.</p>	People and OD NICSHR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from under-represented groups to diversify the age composition of the NICS workforce and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	<p>The NICS monitors the age profile of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - its workforce on an annual basis⁶; - the applicant pool composition of each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis⁸.

		<p>Expand the entry routes to the NICS by increasing apprenticeship offerings via the new NICS Apprenticeship Policy; and development of new pre-employability and employability schemes.</p> <p>Deliver annual recruitment competitions for paid 51-week student placements across a range of disciplines – seeking feedback from each cohort of students via a formalised student network to deliver continuous improvement and make the NICS a more attractive employer option for young people.</p>				
--	--	---	--	--	--	--

Under-representation of minority ethnic people in the NICS workforce.	Persons of different racial groups	<p>By Autumn 2025, deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach informed by data.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels as well Positive Action Advertising to reach a wide an applicant pool as possible.</p> <p>Targeted outreach activity to schools and colleges with a high proportion of minority</p>	People and OD NICSHR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from minority ethnic applicants to diversify the equality composition of the workforce and help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the ethnicity composition of: - its workforce on an annual basis ⁹ ; - the applicant pool composition of each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis ¹⁰ .
		<p>ethnic students with a specific focus on young people aged 12-18 years to raise awareness of the NICS work placement scheme and increase uptake.</p> <p>Deliver the commitments as a Race at Work Charter signatory to create an inclusive workplace for minority ethnic communities.</p>				

9 10

Under-representation of disabled people in the NICS workforce.	Persons with a disability	<p>By Autumn 2025 deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity, including strengthening existing links with the disability sector.</p> <p>Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to target underrepresented groups.</p> <p>Targeted outreach activity with the disability sector to raise awareness of the NICS work experience scheme for disabled people and increase uptake.</p>	People and OD NICS HR	Ongoing	Encourage applications from under-represented groups leading to an increase in the representation of disabled people in the NICS applicant pools and workforce so that the NICS will be more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the disability composition of: - its workforce on an annual basis ¹¹ ; - the applicant pool of each recruitment competition using statistics published on an annual basis ¹² .
		Develop and implement a new NICS ring-fencing policy for successful disabled applicants.				

¹¹
¹²

The NICS workforce could be more diverse and reflective of the society it serves as outlined in the latest Equality Statistics for the NICS 2024 report and Article 55 and gender reviews .	All	Design and deliver new NICS Employability Programmes to opportunities to those furthest removed from work with an initial focus on care experienced and disabled people.	People and OD NICS HR	Ongoing	A broader resourcing mix to expand entry routes to NICS employment to help achieve a NICS that is more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	The NICS monitors the equality composition of its workforce on an annual basis ⁷ .
---	-----	--	-----------------------	---------	---	---

⁷ [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

POLICY AREA: Diverse, supportive and inclusive workplaces

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: To provide a supportive and welcoming workplace for all with an evidence base available to monitor progress and inform future actions to ensure the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is an inclusive employer and is reflective of the society it serves.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Data for the NICS workforce is limited in the areas of sexual orientation and disability preventing an accurate understanding of the composition of the NICS workforce and areas where affirmative action measures are required.	Persons of different sexual orientation	Deliver an annual communications campaign to increase declaration rates of sexual orientation and disability data amongst the NICS workforce. Monitor data completion rates on an annual basis to assess improvements in data levels and to inform future actions.	People and OD	Ongoing	Increase declaration rates of equality data to provide an evidence base to inform future positive action measures.	The NICS monitors the sexual orientation composition of its workforce on an annual basis ⁸ ; Census 2021 sexual orientation data will allow an assessment once more internal data is available ⁹ .
Reasonable adjustment process for disabled applicants and colleagues requires improvement.	Persons with a disability	Undertake a comprehensive review of the reasonable adjustment process and deliver improvements through a co-design approach with key stakeholders including colleagues with lived experience which includes development of a new policy, procedure and range of	People and OD NICS HR	Summer 2025	To provide an effective and efficient reasonable adjustment process for users which is compliant with legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995); reflects best	The NICS monitors the disability composition of its workforce on an annual basis ¹⁰ ; Census 2021 disability data will allow an assessment once more internal data is available ¹¹ .

⁸ [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

⁹ [Census 2021 main statistics sexual orientation tables](#)

¹⁰ [Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality Statistics](#)

¹¹ [Census 2021 main statistics sexual orientation tables](#)

		learning resources to improve awareness and understanding across the Service.			practice and supports service delivery / business needs and to better equip line managers with the relevant knowledge and skills in this area.	
Over 40% of working days are lost due to mental health related absence.	Persons with a disability (mental health)	<p>Launch and deliver a Health and Wellbeing strategy and Action Plan, with a focus on what is impacting the mental health of staff.</p> <p>Develop a cross-departmental Mental Health Forum.</p>	NICSHR	Ongoing	<p>To support good mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and promote Mental Health awareness and improve the mental health of our staff.</p> <p>To share learning and best practices across the NICS and to identify evidencebased effective interventions.</p>	Use of Management Information dashboards, to identify areas with higher levels of absence related to mental health.

POLICY AREA: Statistics and research

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: NISRA outputs, from all areas of government and beyond, provide an accurate and reliable base against which government policies and other decision making can be tested in order to determine whether such policies and other decision making is fair and equitable in consideration of all Section 75 groups.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Data limitations may affect the ability to accurately assess equality impact of policies or decisions. This could potentially lead to an inequality given the gaps in robust s75 monitoring data.	All	<p>Engage with various section 75 groups in planning for and running data collections such as the census.</p> <p>Engage with the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to ensure that (where they exist) the cross-government harmonised standards and guidance for s75 variables reflect the needs of NI users. These are promoted as the default definitions, question and output categories in government surveys and increase the usefulness of data collected across different surveys (in the UK and NI) and in different regions by improving comparability. As part of the actions to improve the UK's inclusive data holdings, these standards are</p>	NISRA	Ongoing with Census data collected once every 10 years.	Development and inclusion of relevant s75 questions (and corresponding outputs) in the Census, Social Surveys and Administrative systems (including NIMDM - Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures) for analysis throughout the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and wider.	<p>NISRA Customer Surveys¹² - used to assess user satisfaction with NISRA's services and products, with the aim being to provide a high quality service which is responsive to and meets the needs of Users following proactive engagement.</p> <p>Census benefits realisation will evaluate the usefulness and reach of section 75 outputs from Census 2021.</p>

¹² [NISRA Customer Satisfaction Survey](#)

		being reviewed, refined and updated. NISRA statisticians in conjunction with policy colleagues to maintain the Guidance on the collection and reporting of section 75 categories . This will further improve coherence, comparability and suitability across NI data sources.				
Data limitations may affect the ability to accurately assess equality impact of policies or decisions on minority ethnic groups. This could potentially lead to an inequality given the gaps in robust ethnic equality monitoring data.	Ethnicity	Ethnic Equality Monitoring (EEM) questions to be added as optional pages on Citizen Space platform to enable activity owners and survey designers to include any/all of the five recommended ethnicity questions into their survey, ensuring they align with best practice EEM questions.	Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services	2025/26	Increase awareness of EEM to improve ethnicity data collection and provide a reliable evidence base to inform policy and decision-making.	1. Number of surveys/consultations incorporating Ethnic Equality Monitoring (EEM) questions. 2. Survey response rates on EEM questions.

POLICY AREA: NISRA

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: To manage production and dissemination of official statistics and social research on NI in keeping with the Code of Practice for Statistics. The Code of Practice exists to provide equity in terms of access to statistical outputs and to maintain public confidence in official statistics in terms of trustworthiness, quality & value.

Issue to address	S75 categories	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress

	involved/ affected					
Potential for inequality in terms of access to statistical outputs.	All	Analyse module responses (on awareness of NISRA, trust in NISRA statistics and importance of NISRA statistics) by other s75 variables available in the overarching Continuous Household Survey (CHS) survey data to identify any inequalities. If inequalities are identified, consider how these can be addressed through NISRA's dissemination strategy and/ or ongoing user engagement, and continue to monitor as part of the analysis of future runs of the Public Awareness of and Trust in Official Statistics survey.	NISRA	Annually	Raise awareness of NISRA, increase trust in and the value placed on NISRA statistical/ research products by all sections of the NI population.	Annual Public Awareness of and Trust in Official Statistics survey ¹³ analyses public trust in NISRA statistics, and public value placed on NISRA statistics.

POLICY AREA: Financial Planning

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Coordination and monitoring of the Department’s budget

¹³ [Public Awareness of and Trust \(Confidence\) in Official Statistics \(PCOS\)](#)

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Potential equality impacts arising from changes in budgetary allocation to Departmental business areas.	Staff members and all groups linked to provision of external services – recruitment, LPS, IT, NISRA	Ensure processes are in place to identify potential equality impacts arising from budgetary allocations to Departmental business areas.	Finance Division with input from business areas	Annually for budget exercise and reviewed on an ongoing basis if any significant changes to budget in year.	Effective assessment of potential equality impacts arising.	Monitoring feedback from Equality commission/ other stakeholders on quality of information included in screening/ impact assessment.

POLICY AREA: Services to the Citizen

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Deliver high quality, efficient and effective services to the citizen, NICS departments and the wider public sector.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress

Inequitable access to online Government Services.	Age; Persons with a disability.	<p>Digital Inclusion Programme activities, including Safer Internet Day, Get Online Week, Positive Ageing Programme and similar initiatives with organisations to encourage digital participation.</p> <p>Digital Inclusion Programme activities are available for those with disabilities and their carers, and are developed in conjunction with disability organisations.</p> <p>As Government Services modernise and move online as digital first, the Go ON NI¹⁴ programme offers the upskilling required for citizens to effectively use these services. This is carried out in liaison with the Libraries NI Network, SCNI and Business in the Community (BITC) and including the Digital Assist</p>	Digital Security and Finance Shared Services (DSF)	By 31st March each year.	<p>Delivery of annual training and upskilling reached through all Go ON NI Programmes.</p> <p>Year on year increase in internet usage for those aged 50-64 and 65+.</p> <p>Encourage people with disabilities to make use of more online services.</p>	<p>Number of activities and evaluation results.</p> <p>Monitoring year on year increase in internet usage.</p>
		Steering Group (DASG) partners.				

¹⁴ [nidirect Go ON NI](#)

Inequitable access to Government Services.	Age; Persons with a disability.	Increased working relationships and working in partnership with organisations represented on the DASG, to deliver bespoke training, awareness and information sessions.	Digital Security and Finance Shared Services (DSF)	By 31st March each year.	Quarterly DASG meetings. Continuing working relationships with Age Friendly Network and inroads into other organisations.	Review of year on year progress and achievements.
Inequitable access to Government Services.	Age; Persons with a disability.	Engage with elderly, socially excluded and people with disabilities organisations on further training/ awareness and review signage and communications. Share good practice with other public facing areas of the department.	Digital Security and Finance Shared Services (DSF)	By 31st March each year.	People with a learning difficulty, Autism or a communication barrier supported in accessing government services.	Analyse feedback gathered through continual engagement with stakeholders.

POLICY AREA: NICS Pension Provision (employer)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: To ensure administration of the NICS Pension Schemes is achieved, maintaining conformity with both generic and general pensions legislation by amending scheme rules to reflect government policies.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
------------------	-----------------------------------	-----------	----------	-----------	------------------	---------------------

<p>McCloud ruling deemed transitional protections introduced as part of Pension Reforms was unlawful.</p> <p>Goodwin ruling (male survivors of opposite sex marriages & civil partnerships are treated less favourably than survivors in same sex marriages & civil partnerships – provision must be made to remove the discrimination) & Walker rulings (schemes must provide same-sex partners and same sex spouses with the same survivor benefits as opposite sex married couples to</p>	All	Appropriate legislation in place to address any discrimination.	Pensions Division	All 'in scope' members must have received a Remedy Service Statement by 31 March 2025 or the primary legislation governing the remedy provides some mitigating scope to modify remedy deadlines for delivery of remedy statements in the event this is required and justified by the Department.	Legislation in place to address any potential inequality and parity with GB Civil Service maintained.	Ongoing monitoring to ensure inequalities are removed.
<p>remove discrimination).</p>				Legislation due to be laid later in 2025, in the interim the policy		

				intent is applied.		
--	--	--	--	--------------------	--	--

POLICY AREA: Land & Property Services (LPS)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Fully understand the needs of customers and be adaptive to changing customer needs.

Issue to address	S75 categories involved/ affected	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale	Intended outcome	Monitoring progress
Potential for some s75 groups to not fully avail of relief/support measures due to lack of s75 data held on rating system.	All	<p>Collect data on the customer experience (including s75 data) and gain fuller understanding of customer needs.</p> <p>Respond to customer feedback and be adaptive to changing customer needs.</p>	LPS	Annually	<p>LPS aims to ensure the services they provide support all their customers in an increasingly digital environment.</p> <p>They want to understand customer needs and experience, which will inform service design and delivery.</p> <p>In terms of policy development and evaluation, they aim to better understand which s75 groups are impacted so that due regard can be given to s75 matters when conducting screening or impact assessments where required under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</p>	<p>Consideration will be given to how the customer's experience can be improved.</p> <p>LPS do this through the Nova Programme and BAU.</p> <p>Work is underway to develop a new strategic business plan for LPS, which will include business and transformation activities to improve the administration of rates and services to meet the needs of all customers.</p>

Annex B

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plan**DoF Disability Action Plan 2025-30**

Measure	Performance Indicators/Target	Timescale	Intended Outcome	Responsibility
Awareness Raising and Training				
Lead and oversee the development and delivery of an annual NICS-wide programme of disability awareness training in conjunction with Employers for Disability NI.	Annual internal evaluation survey.	31 March each year.	Deeper awareness and understanding of disabilities to support a disability inclusive workplace.	People and Organisational Development
Lead the NICS participation in the JAM (Just a Minute) initiative via co-ordination and promotion of the training.	Quarterly monitoring of completion rates.	Quarterly reviews.	Customers and colleagues have a positive and inclusive experience in their interaction with the NICS.	People and Organisational Development
Deliver an annual calendar of diversity days to increase understanding and awareness of disabilities and intersectional diversity issues.	Feedback from colleagues via diversity staff networks.	31 March each year.	Increased awareness and understanding of staff of diversity issues to support an inclusive workplace for all.	People and Organisational Development
Develop and deliver new learning resources for line managers and staff on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reasonable adjustments; Dignity at Work; and Bullying and Harassment. 	Completion rates.	March 2026.	Increased awareness and understanding of the duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and what may constitute disability discrimination.	People and Organisational Development NICSHR
Continue to ensure mandatory completion of the NICS Equality Diversity and Inclusion e-learning modules.	Completion rates.	Ongoing.	All colleagues understand the role they play in achieving an inclusive workplace and how their behaviours directly influence and shape the working environment for them and their colleagues.	Line managers NICS HR People and Organisational Development

<p>Front-line staff to be trained to deal with customers with a disability through completion of the following e-learning courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability Awareness for front-line staff; Supporting Autistic People; Supporting Vulnerable People. <p>Induction for front-line staff to include 'Every Customer Counts'.</p>	<p>Number of staff trained.</p> <p>Customer surveys/ feedback.</p>	<p>Priority 1 training (0-4 months)</p> <p>Complaints dealt with within customer service standards timescales.</p> <p>Customer surveys carried out every year.</p>	<p>Improved service for customers with disabilities.</p>	<p>Line managers and customer service teams.</p>
<p>Provision of advice and support to staff on health related matters, including promoting positive mental health, through NICS Well and in line with the NICS Mental Health Strategy (strategy under development).</p>	<p>Publication of the NICS Well Newsletter 'Well Times'.</p> <p>Well Champions Conference.</p> <p>Delivery of a series of internal communications and events, including celebration of specific diversity days to raise awareness and understanding of issues and the support available.</p>	<p>Quarterly.</p> <p>Annually.</p> <p>Annually.</p>	<p>Increased awareness of health conditions; how to manage them and the support available to those affected.</p>	<p>NICSHR</p> <p>People and Organisational Development</p>
<p>Recruitment, career progression and development</p>				

Deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity, including strengthening existing links with the disability sector.	Delivery of a programme of outreach initiatives.	Ongoing.	Increased applications from disabled people leading to a higher representation of disabled people in the NICS applicant pools and workforce so that the NICS will be	People and Organisational Development NICSHR
			more reflective of the diverse society it serves.	
Conclude development of and launch of a new Ring-Fencing Scheme (RFS) policy as a positive action measure.	Offers of appointment to successful disabled applicants. Representation of disabled people in the NICS workforce.	June 2025.	To guarantee offers of appointment to a minimum number of disabled applicants who have demonstrated, through the relevant selection process, that they meet the required standard for appointment which alongside the existing Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) will support the employment of disabled people.	People and Organisational Development NICSHR
Design and deliver new NICS Employability Programmes to those furthest removed from the labour market with an initial focus on disabled people and care experienced.	Number of participants in the NICS Employability Programme.	March 2026.	Increased representation of disabled people in the NICS workforce.	People and Organisational Development
Promote and develop the work experience programme, providing meaningful placements for disabled people.	Number of requests and work experience placements facilitated. Feedback from participants, disability support organisations and hosting business areas.	Annually.	Increased applications for, and facilitation of work experience placements for disabled people.	People and Organisational Development.

Undertake a comprehensive review of the reasonable adjustment process and deliver improvements through a co-design approach with key stakeholders including colleagues with lived experience.	Increased disability declaration rates as a result of confidence in the process. Improved understanding and engagement with the reasonable adjustment process. Feedback from disabled colleagues and line managers.	Summer 2025.	To ensure equality of opportunity and removal of barriers to employment for disabled applicants to support colleagues to perform their duties and maintain work.	People and Organisational Development
---	---	--------------	--	---------------------------------------

Participation and Engagement				
Development of a NICS-wide Mental Health Strategy.	<div>1. Establish Mental Health forum (internal partners) to connect all NICS mental health activities.</div> <div>2. Connected links developed with external partners (Inspire/Charity for Civil Service Servants)</div> <div>3. Mental Health Strategy developed and implemented.</div>	Continuous	To encourage our people to be healthy with a sense of wellbeing and to enable them to be their best in the workplace.	NICSHR

Include in the appointment plan for each new DoF public appointment competition a section on 'diversity' and, within the application process, consider measures that encourage people with a disability to apply, for example by utilising the Guaranteed Interview Scheme. TEO report on applications: Public appointments reports	Percentage of people with a disability applying for DoF public appointments.	Continuous – an appointment plan is a required element of every public appointment competition.	Greater diversity in DoF public appointments.	Relevant public appointment Sponsor Branch.
Digital Inclusion Programme activities specifically targeted at disabled people and their carers and developed in conjunction with disability organisations.	Number of activities and evaluation results.	Annually.	People with disabilities make more use of online services.	DSF
Carry out regular website accessibility audits and annual content reviews of the DoF website, working with content owners to address findings.	Audit results, business area engagement and user feedback.	Annually.	Ensure DoF website meets accessibility standards.	CAED
Make sure content owners abide by the nidirect style guide before we publish content. Regular website accessibility audits, weekly reviews of autocompliance software and annual content reviews of the nidirect website, working with content owners to address findings.	Audit results, web accessibility testing platform, business area engagement and user feedback.	Continuous	Make sure nidirect website meets accessibility standards.	nidirect CET



Department of

Finance

An Roinn

Airgeadais

www.finance-ni.gov.uk

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

Q1. Do the proposed action plans demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations?

Yes, the proposed action plans in the document demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.

Please give reasons for your answer:

1. Demonstrated Commitment to Promoting Equality of Opportunity:

Addressing Under-representation in Recruitment (Annex A - "Recruitment, Advertising, Marketing and Outreach"): The action plan directly tackles under-representation of specific Section 75 groups within the NICS workforce.

- Religious Belief: Actions include targeted outreach, broad advertising, Positive Action Advertising, and annual review of community background composition to address imbalances.
- Gender: Similar to religious belief, there are plans for targeted outreach, diverse advertising, and regular monitoring of gender composition in the workforce and applicant pools.
- Age: The plan seeks to diversify the age composition through targeted outreach to education sectors, promoting work experience schemes, and expanding entry routes like apprenticeships and student placements.
- Racial Groups: Actions include targeted outreach to minority ethnic communities, promoting career opportunities through various channels, and working towards the Race at Work Charter commitments. The report notes an increase in NICS staff from a minority ethnic background from 0.3% in 2017 to 0.5% in 2023, and female representation at senior levels has risen from 37.6% in 2017 to 42.8% in 2023.
- Disability: The plan outlines targeted outreach with the disability sector, promoting NICS career opportunities, and Positive Action Advertising. The audit acknowledges the need for an improved reasonable adjustment process and notes that the proportion of Civil Service staff who have declared a disability is lower than the economically active population.

2. Improving Data Collection (Section 3.9): The Department acknowledges significant gaps in Section 75 data, particularly for disability (44.5% missing at 1 Jan 2024) and sexual orientation (66.4% missing at 1 Jan 2024). The launch of a communications campaign in November 2023 to increase declaration rates, resulting in a 2% reduction for disability data and 7% for sexual orientation data from January 2023 to January 2024, demonstrates a commitment to building an evidence base for future actions.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

3. Policy and Peer Support for Diverse Groups (Section 3.5): The document highlights the introduction and updating of policies to be more inclusive, such as the Menopause Policy, Domestic and Sexual Abuse Policy, NICS Trans Equality Policy, and various guides and toolkits. The establishment of new staff networks (Disability, Race and Ethnicity, Cancer Support, Student) alongside existing ones (LGBTQ+, Women's) signifies a commitment to supporting diverse groups within the NICS.

4. Addressing Inequalities in Services to the Citizen (Section 3.17, 3.19, 3.20): Digital Access: Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services explicitly address inequalities in access to government services for older people and persons with disabilities through the Digital Inclusion Programme, partnerships with organisations like Age Friendly Network, and bespoke training.

5. Land and Property Services (LPS): While the audit found no direct evidence of inequality in LPS's operational delivery on S75 grounds, LPS continues to adapt services for particular customer groups (e.g., payment options, tailored support, translation services) and plans to further improve understanding of customer needs, review complaints procedures, and develop a Frontline Customer Framework with consideration for vulnerable customers.

6. Learning and Development Adjustments (Section 3.5): NICSHR's steps to adapt training materials and delivery methodologies for staff with disabilities or dependents (e.g., asking about specific needs, regional/virtual options, screen reader compatibility, flexible start times, childcare policy) show a proactive approach to promoting equality of opportunity in professional development.

7. Demonstrated Commitment to Promoting Good Relations:

Inclusive Workplace Culture (Section 3.5): Initiatives like increased visibility and understanding of diversity and inclusion through attendance at events (PRIDE, Belfast Mela), and the development of resources such as the LGBTQ+ Role Models Guide and Inclusive Language Guide, contribute to fostering an inclusive workplace culture.

8. Staff Networks (Section 3.5): The establishment and support of various staff networks (Disability, Race and Ethnicity, LGBTQ+, Women's, Cancer Support, Student) facilitate peer support and understanding among different groups, which can contribute to good relations.

9. Addressing Pension Inequalities (Section 3.10): NICSHR's action to introduce legislation to remedy discrimination in pensions for male survivors of opposite-sex marriages/civil partnerships and same-sex partners demonstrates a commitment to fairness and good relations, especially in areas that have historically caused friction.

10. Cross-Departmental Collaboration on Mental Health (Section 3.11): The Mental Health Forum initiated by NICSHR, aiming to share learning and best practices across the NICS, indirectly contributes to good relations by fostering a supportive and understanding environment for mental well-being across different groups.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

11. NISRA's Data Harmonisation (Section 3.13, 3.14): By working to ensure cross-government harmonised standards and guidance for Section 75 variables, NISRA is promoting consistent data collection and reporting, which can lead to better understanding and more targeted interventions for various groups, thereby contributing to good relations by ensuring data is inclusive and comparable.

12. Engagement with Equality Commission (Section 3.16, Annex A): Finance Division's engagement with the Equality Commission to ensure its budget development aligns with Equality Scheme commitments, and the commitment in Annex A to engage with ECNI annually to review progress on the action plans, demonstrate a clear intent to work with the relevant oversight body to promote equality and good relations.

Q2. Do the proposed action plans demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public life?

Yes, the proposed action plans demonstrate a strong commitment to complying with the Department's statutory duties to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life. This commitment is evident through both past achievements highlighted in the audit and the specific actions outlined in the draft Section 75 Action Plan (Annex A) and implied within the Disability Action Plan (referenced as Annex B).

Please give reasons for your answer:

1. Explicit Recognition of Statutory Duties (Section 1.3, Footnote 1):

The document directly states the Department's statutory duties under Section 75(1) and 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which includes "due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity" (which encompasses disability).

Crucially, Footnote 1 explicitly references Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act, which "places a duty on public authorities to prepare a plan outlining how they propose to have due regards to the need to: i. promote positive attitudes towards disabled people, and ii. encourage participation by disabled people in public life." This direct mention confirms the Department's awareness and acknowledgement of these specific duties.

2. Comprehensive Audit of Inequalities (Section 3.1, 3.2):

The undertaking of a "further audit of inequalities in 2024" that specifically included a review of the existing Disability Action Plan demonstrates a proactive approach to understanding and addressing issues related to disabled people.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

The assessment of the Civil Service workforce profile across Section 75 groups, incorporating feedback from external benchmarking exercises like "Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive Accreditation," and internal staff networks, shows a dedicated effort to identify areas for improvement.

3. Past Progress and Achievements (Section 3.5, 3.8):

The document highlights significant progress made since the last audit (2018-2024) in strengthening the NICS's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion for disabled people:

Diversification of NICS workforce: Specific initiatives mentioned include:

- Outreach to under-represented groups, including disabled people.
- Launch of a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for disabled applicants.
- Development of a Ring-Fencing Policy for successful disabled applicants.
- Facilitation of work experience opportunities.

4. Increased Visibility and Understanding: Attendance at events like the "Harkin International Summit" implies engagement with disability-focused discussions.

5. Policy and Peer Support: Establishment of a new Disability Staff Network during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Learning and Development: NICS's steps to address training material/delivery suitability for staff with disabilities by:

- Asking staff for specific needs/adjustments upon enrolment.
- Adapting course materials, methodologies, and venues.
- Offering regional training and virtual learning options compatible with screen reading software.

7. External Benchmarking: The NICS has achieved "Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive accreditation," demonstrating recognition from a specialist body in this area.

8. Addressing Remaining Inequalities (Section 3.8, 3.9, Annex A):

The audit clearly identifies areas where inequalities continue to impact disabled people:

"An improved reasonable adjustment process to better support disabled applicants and colleagues and to meet the duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)." This directly acknowledges the need for practical support for participation.

"The proportion of Civil Service staff who have declared a disability is lower than the economically active population." This highlights the ongoing challenge in encouraging participation.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

Significant gaps in disability data (44.5% missing at 1 January 2024) are acknowledged, and the communications campaign launched in November 2023 to increase declaration rates directly supports the evidence base needed to monitor progress and inform future actions for disabled people.

9. Proposed Actions in Annex A (Recruitment, Advertising, Marketing and Outreach for "Persons with a disability"):

"By Autumn 2025 deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity, including strengthening existing links with the disability sector." This directly addresses promoting positive attitudes and encouraging participation by actively engaging with the disabled community.

"Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to target under-represented groups." This includes disabled people.

"Targeted outreach activity with the disability sector to raise awareness..."

10. Digital Inclusion for Disabled People (Section 3.17):

The "Digital Inclusion Programme activities" of Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services explicitly target "Persons with a disability" to encourage digital participation. This is a concrete step to enable participation in modern public services.

11. Increased partnership with organisations on the Digital Assist Steering Group and engagement with organisations representing people with disabilities on training, awareness, and review of signage/communications directly promotes positive attitudes and encourages participation by ensuring accessibility.

Q3. Are the proposed actions appropriate to meet that compliance? If not, why and what actions should the Department be taking?

The proposed action plans largely demonstrate an appropriate commitment to meeting the Department's statutory duties to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life. The document outlines a commendable range of existing initiatives and new proposals.

1. Explicit Duty Recognition: The document's explicit mention of Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act (Footnote 1) and its corresponding duties is a strong starting point. It shows the Department understands its legal obligations.
2. Comprehensive Scope: The actions cover various key areas:
 - Employment (NICS as an employer): This is a significant focus, covering recruitment, retention, and career progression. Actions like the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, Ring-Fencing Policy for disabled applicants, and targeted outreach are direct and appropriate ways to encourage participation in public life (through employment in the Civil Service).

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

- Workplace Support: Measures like reviewing the reasonable adjustment process, establishing the Disability Staff Network, and adapting learning and development are vital for fostering positive attitudes and enabling participation once employed. The focus on mental health support is also highly relevant.
3. Service Delivery: Addressing digital inclusion for disabled people (Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services) and improving customer understanding and accessibility (LPS) are crucial for ensuring disabled people can access and benefit from public services, thereby encouraging their participation in society.
 4. Data-Driven Approach: Acknowledging the significant data gaps for disability (44.5% missing) and launching a communications campaign to improve declaration rates is essential for evidence-based policymaking and monitoring progress. This demonstrates a commitment to truly understanding the landscape of inequality.
 5. Learning from External Benchmarking: The engagement with and achievement of "Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive accreditation" shows a willingness to learn from best practices and demonstrate commitment through independent verification.
 6. Proactive Policy Development: Updating existing policies and introducing new ones (e.g., Menopause Policy which can impact disabled women) and developing inclusive guides (e.g., Neurodiversity Line Managers' Toolkit) demonstrate a proactive approach to creating an inclusive environment.

Areas for Potential Further Action/Refinement.

1. Specificity and Measurable Outcomes for "Promoting Positive Attitudes":

While the plan has many actions for encouraging participation, the explicit measures for promoting positive attitudes could be strengthened. Often, positive attitudes are seen as an outcome of participation, but specific, targeted actions can directly influence societal perceptions.

2. Robustness of "Reasonable Adjustment Process" Improvement (Section 3.8):

The report stated "improved reasonable adjustment process" needs clear, quantifiable targets and mechanisms for feedback from disabled staff. The fact it is still identified as an "area of inequality" suggests past efforts may not have been fully effective.

3. Encouraging Participation in "Public Life" Beyond Direct Employment:

While NICS employment is a significant form of public life participation, the duty extends more broadly (e.g., advisory bodies, boards, public consultations).

Accessible Consultation Processes: Ensure all public consultations (including on policies not directly related to disability) are fully accessible to disabled people, using multiple formats, engaging with disability groups, and offering various feedback mechanisms beyond written responses.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

4. Review and Evaluation of Specific Actions:

While the document mentions monitoring progress, the detail on how the effectiveness of specific interventions (e.g., outreach activities, new policies) will be evaluated is limited.

Q4. Are there any further actions required?

Yes, building upon the already commendable proposed actions, there are several further actions the Department could consider strengthening its compliance with statutory duties, particularly in promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraging their participation in public life. These suggestions are aimed at enhancing the scope, depth, and impact of the current plans.

1. Enhance Proactive Communication and Visibility for Positive Attitudes:

Public-Facing Campaigns Highlighting Disabled Role Models: Go beyond internal NICS communications. Launch or actively participate in public campaigns that showcase disabled individuals in various public life roles (not just within the NICS) and their positive contributions. This could involve media partnerships, short video series, or collaborations with disability advocacy groups to share compelling stories. This directly combats negative stereotypes and fosters positive attitudes within the wider community.

2. Active Engagement with Youth and Education:

Beyond general outreach to the education sector for recruitment, develop specific programmes aimed at promoting positive attitudes towards disability among young people, and encouraging disabled young people to consider public service careers from an early age. This could involve school visits, mentoring schemes, or taster days.

3. Deepen the Commitment to Accessible Public Services and Consultations:

- **"Accessibility by Design" Policy:** Implement a formal "Accessibility by Design" policy for all new digital services, physical spaces, and communication materials. This means accessibility is not an afterthought but an integral part of planning and development from the outset, ensuring inclusive access for all from day one.
- **Audits of Existing Services for Accessibility Barriers:** Conduct regular, independent audits of all public-facing services (digital and physical) to identify and remove accessibility barriers that might hinder participation by disabled people. This should include sensory, cognitive, and physical access.
- **Inclusive Public Consultations:** Ensure that all departmental public consultations on any policy area (not just those directly related to disability) are fully accessible to disabled people. This means providing information in multiple accessible formats (e.g., Easy Read, BSL/ISL, large print, audio), offering diverse ways to respond (e.g., online forms, phone, in-person meetings with support), and actively consulting with disability groups in the design of the consultation process itself. This encourages their active participation in shaping public policy.

Unclassified

195

ITEM 11.3.

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 July 2025
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	Community Planning and Climate Manager
Date of Report	10 July 2025
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: Consultation Response
Subject	A draft Consultation Response to the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Draft NI Anti-Poverty Strategy Appendix 2 - Draft ANDBC Response to NI Anti-Poverty Strategy

Background

The Department for Communities launched a public consultation on the draft Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Strategy 2025–2035 on 17 June 2025, with responses due by 19 September 2025. This is the first dedicated, cross-departmental strategy aimed at tackling poverty in Northern Ireland in a holistic and sustained manner.

The strategy is a statutory requirement under Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which was inserted by the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, and is designed to address both the causes and consequences of poverty through a whole-systems approach.

Not Applicable

196

The draft strategy is structured around a 10-year vision and organised under three strategic pillars:

- **Pillar 1 - Minimising the Risk of Falling into Poverty**
- **Pillar 2 - Minimising the Impacts of Poverty**
- **Pillar 3 - Supporting People to Exit Poverty**

Councils and other stakeholders have been invited to respond to the consultation, which will inform the final version of the strategy. The draft Council response is attached for consideration.

Summary of the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy Commitments

Pillar 1: Minimising Risks

<p>Focuses on early intervention and prevention by addressing key risk factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational disadvantage • Family instability • Debt • Disability • Substance use • Ethnic inequality 	<p>Key Actions Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of the Extended Schools Programme • Development of a Disability Employment Strategy • Research into the impact of the two-child limit • Implementation of a local Financial Wellbeing Strategy
--	---

Pillar 2: Minimising Impacts

<p>Aims to reduce the immediate effects of poverty on individuals and families by improving access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support • Education • Health services • Safe and inclusive communities • Affordable housing and transport 	<p>Key Actions Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued welfare mitigations and fuel poverty interventions • Affordable school uniforms legislation • Delivery of a new Safer Communities Strategy • Expansion of advice services and rural support frameworks
--	---

Pillar 3: Supporting People to Exit Poverty

<p>Focuses on long-term solutions to help individuals and families move out of poverty through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and economic development • Skills and training • Childcare provision 	<p>Key Actions Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a Good Jobs Charter and Employment Rights Bill • Implementation of inclusive pathways to work • Investment in childcare subsidies and early learning strategies
---	--

Not Applicable

197

Draft Council Response

This is an important strategy and its commitment to a rights-based, outcomes focused collaborative approach are welcome. A draft response has been prepared (see attached).

While the strategy is welcome, the draft response expresses concern that it does not go far enough and primarily consists of existing actions that have not yet delivered the necessary impact.

Bolder measures and a genuinely joined-up, whole-systems approach are required—one that addresses root causes, strengthens coordination, and is grounded in evidence and lived experience.

The draft response makes the following key points:

- **Poverty is deepening despite current efforts.** Most listed actions are already underway, yet hardship is rising. A step change is needed—not more of the same.
- **Prevention must be central.** Early intervention—through affordable housing, mental health support, family services, and addressing rural isolation—is essential, as highlighted in *Ards and North Down's Poverty and Hardship Report (2024)*.
- **The system must work better for people.** The welfare system can be rigid and stressful. Delays, sanctions, and study restrictions often trap people in poverty.
- **Intergenerational poverty must be addressed.** Long-term disadvantage, low aspiration, trauma, and paramilitary influence require sustained, targeted support.
- **Local, place-based solutions matter.** Poverty varies across and within council areas. Councils and community groups must be empowered to respond flexibly to local need—especially in rural areas.
- **Lived experience and local data are vital.** Ongoing co-design and the use of council-level data, such as that gathered in Ards and North Down, should inform and monitor delivery.
- **Cost-of-living pressures require urgent action.** Rising prices for food, fuel, rent, and other essentials demand continued emergency support alongside longer-term change.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the attached draft response for submission to the Executive Office.

The Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy (2025-2035)





Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Anti-Poverty Consultation

Department for Communities

Poverty Policy Branch

Level 7 Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast BT2 7EG

Email: AntiPovertyConsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk

This document is also available from our website at:

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Contents

1. Consultation Introduction	5
2. Foreword	8
3. Introduction	9
4. Our Approach to Tackling Poverty	12
5. Minimising the Risk of Falling into Poverty	14
6. Minimising the Impacts of Poverty	18
7. Supporting People to Exit Poverty	25
8. Monitoring, Reporting and Governance	28

A hard copy of the report, or a copy in a different format, can be provided on request by e-mailing:

Anti-Poverty Consultation

Department for Communities

Poverty Policy Branch

Level 7 Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast BT2 7EG

Email: AntiPovertyConsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk

Consultation Introduction

The Anti-Poverty Strategy sets out the Executive’s commitment to a joined up, long term approach to addressing poverty. It seeks to remove barriers and support equality of opportunity for those experiencing or at risk of poverty. It sets a clear framework within which actions to tackle poverty will be taken forward in a practical and sustainable manner.

Our vision for this work is as follows: Working together, poverty and its impacts will be effectively and sustainably eradicated across our communities.

This vision is underpinned by three key pillars which will be supported by a range of work areas and key actions. This will allow us to make a difference to those experiencing or at risk of poverty in an effective and sustained manner.

These three pillars are:

- Minimising Risks
- Minimising Impacts
- Exiting Poverty

The Executive is committed to working together to deliver this Strategy and make a long term, sustainable impact on poverty; supporting our people, strengthening our economy, providing effective training and educational pathways and helping to improve and protect health.

Scope of Consultation:

The Department for Communities is consulting on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and welcomes your comments on any aspects of this document.

The purpose of this consultation on the Anti-Poverty Strategy is to set out what the Executive proposes to do to fulfil its obligations in respect of compliance with the obligation under s28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and gather your views on those proposals.

Duration of Consultation:

The consultation will be open for response from 17 June – 19 September 2025.

For responses to be considered they must be received by the Department by 5pm on 19 September 2025. Responses received will be used to inform the final content of the Executive strategy.

The key documents for your consideration are available at

www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-ni-executive-anti-poverty-strategy

Documents:

- Draft NI Executive Anti-Poverty Strategy Consultation Document
- Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy EQIA
- Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy Rural Needs Impact Assessment

Ways to respond:

You can respond to this consultation by filling out the survey at the following link
<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/anti-poverty-strategy-consultation>.

You are under no obligation to provide personal details in responding to this consultation.

Please note that as responses to publication may be disclosable respondents should not include personal data or names as part of their responses to this consultation.

If you would like to provide a written response to the consultation or have further queries, these can be emailed to AntiPovertyConsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk

Written responses can also be submitted to

Anti-Poverty Consultation

Department for Communities

Poverty Policy Branch

Level 7 Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast

BT2 7EG

Consultation Responses:

We will consider the responses received and, following that, publish a consultation report on the Departmental website, which will outline feedback received and the Department's next steps.

Accessibility:

Documents can be requested in alternative formats. For more information on the alternative formats available and the time scales involved, please contact us at any stage at AntiPovertyConsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Access to Consultation Responses

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). Responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published. We will remove email addresses and telephone numbers from these responses; but apart from this, we will publish them in full. For more information about what we do with personal data please see our consultation privacy notice www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/supplementary-privacy-notice-dfc-business-areas.

Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR); however all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

A summary report and analysis of consultation responses will be published on the DfC website.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under the FOIA or EIR.

Foreword

As an Executive, there are few issues we face as important as addressing poverty. Poverty impacts every aspect of our society and effectively tackling this issue will lead to benefits not only for individuals and families but will help strengthen our communities and boost our economy. Poverty has a negative impact on physical and mental wellbeing, limiting the ability of people fulfil their potential and achieve their goals and aspirations.

The Executive is committed to working together to deliver this Strategy and make a long term, sustainable impact on poverty; supporting our people, strengthening our economy, providing effective training and educational pathways and helping to improve and protect health.

This Strategy will build on the Executive's work over the last number of years in tackling poverty. While we acknowledge there is much more work to be done, it is also important that we acknowledge and learn from what has been delivered to date. Actions such as the welfare mitigation payments including benefit cap mitigation and offsetting the bedroom tax, show that the Executive has provided a range of programmes and supports that are not always available in neighbouring jurisdictions. Through this Strategy we set out commitments on how we will continue to provide support and assurance to those who need it most.

We will ensure that policies brought forward as part of this Strategy are focused on addressing the real-life impacts of poverty and based on a range of evidence, including lived experience. The Strategy will be delivered over 10 years and is being brought forward at a time of significant budget constraint, therefore it is important that we put in place actions that make the most impact. Some strategic actions can and will be delivered immediately while others will be kept under review and delivered as evidence and budget allows.

This Strategy sets a clear framework within which anti-poverty work will be taken forward in a practical and sustainable manner. We will aim not just to increase people's incomes, but also to ensure there are routes out of poverty. This will mean a focus not only on benefits and wages, but also addressing issues around health, well-being and employment.

It is also essential that we acknowledge that this is not a problem which the Executive can solve in isolation. To truly tackle poverty at a society-wide level will require not only the engagement of the Executive, but also the support of community organisations, businesses, voluntary groups, councils, families and individuals. Tackling poverty in a meaningful way will require more than just Government to play its part.

The Executive is confident that this Strategy will provide an integrated framework within which we can prioritise actions and funding, helping us to work towards a society where we can see the impacts of poverty reduced and improved outcomes that make a real and lasting difference to people's lives.

1. Introduction

This Anti-Poverty Strategy sets out the Executive's commitment to a joined up, long term approach to addressing poverty. It seeks to remove barriers and support equality of opportunity for those experiencing or at risk of poverty. While the Executive has previously taken forward a wide range of initiatives and actions which help support those in or at risk of poverty, this is the first time it has published a Strategy dedicated to tackling this issue in a holistic manner.

This Strategy will drive continuous improvements targeted at making a real difference in the lives of those experiencing or at risk of poverty. It represents the next step in our journey towards a fairer and more inclusive society, where everyone can live their lives with freedom, dignity, choice and control.

How the Strategy was developed

The core values of collaboration and partnership-working were embedded at the heart of the process and have enabled an informed and joined up approach.

Throughout this work the Department for Communities has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders. This work included the establishment and report of an independent Expert Advisory Panel, an Anti-Poverty Strategy Co-Design Group made up of community and voluntary organisations and a Cross Departmental Working Group made up of senior officials from across all Departments.

The Executive acknowledges and draws upon the significant contribution to the development of the Strategy and those who made a valuable contribution to identifying the issues we need to tackle and the actions to successfully address them.

In addition to this work, a Scoping Review of the Literature on Poverty in Northern Ireland¹ was conducted by the Department for Communities to provide an overview and assessment of the available evidence and set out what is known about poverty from existing literature, to identify gaps and make recommendations on further research needed to strengthen the evidence base. In particular, three areas of poverty were explored: **the risk factors for falling into poverty; the major impacts of poverty on people's lives; and the factors that enable people to leave/exit poverty.**

The Executive has taken the time to consider all of the work that has gone before to ensure that the draft Strategy reflects our priorities alongside the ongoing challenges we face. Inevitably, the current fiscal climate has placed limitations on how far we have been able to go on a number of areas, particularly in the first years of the Strategy. We must by necessity, ensure that the impact of every pound spent is maximised to address real, evidenced need.

1: https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/scoping-review-of-literature-on-poverty-ni_0.pdf.

Poverty In Northern Ireland



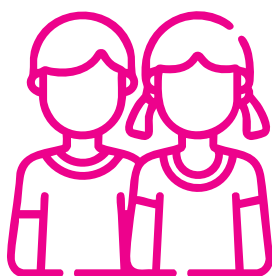
18%

of the population in
Relative Poverty
(After Housing Costs)



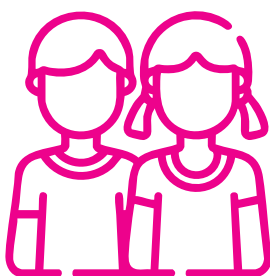
15%

of the population in
Absolute Poverty
(After Housing Costs)



25%

of children in
Relative Poverty
(After Housing Costs)



21%

of children in
Absolute Poverty
(After Housing Costs)



20%

of those individuals living
in families where someone is
disabled are considered to be
in Relative Poverty (AHC).



16%

of adult females were
estimated to be in Relative
Poverty compared to 14% of
adult males (AHC).

Defining Poverty

For the purposes of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, poverty is defined as:

Poverty means that a person or family's income and other resources are not sufficient to meet their basic needs. This includes paying for essentials such as housing, heating, food, clothing and social activities.

Interventions will aim to target objective need. This means that actions delivered as part of the Strategy will be based on a broad evidence base and targeted at an identified need. The evidence base used to assess objective need will be dependent on the subject area and the underlying need to be addressed.

Evidence considered in assessing objective need for the purposes of this Strategy may include, but is not limited to, data published in the annual poverty bulletin, administrative data held by departments, and the population-level indicators assigned to Anti-Poverty Strategy outcomes.

In making decisions on objective need, due regard will be had to Section 75 categories.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy in context

The Anti-Poverty Strategy will form a key part of the Executive's work going forward. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to bring this Strategy forward stating "Tackling Poverty will require all Northern Ireland Departments to work together with their Arms-Length Bodies and delivery partners in order to make a lasting change to our society. Poverty is not a matter for government alone to tackle, but for all public services, the voluntary and community sector and the wider population."

In addition to this, a wide range of other commitments within the Programme for Government will have a direct impact on issues which disproportionately impact those at risk of socio-economic disadvantage including cutting health waiting times, providing affordable social housing and working towards safer communities.

2. Our Approach to Tackling Poverty

This Strategy is built on the co-design work and evidence base highlighted above. The Strategy is focused on three key pillars which will be supported by a range of work areas and key actions. This will allow us to make a difference to those experiencing or at risk of poverty in an effective and sustained manner. This work will be underpinned by actions which will act as levers to reduce poverty and its impacts.

Our vision for this work is as follows –



VISION

“Working together, poverty and its impacts will be effectively and sustainably eradicated across our communities.”

This vision is underpinned by three key pillars -



Minimising Risks

We will minimise the risks and root causes of people and their families falling into poverty.

We will work with people to maximise their chances of avoiding these risks and lower their chances of falling into poverty.



Minimising Impacts

Where people find themselves in poverty, we will support them and ensure that inequalities are minimised and life opportunities are maximised.



Exiting Poverty

We will support people experiencing poverty and through working together we will provide routes out of poverty.

In recognising the cyclical and frequently inter-generational nature of poverty we also recognise that work between these pillars will frequently overlap and that minimising risks, impacts and exiting poverty for groups and individuals will require appropriate interventions. For example, poor health can both be a risk of falling into poverty as well as an impact of experiencing poverty. Equally, how we support lifting children from poverty will require different strategies than those for older people and this understanding is a key underpinning principle of the Strategy. Just as importantly, **the focus across all three pillars will be on identifying and addressing the root causes of poverty with the aim of prevention, where this is possible.**

Through focusing on these three pillars we aim to provide an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty in our society and improve the lives of all.

The Strategy will be underpinned by a Programme of Delivery which will be updated on an ongoing basis. The Programme of Delivery will be reviewed and updated when new issues or opportunities arise and when new potential initiatives are developed. This will ensure that it remains as current as possible and it is able to react to the challenges and changes in society and the economic landscape that lie ahead.

Where people live will also have an impact on how poverty affects them, whether it is in increased transport costs, difficulty in accessing services or being able to find affordable, comfortable and secure accommodation.

Due to the deep and lasting impacts of poverty on people, it is essential that we ensure the rights of those experiencing or at risk of poverty are protected and promoted. Lived experience and the role of civil society in amplifying, advocating for and supporting the voices of those impacted must be used to inform our actions to address poverty and its effects. This can help to ensure that those experiencing or at risk of poverty are able to access the support they need.

The following chapters set out the high-level approach to each of the pillars and how we aim to address the associated issues.

3. Minimising the Risk of Falling into Poverty

What are the risk factors for falling into Poverty?



There are a wide range of risk factors for falling into poverty and every individual story is unique. However, following widespread consultation with stakeholders and analysing the existing research, we have identified a number of key factors which must be addressed in order to effectively tackle poverty.

Childhood Education: There is widespread evidence to show that children's education is one of the key predictive factors for determining their chances of avoiding poverty in the future. This is further compounded by ongoing educational inequalities, which show that coming from a socio-economically deprived background is closely linked to low levels of attainment².



In 2020/21, 60% of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieved at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C standard (including English and Maths), compared to 84% of those who do not receive free school meals³.

Outcome: All children will have maximised opportunities in relation to education, addressing socio-economic gaps in educational attainment.

Family/Childhood Factors: A wide range of family factors impact on the chances both of families being in poverty and also of a child growing up to experience poverty later in life. Research has shown that childhood poverty has a causal effect on children's future poverty status with parental income having one of the strongest associations with children's future income and children's intermediate outcomes.



The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (2016)⁴ found that **neglect or abuse** as a child can increase the risk of experiencing poverty in adulthood. They specify that impact on mental health can lead to unemployment, low earnings, homelessness and exposure to substance misuse. Family structure is also a significant issue in this area and a variety of research⁵ has shown that family instability and size can be closely associated with a higher risk of poverty.

² The Equality Commission have highlighted that free school meal entitlement is a strong indicator of social disadvantage and is closely linked to low levels of academic achievement - ECNI, 2020, Summary of policy positions relating to poverty and socio-economic disadvantage (equalityni.org)

³ Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers (education-ni.gov.uk)

⁴ JRF, 2021. UK Poverty 2020/21, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2020-21>

⁵ HM Government, 2014. "An evidence review of the drivers of child poverty for families in poverty now and for poor children growing up to be poor adults." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ca9e640f0b65b3de0a616/Cm_8781_Child_Poverty_Evidence_Review_Print.pdf

The Centre for Social Justice (2019)⁶ reports that the break-up of family relationships is one of the quickest routes into poverty. Children in families that break apart are more than twice as likely to experience poverty as those whose families stay together.

Outcome: The benefits of a good family structure will be promoted. Families and young people experiencing disadvantage will be supported, helping them to have fulfilling and complete home and family lives.

Debt: Unsustainable debt can have a severe adverse affect on people's chances of avoiding poverty. The Centre for Social Justice has previously highlighted debt as one of its five 'pathways to poverty', referring to it as both a cause and consequence.



The need to meet day-to-day expenses can often drive those on low incomes into debt. This creates a domino effect, as low income families then have to spend more money to service their debt. Debt not only deepens poverty, but can be a major source of stress and anxiety⁷.

Outcome: People will be supported to maximise their financial wellbeing.

Disability: JRF (2021)⁸ reported that half of all people in poverty either have a **disability** themselves or live with someone who does, compared with just a third of people in non-poor households. Similarly, Barnard (2018)⁹ found strong links between disability and poverty in Northern Ireland with 27% of disabled people and 28% of families that include someone who is disabled being in poverty in 2016/17, compared to 19% of non-disabled people and 16% of people in families which do not include a disabled person.



Deaf and disabled people living in Northern Ireland are twice as likely to be economically inactive as they are to be in employment. Our rate of employment for those who are Deaf and disabled is 32.7%, compared to an employment rate of 81.8% for those who do not have a disability.

Outcome: People with disabilities will be supported to be economically independent, maximising their potential in relation to education and employment.

5 HM Government, 2014. "An evidence review of the drivers of child poverty for families in poverty now and for poor children growing up to be poor adults." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7ca9e640f0b65b3de0a616/Cm_8781_Child_Poverty_Evidence_Review_Print.pdf

6 Centre for Social Justice, 2019. "Why Family Matters". <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CSJJ6900-Family-Report-190405-WEB.pdf>

7 HM Government (2014) infers a broad causal relationship between problem debt and low income poverty, which is that once in debt, low income families have to spend a higher proportion of their income to service this debt.

8 JRF, 2021. UK Poverty 2020/21, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2020-21>

9 Helen Barnard, 2018. "Poverty in Northern Ireland" (JRF) <https://www.jrf.org.uk/poverty-in-northern-ireland-2018>

Substance Use: Research has shown that addiction can impact people in a wide range of ways in terms of their socio-economic status. Alcohol and drug dependency can affect people's ability to gain employment and to provide support to family members. Most obviously, this has an impact on mental health and physical well-being.



Alcohol and drug related indicators continue to show some of the largest health inequalities monitored, with rates of drug-related deaths in the most deprived areas over four and a half times higher than in the least deprived. Alcohol-related deaths are four times higher in the most deprived areas.¹⁰

Harkness, Gregg and MacMillan (2012) state that in 2006 the Centre for Social Justice highlighted **alcohol and drug addiction** as one of their five 'pathways to poverty' both as a cause and consequence.

Outcome: Government and key partners will work to support people - and reduce the harms associated with alcohol and drugs.

Ethnicity: Recent research has shown that people's ethnicity may impact on their levels of socio-economic disadvantage¹¹. There are a range of reasons for this and we must work to ensure our society is equal and fair for all those who contribute to it.



Wallace, McAreavey and Atkin (2013)¹² suggest that a lack of recognition of overseas skills and qualifications, immigration status, language difficulties and problems in negotiating support services all serve to heighten the risk of poverty for ethnic minority groups. JRF 2016 believes people from ethnic minorities become trapped by limited training opportunities, discrimination and racism with informal cultures and networks within workplaces making it harder for them to progress.

Outcome: We will take steps to ensure that Ethnicity will not increase a person's risk of poverty.

These outcomes will be delivered through a Programme of Delivery which will include a range of actions and be updated throughout the lifespan of the Strategy as appropriate. These will be included in action plans which will be updated on a rolling basis.

¹⁰ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hscims-report-2022.pdf>, p5

¹¹ JRF, 2021. "UK Poverty 2020/21" states that in work poverty is higher for Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workers than for White workers and is highest for Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers, which is at about 34% and much higher than the 12% of in-work poverty rate for white households.

¹² A Wallace, R McAreavey and K Atkin, 2013. "Poverty and ethnicity in Northern Ireland. JRF. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/race-and-ethnicity/poverty-and-ethnicity-in-northern-ireland>

Minimising the Risk of Falling into Poverty:

Strategic commitments to be delivered in the first years of the Strategy:

- We will continue to deliver the Extended Schools Programme which provides a range of support in the form of breakfast clubs, after school activities, parental engagement, literacy and numeracy support, healthy eating etc. (Department of Education)
- We will undertake research to understand the impact of Westminster's two child limit on poverty indicators, and call on the government to remove Westminster's Two Child Limit. (Department for Communities)
- We will deliver the RAISE programme, a new initiative which aims to raise achievement to reduce educational disadvantage. Funding of £20 million is being provided through the Shared Island Fund for a period of 2 years and a Memorandum of Understanding between Departments of Education north and south has been agreed. (Department of Education)
- We will work with delivery partners to scope an NI Debt Respite Scheme. (Department for Communities)
- We will work with the Money and Pension Service to implement a local delivery plan for the UK Financial Wellbeing Strategy. (Department for Communities)
- We will develop and implement an Executive Disability Strategy. (Department for Communities)
- We will develop and implement the Disability Employment Strategy. (Department for Communities)
- We will deliver a refreshed Healthy Child Healthy Future (HCHF) programme - the universal child health promotion programme for NI 0-19 years. This will have a strong focus on ensuring every child is given the best start in life with increased support for those families who are most in need because of factors relating to disadvantage. HCHF assesses the child and family holistically and within the wider community and tailors support or signposts accordingly to help address need. (Department of Health)

4. Minimising the Impacts of Poverty



The impacts of poverty are felt across our society and can have devastating impacts on people’s health, education and economic outcomes. While this Strategy focuses on how we improve long term outcomes for individuals and society more broadly, it is also essential that we take steps to address the immediate issues and impacts felt by people experiencing poverty.

Access to Resources: Most measures of poverty are defined by low levels of resource. In order to minimise the impact of poverty, it is essential that we ensure a range of safety nets are in place to make sure that all people have access to a minimum level of resource.

An individual is considered to be in relative poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60% of UK median income. In 2022/23 the relative poverty threshold (BHC) for a couple with no children was an income of £373 per week.

Food insecurity is an issue that cuts across all age groups, on every day of the year including weekends, when a child is sick and also during school holidays. If a child is in food insecurity, it is inevitable that his or her wider family is also in food insecurity.

Outcome: Appropriate and effective financial support will be provided to those in our society who are socio-economically disadvantaged. Older people, children and adults with disabilities will be helped to access appropriate support.

Access to Education: As already noted in this Strategy, education is a key issue in relation to the prevention of poverty. In addition, living in poverty can also impact on the wider benefits that can be achieved through education.



Therefore, it is important that we work to ensure that attending school is as close to cost neutral as possible to maximise the benefits delivered to all our children. Buttle UK (2019)¹³, found that out of 1,200 frontline workers, 79% reported regularly seeing parents who are struggling to afford the costs associated with school which at its most extreme is being unable to afford school uniforms or the correct equipment resulting in children not being able to take certain subjects, or even attend certain schools.

The correlation between pupils' entitlement to free school meals and achieving lower outcomes in exam results has long been established across the UK.

Outcome: The costs of accessing and participating in education will be minimised, with particular consideration given to children from socio-economic disadvantaged families.

Physical and Mental Health: Health inequalities are the differences in health outcomes experienced by different socio-economic, demographic or population groups. Differences in health outcomes highlight the unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society. Health inequalities can arise because of the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age. These conditions influence our opportunities for good mental health, physical health, and wellbeing.



Health inequalities also drive poorer health outcomes for our wider population, increase demand on health services and increase costs and public expenditure in Northern Ireland. They also impact economic growth, unemployment, productivity, community cohesion, the justice system, community wellbeing, families, and individuals. To address health inequalities, we need to adopt a whole of Government approach and work with key stakeholders, including local government and the Community and Voluntary sector.

The health and wellbeing outcomes of people who live in deprived areas are often substantially worse. In 2018-20, life expectancy for men living in the 20% most deprived areas of NI was 74.5 years – this was 6.9 years less than those living in the 20% least deprived areas. Female life expectancy in the 20% most deprived areas was 79.3 years, 5 years fewer than women in the 20% least deprived areas¹⁴.

¹³ Buttle UK, 2019. "The Experiences of Education for Children and Young People in Poverty in the UK in 2019." <https://buddleuk.org/our-research/research-reports/back-to-school-an-unequal-education-for-children-in-poverty/>

¹⁴ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hscims-life-expectancy-ni-2018-20.pdf>, p14

A research paper from the British Medical Association (BMA 2017¹⁵) also stated that poverty, unemployment and social isolation are associated with higher prevalence of schizophrenia and rates of admission to specialist psychiatric care. Fitzpatrick et al. (2018)¹⁶ found that the impact of destitution on people's mental health was clearly significant with people whose mental health has been affected by destitution being implicated in a vicious cycle, whereby their poor mental health inhibited job-seeking and other actions that might help them escape destitution.

Outcome: Everyone will be supported in improving their mental and physical well-being, with a focus on driving down health inequalities related to socio-economic disadvantage.

Exposure to Crime/Safety: Poverty can expose people to a higher risk of negative life experiences, including an increased likelihood of experiencing the impacts of crime.



JRF (2016) highlights that living in poverty or a deprived neighbourhood makes both offending and being the victim of a crime involving property or violence much more likely.

Research has identified that children in poverty are much more vulnerable to criminal exploitation and becoming involved in gangs¹⁷.

Borysik (2020)¹⁸ identifies a pattern in childhood experiences, including being blighted by poverty, that lead to an adult becoming stuck in a revolving door of crisis and crime. She cites that the Ministry of Justice research in 2019 found that though only 15% of all pupils were eligible for free school meals, they made up over two-fifths (43%) of prolific offenders and a third (32%) of non-prolific offenders.

Outcome: We will have safe environments, including in the most deprived areas.

The Impact of Place: Those who are most likely to suffer from poverty are also the most likely to live in deprived environments or suffer from social isolation. People in poverty may experience worse environments which are poorly served by services, shops and public transport.¹⁹



This can often exacerbate the impact of living in poverty. Where there is a lack of essential services such as a post office, primary school, supermarket or a Doctor's Surgery, people have the added expense of paying for transport to access support.

15 BMA, 2017. "Health at a Price" <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/2084/health-at-a-price-2017.pdf>

16 S Fitzpatrick, G Bramley, F Sosenko, J Blenkinsopp, J Wood, S Johnsen, M Littlewood and B Watts (2018). "Destitution in the UK 2018. JRF. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/cost-of-living/destitution-in-the-uk-2018>

17 Buttle (2019) states that children in poverty are much more vulnerable to criminal exploitation and becoming involved in gangs; explaining that some of the reasons for this include high levels of exclusion from school, a lack of afterschool activities and difficulties accessing further education.

18 Borysik, 2020. "New Generation : Preventing young adults being caught in the revolving door. Revolving Doors Agency.

19 Maitre, Russell and Smyth (2021) state that while poor families are geographically dispersed and many do not live in disadvantaged areas, they are more likely than high-income families to live in neighbourhoods with problems of crime, poor services and environmental pollution. B Maitre, H Russell, E Smyth, 2021. "The dynamics of child poverty in Ireland : Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland survey." ESRI Research series 121 May 2021. <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS121.pdf>

Often, areas of multiple deprivation face the loss of basic services and amenities such as banks and post offices, and large retailers may be reluctant to locate in poorer areas.²⁰ Those living in rural areas also face a range of issues related to place. Many areas face high levels of fuel poverty and limited access to health, recreational and educational centres. For those with limited resources this can be made worse by a limited public transport network in many rural or isolated areas. This is an issue in particular for those who lack access to a car or have mobility issues.²¹

As the Social Mobility Commission stated in its annual report **“there is a particular challenge for people living in neighbourhoods and places where, for a whole variety of reasons, educational and economic outcomes appear to be poor across generations.”**²²

Outcome: We will have strong communities with improved physical infrastructure, particularly in areas suffering the highest levels of deprivation.

Housing (including Fuel Poverty): Growing up in poverty too often means living in poor quality housing which can have an impact on children’s health, well-being and education²³. Good quality housing is essential to people’s health and wellbeing. There is a clearly evidenced relationship between housing and poverty. These links are embedded throughout the poverty measures that we use, with figures available before and after housing costs. In 2019/20, individuals living in the social housing were at the highest risk of relative poverty, both before and after housing costs, at 25% and 32% respectively.



A range of research highlights that families on low incomes are more likely to live in overcrowded homes, with overcrowding being four times as prevalent in social-rented housing compared to owner occupation. The British Medical Association (2017) has also highlighted that many individuals on low incomes face ‘fuel poverty’, which results in them living in a cold, damp home leading to a higher risk of poor health outcomes as well as increased morbidity and mortality. This leads to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and mental health problems, as well as increased minor illnesses and exacerbation of existing conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism. Fuel poverty levels in Northern Ireland have fluctuated from 27% in 2001, to 44% in 2009 and 22% in 2016 as reported in the NI House Condition Survey. The most recent modelled fuel poverty estimate using the 2016 baseline data estimated a fuel poverty figure of 27% in 2022²⁴.

Outcome: Everyone has access to good quality, affordable and sustainable housing.

20 Dowler, Elizabeth, (2008) ‘Health and inequalities the challenge for sustaining just consumption’, Local Environment Vol 13 No 8 pp 759-772.

21 https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/234832021/Ryan_McGuire_Thesis.pdf

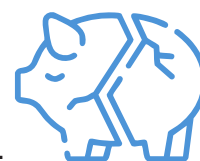
22 State of the Nation 2022 : A fresh approach to social mobility

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1084566/State_of_the_Nation_2022_A_fresh_approach_to_social_mobility.pdf, p3

23 As stated in L Pople, L Rodrigues and S Royston, 2013. “Through Young Eyes.” The Children’s Commission on Poverty. <https://production.basw.co.uk/policy-and-practice/resources/through-young-eyes-childrens-commission-poverty>

24 <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/working-with-us/research/house-condition-survey>

The Lived Experience of those in Poverty: Our stakeholders have told us that maximising the use of appropriate evidence in developing and implementing anti-poverty interventions and policies are essential in ensuring that supports are targeted at the areas where they will have the greatest impact. This was reflected in both the Expert Panel's report²⁵ and the Co-design Group's report²⁶.



We will take steps to involve those experiencing or at risk of poverty by taking forward policies and programmes within this strategy. This work will be delivered through a number of initiatives.

Outcome: Policies that are brought forward as part of this Strategy are focused on addressing the real life impacts of poverty and based on a range of evidence including lived experience.

Advice Services: Good quality advice services can help people find their way out of poverty. Common areas where advice is sought include welfare benefits, debt, housing, childcare and employment.



The JRF²⁷ has also stated that the voluntary sector, community groups and faith organisations offer lifelines enabling people to escape poverty and have a vital role in facilitating and enabling communities and individuals to reduce poverty locally. They explain that frontline providers of services and community and voluntary sector organisations are usually the first point of contact for people in poverty.

Outcome: People experiencing or at risk of poverty have access to free, quality-assured advice services.

²⁵ Report from the Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel | Department for Communities

²⁶ <https://www.nicva.org/article/members-of-the-dfc-anti-poverty-strategy-co-design-group-produce-key-recommendations-paper#:~:text=Members%20of%20the%20Department%20for%20Communities%20%28DfC%29%20Anti-Poverty>

²⁷ JRF. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016 . "We can solve poverty in the UK – a strategy for governments, business, communities and citizens."

Minimising the Impacts of Poverty:

Strategic commitments to be delivered in the first years of the Strategy:

- We will continue to deliver a package of welfare mitigations, keeping the level of support under review as resources and evidence become available, whilst lobbying Westminster on reform as appropriate. (Department for Communities)
- We will lobby Westminster to maintain the triple lock guarantee in relation to pension payments. (Department for Communities)
- We will develop and deliver a Fuel Poverty Strategy. We will also design and deliver a new Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Scheme – Warm, Healthy Homes. (Department for Communities)
- We will implement agreed changes that are designed to improve access to and delivery of Discretionary Support. (Department for Communities)
- We will continue to provide assistance with the payment of upfront childcare costs through the Adviser Discretion Fund. (Department for Communities)
- We will provide advice, increase awareness and provide focused support to ensure that older people, and children and adults with disabilities can access their full benefit entitlement. This will include a programme of work to promote Pension Credit uptake and delivery of the Make the Call wraparound service. (Department for Communities)
- The Executive will continue its commitment to ensure the Civil Service is a Living Wage employer. We will ensure that payment of the Living Wage must be included as a condition of contract for all tenders. (Executive/Department of Finance)
- Through a range of actions we will minimise the cost of school attendance, this will include continued provision of free school meals (FSM) and Uniform Grants (UG). (Department of Education)
- We will introduce legislation to ensure that school uniforms are affordable for all families. (Department of Education)
- We will develop and deliver a new Safer Communities Strategic Approach, based on Trauma Informed and Public Health approaches, with the aim of increasing community safety and confidence. (Department of Justice)

- We will develop and deliver a new People and Place Strategic Framework to deliver an effective and more integrated place-based approach to target deprivation, based on objective need. (Department for Communities)
- We will continue to deliver the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework, which invests in a range of collaborative initiatives to tackle rural poverty, isolation, loneliness and health and wellbeing issues. (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs)
- We will deliver the NI Food Strategy Framework to help focus collective efforts addressing significant societal challenges directly and indirectly linked to food. This will have impacts in relation to both people's health and food poverty. (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs)
- We will ensure that everyone, including those in or at risk of poverty, has access to good quality, affordable and sustainable homes. This will include work to tackle a range of issues including revitalisation of the Housing Executive and transformation of the Private Rented Sector. We will oversee the development of action plans as part of the implementation of the Executive Housing Supply Strategy. (Department for Communities)
- We will work with the Transforming Medication Safely NI (TMSNI) programme to support implementation of the Community Development Health Network (CDHN) 'Our Lives, Our Meds, Our Health' report to improve safe practices with medicines through addressing health inequalities. (Department of Health)
- We will continue the Healthy Start Scheme in Northern Ireland, which provides a pre-paid card for pregnant women and families with young children to access nutritious healthy food. This improves long term health for mothers and children and frees up household income for other needs and addresses health inequalities. (Department of Health)
- We will continue to work with the CDHN through the Building the Community Pharmacy Partnership (BCPP) programme to strengthen links between community groups and their local pharmacies, with actions targeted at the most deprived and impoverished communities in order to address health inequalities and the social determinants of health. (Department of Health)
- We will continue to support the advice sector to ensure that good quality, free, independent, advice is available to those living in or at risk of poverty. We will refresh the policy framework for delivery of advice to enhance collaboration and provide more integrated independent advice and debt services. (Department for Communities)

5. Supporting People to Exit Poverty



In order to tackle poverty in a long term and sustainable way, it is essential that we work with people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage in order to help them 'exit poverty'. This can be achieved by government working together with support services and families in a truly collaborative and complementary way. Through this approach we can tackle the long-term consequences of poverty.

Employment/Economic Conditions: Work has been identified as the most effective long-term way out of poverty for working age people, but to help ensure these routes are available we need to take steps to build our economy, grow productivity and create good quality jobs.



JRF (2021) states that **in-work poverty** has largely continued on an upward trend and stood at almost 13% in 2018/19. Research has stated that Northern Ireland's issue in relation to low pay relates to the private sector. Whereas jobs in the public sector paid on average the same as Great Britain, private sector pay was 16% lower²⁸).

Sissons, Green and Lee (2017)²⁹ present research that demonstrates there is a significant proportion of the workforce who are employed in **insecure and poor quality jobs**. This issue is further complicated by the number of people working on **temporary** and **zero hour contracts**.

Outcome: A strong and growing economy with a wide range of good jobs across both the public and private sector providing opportunities that are accessible to those in poverty.

28 T MacInnes, H Aldridge, A Parekh and P Kenway, 2012. "Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland." <https://www.jrf.org.uk/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-in-northern-ireland-2012>

29 P Sissons, A E Green and N Lee, 2018. "Linking the sectoral employment structure and household poverty in the United Kingdom." Work, Employment and Society, 32(6), pp1078-1098. https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/84204/7/Lee_Linking-the-sectoral.pdf

Gaining employment: There is no doubt that for those who can work, employment presents one of the best, most effective and sustainable routes out of poverty.³⁰



Research³¹ has noted that a father's and mother's entry into full time employment is significantly related to the chances of children exiting economic vulnerability. Barnard (2018) found that Northern Ireland had higher **worklessness** and **lower employment** than elsewhere in the UK and that the proportion of people in poverty in workless households, in contrast with the UK, has increased slightly over time.

Outcome: People will be able to access clear pathways to work and be supported in developing the skills and behaviours they need to access and prosper in the workplace.

Training and further education: While the importance of childhood education has already been referenced, it is also important to highlight that further education provides a route for adults to develop their skills and potentially exit poverty through higher paid employment. This also more broadly benefits us as a society by developing a more productive and competitive economy.



ONS 2015³², found that the level of qualifications an individual holds is related to their likelihood of exiting poverty when entering employment. Crisp, Gore and Pearson (2014)³³ state that in general terms, improved qualifications lead to better wages, and this can lift people out of poverty.

The Social Mobility Commission has also highlighted that participating in more training significantly increases the chances of escaping from low pay. However, low paid workers with limited or no qualifications, are significantly less likely to undertake training³⁴.

More recently in research published in February 2023, the Social Mobility commission highlighted that studying for a qualification in higher education (HE) or further education (FE) positively correlates with someone's future earnings³⁵.

Outcome: Young people and adults will be able to develop their skills and careers through a range of supported educational initiatives beyond school.

30 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation in their 2016 paper "We can solve poverty in the UK – A Strategy for governments, businesses, communities and citizens" clearly state that being in a job generally offers the best route out of poverty. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/we-can-solve-poverty-in-the-uk>

31 Maitre, Russell and Smyth (2021)

32 Office for National Statistics, 2015. Poverty and Employment Transitions in the UK and EU : 2007-2012. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/povertyandemploymenttransitionsintheukandeu/2015-03-10#:~:text=The%20percentage%20of%20people%20who,73%25%20in%202010%20to%202012.>

33 R Crisp, T Gore, and S Pearson, 2014. "Reducing poverty in the UK: A collection of evidence reviews." Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/22579/1/Reducing-poverty-reviews%20JRF.pdf>

34 Social Mobility Commission October 2020. Learning Ladders – The Role of Adult Training in supporting progression from Low Pay. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-ladders-adult-training-and-progression-out-of-low-pay/learning-ladders-the-role-of-adult-training-in-supporting-progression-from-low-pay>

35 Social Mobility Commission February 2023. Labour Market Value of Higher and Further Education Qualifications : A Summary. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/labour-market-value-of-higher-and-further-education-qualifications-a-summary-report/labour-market-value-of-higher-and-further-education-qualifications-a-summary-report>

Childcare: Supporting those with caring responsibilities, and in particular children, is also a key issue. By ensuring affordable childcare is available we can assist in enabling working families to increase the hours they work, playing an important part in helping them escape poverty³⁶.



HM Government (2014) claims that there is evidence of higher rates of worklessness in larger families, citing a combination of higher childcare costs and issues of co-ordination between different agencies (for example school, nursery and childminder) as factors likely to deter mothers of large families from entering the labour market.

Outcome: We will identify ways to assist socio-economically disadvantaged families in addressing gaps in childcare provision to ensure they can maximise their potential in the workplace.

Supporting People to Exit Poverty:

Strategic commitments to be delivered in the first years of the Strategy:

- We will prepare and deliver a programme which will offer inclusive pathways to work. (Department for Communities)
- We will address regional imbalance in our economy through the Sub-Regional Economic Plan to ensure that people have access to quality employment regardless of where they live. (Department of Economy)
- We will improve the quality of employment across the economy through a new Employment Rights Bill, a Good Jobs Charter and by increasing uptake of the real Living Wage through funding the NI franchise of the Living Wage Foundation. (Department of Economy)
- We will implement the all-age Careers Action Plan. (Department of Economy)
- We will deliver high quality, industry relevant skills and training programmes. We will implement the Skills, Careers and Apprenticeship Action Plans. (Department of Economy)
- A budget of £23m has been allocated in 2025/26 to provide a 15% childcare subsidy for working parents eligible to Tax Free Childcare. (Department of Education)
- We will bring forward a draft Early Learning and Childcare Strategy for public consultation to Executive colleagues in autumn 2025. (Department of Education)

6. Monitoring, Reporting and Governance

As the Strategy clearly demonstrates, dealing with poverty is not something that can be taken forward by one Department, or even the Executive, acting in isolation. It is only through meaningful and sustainable co-operation across all of society that we will be able to deliver on our strategic vision.

It is also essential that we acknowledge that this is a long term Strategy, and therefore it is important that we build flexibility and resilience into our governance and monitoring mechanisms which will allow us both to monitor the effectiveness of actions, but also update and react to changing circumstances and developments in the data available for tackling poverty.

Governance Structures

The Anti-Poverty Strategy remains an Executive Strategy and as such will be overseen at NICS level by a single **Anti-Poverty Strategy Board**. This Board will be Chaired by the Head of the Civil Service and attended by Senior Civil Service representatives from all Departments. This Board will meet regularly and will assess the effectiveness of the Strategy, agree changes and updates to the actions plans and sign off on formal reports.

The **Anti-Poverty Strategy Board** will be supported in this work by three **Pillar Sub-Committees**. These will be responsible for delivery under each of the Strategy's three pillars and will be chaired by a representative nominated by the Permanent Secretary for the relevant Department. **(Appropriate Department to be determined)**

- Minimising Risks (XX)
- Minimising Impact (XX)
- Exiting Poverty (XX)

Each Pillar Sub-Committee will be responsible for monitoring their progress on the action plan, identifying and adding new actions where this is appropriate and providing information as requested to the Anti-Poverty Strategy Board.

Consideration will also be given to how best to involve those with lived experience of Poverty and supporting organisations.

Monitoring

Each outcome will be underpinned by the action plan which will be updated on an ongoing basis.

To track the Strategy's progress against its vision and pillars, a number of indicators will be used to monitor progress over time.

Monitoring will also be undertaken at the levels of pillars. However, this will be undertaken in a pro-active and flexible manner. Each Sub-Committee will identify and source appropriate statistics

which match the current actions captured within their pillars. This will ensure a ‘live’ approach which allows for monitoring to reflect the current prioritised actions within each pillar.

Proposed Measures

Vision/Overall Strategy

- The percentage of individuals living in relative poverty after housing costs (AHC).
- The percentage of children living in relative poverty (AHC).
- The percentage of working age adults living in relative poverty (AHC).
- The percentage of pensioners living in relative poverty (AHC).

Pillars/Outcomes

1. Minimising the risk of falling into poverty

- Educational Attainment Gap – Difference between the percentage of non-free school meal entitled (non-FSME) school leavers and the percentage of FSME school leavers achieving at level 2 or above including GCSE English and Maths.
- Disability Employment Gap – Percentage in employment by disability status.
- Standardised Admission rate – Alcohol related/drug related causes.

2. Minimising the impacts of poverty

- Healthy life expectancy – (Gap between most and least deprived).
- Percentage of people who were victims of any NI safe community survey crime.
- Number of households in housing stress.

3. Supporting people to exit poverty

- Percentage of Employees earning on or above the Real Living Wage (aged 18 and over).
- Percentage who are economically inactive for any reason other than being a student (aged 16 to 64).
- Proportion of 16 to 24 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

While indicators are included under a particular pillar, it is expected that some indicators will inform aspects relevant to other pillars, and poverty overall.

Actions

While the high-level Strategy indicators outlined in the above section will provide a useful tool to monitor societal trends, it is important to recognise that they will also be influenced by many factors outside of the control of the Strategy. Therefore, it is also important to monitor the impact/effectiveness of each action within the strategy, as these are the activities which Departments control and can be held accountable for. Monitoring at action level also allows for earlier feedback, providing insight on what is working, allowing decisions to be taken quickly to amend actions if they are not producing the desired results.

Individual actions will be reported on by the owning Department.

Quality of the Indicators

All of the indicators are composed of official statistics produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Official statistics adhere to the Code of Practice for Statistics which outlines principles and practices to follow when producing statistics to ensure high quality, reliable outputs.

The indicators have been identified by NISRA statisticians in collaboration with policy colleagues to ensure they are relevant to demonstrate progress.

Where relevant, indicators have been chosen to match those included in the NI Executive's PfG Wellbeing Framework.

Reporting on Progress

Performance is assessed by comparing the most recent data point for an indicator with the baseline figure.

DfC will report annually on the progress of each indicator, the timing of which will be dependent on when additional data becomes available.

Future Development

The Department will engage with stakeholders and users to gather feedback on the current indicators. Indicators will be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate, identify and address any potential gaps, and to improve or replace existing measures as necessary.

For example, the Department is working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to develop a new measure of poverty, called "Below Averages Resources", which takes account of inescapable costs such as childcare. If development is successful, then this measure will be considered for inclusion.

To complement the chosen indicators, the Department will continue to monitor and publish a range of poverty measures including; Relative Poverty Before Housing Costs for individuals, children, working age adults and pensioners; Absolute Poverty Before and After Housing Costs for individuals, children, working age adults and pensioners; Children in low income and material deprivation; Persistent Poverty (published by DWP) and Food Poverty (published by DfC and Trussell). This will allow the story behind the overall trends to be identified.

In addition to this, work will continue with DWP and other colleagues in considering developing new, broader measures of poverty to help enhance our overview of this important area of the Executive's work.

Review

A formal mid-point review of the Anti-Poverty Strategy will be carried out by the Department for Communities and other Executive departments during its fifth year of operation. The findings of this report will be approved by the Executive and published on the Department for Communities website. This allows the Strategy to be flexible and reactive to emerging issues and needs.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Standard



**Northern Ireland
Executive**

www.northernireland.gov.uk

Ards and North Down Borough Council DRAFT Response to Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy Public Consultation

QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the vision included in the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- ☒ Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

1a. Please tell us why:

While the intention behind the vision is welcome, the wording should be strengthened to put the eradication of poverty at the forefront. The current phrasing places more emphasis on working together, with poverty reduction almost presented as a by-product. Flipping the focus to prioritise the *eradication of poverty* as the central goal—achieved through *collaborative, whole systems thinking*—would give the vision greater clarity, ambition, and urgency. This would better reflect the transformative change that is needed and the scale of commitment required across all sectors.

Alternative wording for a vision could be either of the following.

“Poverty will be sustainably eradicated across our communities through coordinated action, shared responsibility, and a whole-systems approach.”

“We will end poverty in Northern Ireland by working together, tackling its root causes, and building a fairer society for everyone.”

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the importance of the three pillars included in the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Pillar 1 Minimising Risk	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Pillar 2 Minimising Impacts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Pillar 3 Existing Poverty	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

Pillar 1- Outcomes Minimising Risks

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the six outcomes supporting Pillar 1 of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Childhood Education	X				
Family/Childhood Factors	X				
Debt	X				
Disability	X				
Substance use	X				
Ethnicity	X				

3a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the outcomes listed?

We welcome the inclusion of important risk factors like childhood education, family circumstances, debt, disability, substance use, and ethnicity. These all play a part in why people fall into poverty and must be addressed.

We recognise the importance of family in supporting positive outcomes for children and reducing poverty risk. However, references to a “good family structure” risk oversimplifying this issue. Families take many forms, and policy must reflect and support this diversity — including lone-parent, blended, and separated families, or those affected by bereavement or domestic violence. What matters most is a safe, stable, and nurturing environment, not adherence to a traditional model.

Support should focus on reducing financial pressure and improving access to childcare, mental health services, education, and employment. While two incomes can reduce short-term poverty risk, remaining in unsafe relationships can have lasting negative impacts on wellbeing and future outcomes. We urge the Strategy to adopt an inclusive, strengthened-based approach that values resilience and love in all family types, and avoids stigmatising children or parents based on family circumstances.

In Ards and North Down, a 2024 report showed that debt is a major reason people turn to food banks and social supermarkets. The evidence strong supports the inclusion of reducing debt as an important outcome.

Disability and long-term ill health are closely linked to economic inactivity. Many people with health issues or disabilities can’t work due to a lack of support, inclusive workplaces, or accessible transport. This often means relying on benefits that don’t cover the cost of living, which increases the risk of poverty.

In some areas, especially those with a long history of deprivation, poor health and unemployment are deeply connected and pass from one generation to the next. Tackling these needs joined-up work across health, jobs, and community support. Although some of these issues are picked up under other parts of the strategy, acting early to stop people from falling into poverty is the most effective way to end it.

Mental health is only referenced in the context of substance misuse within the draft Strategy, which significantly underplays its wider impact. Poor mental health is both a cause and consequence of poverty. It can affect a person's ability to access education, secure and sustain employment, manage relationships, and navigate essential services — all of which are critical to preventing and alleviating poverty. Mental health should be recognised as a key outcome, not only under Pillar Two (Public Services) but also within Pillar One (Preventing Poverty). A more prominent focus on mental health across the Strategy would help ensure that early intervention, access to support, and the reduction of stigma are prioritised as part of a whole-system approach to tackling poverty.

3b. Are there any other outcomes you feel should be included under this pillar?

We welcome the inclusion of key risk factors like childhood education, debt, disability, substance use, and ethnicity in the strategy. The 2024 Ards and North Down Poverty and Hardship Report highlights debt as a major cause of reliance on food banks locally, reflecting wider poverty challenges.

However, the strategy should also consider additional preventative factors. Housing issues—such as high costs, insecure tenancies, poor conditions, and homelessness—can both lead to and deepen poverty. Other important but less visible factors include poor mental health, low aspiration among young people, and paramilitary influence in some communities.

Economic inactivity linked to disability and long-term ill health further increases poverty risk, especially where support and accessible employment are lacking. A truly effective, whole-systems approach must be flexible and responsive to local contexts and emerging evidence to address the full complexity of poverty.

Pillar 2- Outcomes Minimising Impacts

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the eight outcomes supporting Pillar 1 of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Access to resources		X			
Access to education		X			
Physical and mental health		X			
Exposure to crime/safety	X				
Impact of place	X				
Housing	X				
Lived experience		X			
Advice services	X				

4a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the outcomes listed?

The outcomes aimed at minimising the impacts of poverty address important areas such as welfare support, fuel poverty, housing assistance, and advice services. However, some of these actions feel more passive—focused mainly on managing hardship—rather than actively easing the daily struggles people face while living in poverty.

To better support those currently experiencing poverty, the strategy could include more proactive measures to reduce immediate burdens. For example, expanding assistance with high energy, food, and transport costs would help ease financial pressure. Strengthening community safety and accessible local services can also improve wellbeing and social inclusion.

While prevention is rightly covered under a different pillar, this part of the strategy should focus on providing timely, practical support that improves people's quality of life and helps them manage the challenges poverty brings on a day-to-day basis.

4b. Are there any other outcomes you feel should be included under this pillar?

Practical interventions like reducing the rising costs of essentials—energy, food, and transport—can immediately ease pressure on low-income households. Targeted energy support, affordable public transport, and community food initiatives would help families keep more of their income.

It's also important to support people without fostering long-term dependency on Universal Credit or state benefits. This means investing in skills, education, affordable childcare, and sustainable pathways to good-quality work, especially for those facing additional barriers like disability or caring duties. Early years support and community resilience are key to breaking poverty cycles.

Finally, digital inclusion is crucial, as access to technology increasingly affects opportunities and daily life.

A strong Anti-Poverty Strategy should both alleviate hardship now and help people build independence and dignity for the future.

Pillar 3- Outcomes Existing Poverty

5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the four outcomes supporting Pillar 1 of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Employment/Economic Conditions	X				
Gaining employment	X				
Training and further education	X				
Childcare	X				

5a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the outcomes listed?

The strategy's emphasis on improving economic conditions, expanding employment opportunities, increasing access to further education, and providing affordable childcare is both welcome and essential. These areas are practical, evidence-based approaches that have consistently proven effective in helping people move out of poverty.

However, success depends not only on these broad priorities but also on ensuring that comprehensive, accessible support systems are in place to assist individuals at every stage of their journey. This includes tailored career guidance, skills development programs that match local labour market needs, and wraparound support such as mentoring and advice services to help people overcome barriers like disabilities, caring responsibilities, or long-term unemployment.

Affordable childcare is critical for enabling parents, particularly single parents, to enter or return to the workforce or pursue education and training. Similarly, removing structural barriers—such as inflexible work practices, transport challenges, and stigma—will be crucial to improving employment outcomes.

Furthermore, addressing regional economic disparities through targeted investment can help ensure opportunities are available regardless of where people live, reducing inequalities and creating more inclusive growth.

5b. Are there any other outcomes you feel should be included under this pillar?

To truly help people escape poverty, additional barriers must be tackled. Intergenerational dependence on Universal Credit has become normalised in some communities due to lack of opportunity and deep-rooted disadvantage, requiring long-term investment in early intervention and whole-family support.

Paramilitary influence in certain areas also restricts freedom and opportunity, demanding coordinated efforts across poverty reduction, community safety, and peacebuilding.

Benefit rules can discourage full-time study or reskilling, limiting progression; these should be reviewed to better support career advancement.

Affordable, reliable transport—especially in rural areas—is vital for accessing jobs, training, and services, yet often overlooked.

A flexible, person-centred approach that reflects people's real lives and potential is essential to help families not just survive poverty but leave it behind.

Pillar 1 – ACTIONS – Minimising Risks

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these actions will deliver the outcomes of Pillar 1 as laid out in the draft Strategy document?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- ☒ Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

6a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the actions listed under this pillar?

The first-year actions show a positive commitment to early intervention, education, financial wellbeing, and targeted family support. Programmes like the Extended Schools Programme and Healthy Child Healthy Future address key risk factors, while plans for a Debt Respite Scheme recognise financial pressures on low-income households.

However, these actions are just a start. The strategy must also tackle broader structural issues such as secure employment, affordable housing and transport, and a benefits system that encourages progression rather than dependency. The ongoing research into the two-child limit is important and should quickly inform policy change due to its proven harm.

Future plans should prioritise cross-departmental, whole-system approaches, including input from those with lived experience, and address community-level challenges like paramilitary influence, mental health access, and digital exclusion—areas not yet reflected in this initial plan.

We have been advised that there is a notable lack of awareness among first-time working parents about the range of financial support available to them. Many are unaware of top-up benefits such as Universal Credit childcare support or tax credits, particularly if they have never previously engaged with the benefits system.

Improving access to this information could play a key role in preventing child poverty by ensuring families are not missing out on vital support due to a lack of awareness. Overall, these commitments provide a foundation but must lead to more ambitious, joined-up, and long-term action.

6b. Are there any other action you feel should be included under this pillar?

The strategy must address the root causes of poverty, including access to education, healthcare, mental health, and substance use support. While the first-year actions are welcome, most reflect existing programmes. With poverty rising, new, ambitious, systemic interventions are needed.

Key gaps include:

- Affordable, accessible transport, especially in rural and low-income areas, essential for accessing work, education, and services.
- Affordable housing and stronger tenant protections, currently overlooked despite being major poverty drivers.

- Better mental health support, as poor mental health both causes and results from poverty, but services remain underfunded.
- Specific first-year actions on affordable childcare to enable parents, particularly women, to work or study.
- Welfare policy reforms to reduce barriers in Universal Credit that discourage study or part-time work, favouring support over penalties.
- Community-level efforts to tackle paramilitary influence, intergenerational worklessness, and low aspiration in deprived areas.

To truly reduce poverty, the strategy must go beyond sustaining current programmes and deliver bold, joined-up actions that transform the underlying conditions enabling poverty.

Pillar 2 – ACTIONS – Minimising Impacts

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these actions will deliver the outcomes of Pillar 2 as laid out in the draft Strategy document?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- ☒ Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

7a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the actions listed under this pillar?

The strategic commitments to minimise the impacts of poverty are welcome, and many of the actions—such as welfare mitigations, fuel poverty interventions, access to advice, and housing support—are essential for people who are already experiencing hardship. These services make a meaningful difference in people's daily lives. These actions are largely continuations of existing programmes, and while many are helpful, they may not go far enough in tackling the underlying causes or changing the conditions that perpetuate poverty.

Through a Health and Research Project running as part of our Labour Market Partnership, it has become clear that there is a significant lack of awareness among working individuals regarding how employment affects their benefit entitlements. Many people continue to believe that working more than 16 hours per week will result in the complete loss of benefits, despite the introduction of Universal Credit tapering. This misconception can discourage people from increasing their working hours or seeking better-paid employment.

7b. Are there any other action you feel should be included under this pillar?

Most current actions are existing programmes that ease poverty's effects but don't change the systems trapping people in poverty. To reduce crisis levels, bolder, preventative steps are needed.

Key gaps include:

- Radical improvements to affordable transport, especially for rural and low-income areas.

- Reform of welfare policies to remove penalties on those trying to improve their situation, like studying or part-time work.
- Increased access to mental health support as a core poverty prevention tool.
- Strengthening community resilience by tackling paramilitary influence and involving communities in solutions.
- More investment in place-based, preventative services like family support and early intervention.
- Tackling digital exclusion by ensuring access to technology and skills.
- Involving people with lived experience in shaping and assessing poverty strategies.

Current commitments help but must be part of a transformational approach addressing both causes and effects, or poverty will outpace our efforts.

We recommend that the strategy includes targeted communication efforts to address the gap in understanding of how working hours affect benefit entitlement. This could include drop-in clinics or outreach sessions in partnership with employers and Job and Benefits Offices (JBOs), where staff can use benefit calculators to demonstrate how individuals may be financially better off by increasing their hours. Information packs or fact sheets distributed directly to Universal Credit claimants, clearly explaining how earnings affect entitlements and highlighting available support such as childcare elements could also be useful.

Pillar 3 – ACTIONS – Existing poverty

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these actions will deliver the outcomes of Pillar 3 as laid out in the draft Strategy document?

Strongly Agree
 Agree
 X Neither agree nor disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree

8a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the actions listed under this pillar?

The strategic actions aimed at helping people exit poverty are welcome. Steps to improve skills, job quality, childcare, and access to regional employment are all important parts of the solution. The focus on a Good Jobs Charter, a new Employment Rights Bill, and inclusive pathways to work shows a commitment to raising standards and supporting more people into decent, sustainable employment.

8b. Are there any other action you feel should be included under this pillar?

The strategy's focus on work, childcare, skills, and employment rights is important and should continue. However, escaping poverty often requires more than just a job, especially for those with complex needs or deep-rooted disadvantages.

The strategy fails to consider pension poverty that can trap older people in long-term hardship, particularly those who are not entitled to Pension Credit or other means-

tested support. The way support is currently structured means that pensioners who narrowly miss out on entitlement can end up financially worse off than those who qualify, due to the loss of access to additional benefits such as help with housing, heating, and healthcare costs. This creates an unfair “cliff edge” that penalises modest savings or small private pensions. As highlighted in Ards and North Down’s Hardship and Poverty Report, pensioner poverty limits older people’s ability to participate fully in society, support younger family members, or afford essentials—undermining both dignity and wellbeing in later life. Addressing these gaps is vital to reducing poverty across all age groups and preventing intergenerational disadvantage.

Additional actions to consider include:

- Expanding wraparound support covering housing, mental health, addiction, debt advice, and confidence-building.
- Creating transitional job schemes with training and mentoring for those not ready for open employment.
- Reforming welfare rules to remove disincentives that trap people in low-paid work or restrict progression.
- Investing in social enterprises and community wealth building to create local jobs and sustainable income.
- Supporting whole families through parenting, early years, and integrated care to break cycles of poverty.
- Building financial resilience with literacy programmes and access to affordable credit.
- Embedding peer support and involving people with lived experience in service design and delivery.

Jobs and training matter, but people need security, dignity, and real choices. A flexible, person-centred approach is key to lasting exits from poverty.

Headline Indicators

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these headline indicators as laid out in the draft Strategy document?

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☒ Neither agree nor disagree

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

9a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the headline indicators?

We welcome the inclusion of headline indicators to measure progress in tackling poverty, as it is vital that the strategy is accountable and focused on outcomes. However, we would urge a broader and more nuanced set of indicators that better reflect the lived reality of poverty in Northern Ireland and the complexity of its causes

and consequences. Measures such as material deprivation help reflect what families can afford, beyond just income.

We support the inclusion of headline measures based on relative poverty after housing costs, as these help to track income inequality and the impact of housing on household finances. Breaking down the data by life stage (children, working-age adults, and pensioners) is also useful and allows for more targeted policy responses. Data disaggregated by age, disability, geography or household type is essential for targeting action.

9b. Are there any other headline indicators you feel should be included here?

These measures are not enough to fully understand the scale, depth, or lived experience of poverty in Northern Ireland.

We recommend including additional indicators to give a complete and more meaningful picture, such as:

- **Persistent poverty:** How many people remain in poverty over multiple years? This would help identify long-term poverty rather than just short-term income dips.
- **Poverty depth:** An indicator showing how far below the poverty line people fall would reflect the severity of deprivation.
- **Material deprivation:** Tracking whether households can afford basic goods and services (e.g. heating, suitable clothing, a warm meal) shows whether income translates into actual wellbeing.
- **In-work poverty:** A growing number of people in poverty are working. Measuring poverty among employed adults is essential to address low pay, insecure contracts, and lack of progression.
- **Access to essential services:** Indicators on childcare, transport, digital access, and health services would reflect structural barriers that prevent people escaping poverty.
- **Debt and financial stress:** Rising debt and lack of savings can trap people in poverty. Indicators on financial resilience would capture this.

Finally, we strongly recommend including qualitative data or indicators based on lived experience. Understanding how people in poverty rate their own wellbeing, dignity, and opportunities would add vital context to the headline statistics. A more rounded set of indicators would ensure the strategy tackles not only income poverty, but also its drivers, impacts, and the conditions that allow people to exit it sustainably.

Pillar 1 Indicators – Minimising Risks

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these pillar level indicators appropriately monitor progress towards the Pillar one outcomes as laid out in the draft Strategy document?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- X Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

10a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the pillar 1 indicators?

These are useful starting indicators for Pillar 1: Minimising the Risk of Falling into Poverty and they reflect the role of education, health, and employment inequality in poverty risk. However, they are quite limited in scope and do not fully reflect the range of risk factors that can lead people into poverty. These are reflective of what we can (or already) measure rather than what we need to measure.

10b. Are there any other indicators you feel should be included here?

The proposed indicators are too narrow to fully measure the complex and interrelated factors that contribute to poverty risk. We suggest that a broader range of indicators be included to give a more complete picture and to support earlier, more preventative interventions.

Additional or alternative indicators to consider include:

1. Early childhood development: Include measures such as the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1. Early years outcomes are key predictors of later poverty risk.
2. School attendance and exclusions: Chronic absenteeism or exclusions are strong warning signs of vulnerability and future disadvantage.
3. Youth engagement: Include the percentage of 16–24 year olds not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This is a well-established indicator of future poverty risk.
4. Mental health prevalence: Poor mental health is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Include prevalence data or self-reported mental health scores, particularly among working-age adults and young people.
5. Access to affordable housing: Housing stress is a key trigger for falling into poverty. Include the percentage of households spending more than a third of income on housing, or numbers on the social housing waiting list.
6. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): Where data is available, ACEs are closely linked to long-term disadvantage and poverty risk.
7. Debt levels or financial insecurity: Include indicators related to problem debt or inability to cope with unexpected expenses (e.g. from Family Resources Survey or FRS data).
8. Transport access: Lack of affordable and reliable transport can limit education, work, and services, particularly in rural areas.

While the current indicators are relevant, they risk missing key dimensions of poverty prevention, especially around early intervention, mental health, housing, and financial resilience.

Pillar 2 Indicators – Minimising Impact

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these pillar level indicators appropriately monitor progress towards the Pillar two outcomes as laid out in the draft Strategy document?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- X Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

11a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the pillar 2 indicators?

The proposed indicators are relevant to Pillar 2: Minimising the Impacts of Poverty, but they offer a limited view of how poverty affects people's lives. They touch on health, safety, and housing, which are vital — but more is needed to capture the breadth of poverty's impacts and how well support systems are working.

11b. Are there any other indicators you feel should be included here?

To fully understand and respond to the impact of poverty, we recommend that additional indicators be considered. These could better reflect financial stress, social isolation, stigma, and the effectiveness of public support.

Additional or alternative indicators might include:

1. Food insecurity – Track the percentage of households experiencing food poverty or using foodbanks.
2. Fuel poverty – Include data on households spending a high proportion of income on energy, especially in rural or older housing.
3. Financial resilience – An indicator on the ability to cope with unexpected expenses (e.g. from Family Resources Survey) would highlight stress and lack of safety nets.
4. Access to advice services – Measuring how many people are accessing independent, free advice (debt, welfare, housing) and the outcomes of those services would show how well systems are helping people.
5. Mental health impacts – Include data on anxiety, depression or emotional distress among people living in poverty, especially children and lone parents.
6. School attendance for low-income pupils – Absenteeism linked to poverty (e.g. illness, lack of uniforms, caring responsibilities) is a clear impact with long-term consequences.
7. Transport poverty – Where transport costs are high or public transport is limited, people in poverty can become isolated or unable to access jobs, services or education. An indicator on transport access or costs would reflect this impact.

8. Digital exclusion – Lack of access to broadband or digital devices can limit participation in education, work and benefit systems.
9. Loneliness/social isolation – Especially for older people or rural communities in poverty, social connection is both an outcome and protective factor.
10. Take-up of entitlements – Measuring the uptake of benefits such as Pension Credit or Universal Credit could help identify gaps in support delivery.

The current indicators should be expanded to reflect the real, everyday consequences of poverty and the success of the supports meant to reduce them. Without this, the full impact of poverty remains hidden, and interventions may miss key areas of need.

Pillar 3 Indicators – Existing Poverty

12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these pillar level indicators appropriately monitor progress towards the Pillar three outcomes as laid out in the draft Strategy document?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- ☒ Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

12a. Do you have any further comments to make on any of the pillar 3 indicators?

The indicators for Pillar 3: Supporting People to Exit Poverty are helpful and well-aligned with key drivers of economic participation. However, they do not fully reflect the barriers people face in trying to move out of poverty — such as low-paid or insecure work, lack of childcare, limited transport, and restrictive welfare rules.

12b. Are there any other indicators you feel should be included here?

More indicators are needed that reflect the real barriers people face in trying to exit poverty.

Additional indicators could include:

- In-work poverty – to show that having a job doesn't always mean escaping poverty.
- Underemployment – people who want more hours or better jobs.
- Access to childcare and transport – key barriers to work or study, especially for parents and rural communities.
- Quality of jobs – not just having a job, but job security, progression and fair pay.
- Digital access and skills – essential for job hunting and learning.
- Debt or lack of savings – financial stress makes it hard to move forward.
- Pension poverty - often goes unnoticed, yet it affects quality of life, health, and access to services, particularly for older women and those without private pensions.

These would give a fuller picture of how well the strategy is supporting people out of poverty.

Equality Impact Assessment

13. Are there any data, needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in the EQIA document?

It is important to ensure that the needs of all Section 75 equality categories are considered and that any data gaps are addressed. This includes ensuring that data is collected on the impact of digital inclusion and access to technology.

14. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in the EQIA Consultation document?

It is important to ensure that any adverse impacts on Section 75 equality groups are identified and addressed. This includes ensuring that the needs of individuals with disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds are considered.

15. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts emerging from implementation of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Actions to reduce or eliminate adverse impacts should include ensuring that all individuals have access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This includes providing support for mental health and substance use issues and addressing the impact of digital inclusion and access to technology.

Final Comments

16. Is there anything further you'd like to add or comment on in relation to the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy?

While the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy sets out useful pillars and actions, it lacks new, bold measures to address the growing scale of poverty. A whole-systems approach is needed—one that tackles root causes, joins up services, and is based on evidence of what works.

- **Poverty is deepening despite current efforts.** Most listed actions are already underway, yet hardship is rising. A step change is needed, not more of the same.
- **Prevention must be central.** Early intervention—through affordable housing, mental health support, family services, and tackling rural isolation—is essential, as highlighted in Ards and North Down's Poverty and Hardship Report.
- **The system must work better for people.** The welfare system is often rigid and stressful. Barriers like delays, sanctions, and restrictions on study can trap people in poverty.
- **Intergenerational poverty must be tackled.** Long-term disadvantage, low aspiration, trauma, and paramilitary influence require sustained, targeted interventions.
- **Local, place-based solutions matter.** Poverty varies by area. Councils and community groups should be supported to respond flexibly to local needs—especially in rural areas.

- **Lived experience and local data are vital.** Ongoing co-design and use of council-level data, like that from Ards and North Down, should shape and monitor delivery.
- **Cost-of-living pressures need urgent action.** Rising costs for essentials demand continued emergency support alongside longer-term solutions.

Overall, the strategy must be more ambitious, proactive, and responsive to the realities of poverty across Northern Ireland.

Unclassified

245

ITEM 12

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 July 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community and Culture
Date of Report	30 May 2025
File Reference	ART 05/R2/25
Legislation	The Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Arts Project Grants Round 2
Attachments	None

The second round of the Arts Project Grants for 2025-2026 opened for application on Tuesday 1 April 2025 with a deadline of Tuesday 13 May 2025. The grants were advertised in the local press, social media and on the Councils web site.

An assessment panel met on Tuesday 27 May to assess 8 applications received by the closing date. The panel comprised of the following Ards & North Down Council Officers:

- Emma Keenan, PCSP Officer
- Moira O'Rourke, Heritage Development Officer
- Amy McKelvey, Community Arts Development Officer

A maximum of £1,000 can be applied for per application.

Not Applicable

246

Table 1 below provides a summary of the applications, the scores received and comments.

	Name of Organisation	Requested Amount	Project	Score	Comments	Award Rec
1	Ards Camera Club	£1000	Waterways of North Down & Ards	56	Did not provide sufficient detail of the facilitators which is required for scoring	0
2	Boom! Studios	£1000	Eco Artists – The Art of Environmental Sustainability	90	Excellent application and valuable project to develop environmental skills of local artists	£1000
3	Hollywood Shared Town	£1000	World Music Concert Series for Primary Schools	84	Impressive project with local Primary Schools and Beyond Skin music engagement	£1000
4	Kilcooley Women's Centre	£1000	Bangor Uke Ladies	70	Good project however KWC have already received max funding per group in this financial year	£0
5	Kilmood Art Club	£760	Art in the Community	68	Accessible and varied arts workshops	£760
6	Northern Attitudes	£1000	Hollywood Scratch Night	50	Lack of clarity and focus in project description. Unclear outcomes.	£0
7	Orchardville	£960	Orchardville Performs	90	Excellent application and project working with vulnerable adults	£960
8	Portaferry Gala Festival	£636	Sewing the Scene – Festival Flags & Bunting	56	Budget and evidence need for project was poor	£0
	Total	£7,356				£3,720

The available budget was £3,810 and applications totalled £7,356. The pass mark was 60%. Three applications scored below the pass mark due to a lack of information, unclear outcomes, perceived need for the projects, and poor budgeting. Kilcooley Women's Centre scored above the pass mark but have already received the maximum amount of funding for this financial year so are not eligible to receive further funding until 26/27. Four other organisations scored above the pass mark and are eligible for funding making the total amount of funding recommended £3,720.

This round of funding was administered using the Councils previous grants policy. An updated application pack will be brought to the Community and Wellbeing Committee meeting in September 2025 for approval under the new grants policy prior to the 2026/2027 scheme being launched.

Not Applicable

247

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the 4 successful applications and awards detailed in table 1, totalling £3,720.

Unclassified

248

ITEM 13

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	10 September 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community and Culture
Date of Report	10 July 2025
File Reference	GREL433
Legislation	The Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Additional Funding to Support Social and Racial Cohesion
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Application for additional funding to support social and racial cohesion Appendix 2-Draft consultation response DoF Audit of inequalities

Following the recent social unrest in Ballymena in June 2025 that led to heightened racial tensions across Northern Ireland. The Executive Office offered to support councils in delivering projects to support social and racial cohesion as part of wider delivery under the District Councils Good Relations Plan, (DCGRP). An additional resource of up to £20K per council was made available. The additional resource does not require match funding.

The priority focus of the funding is to involve local groups in projects delivering fast paced interventions to improve social and racial cohesion in the local area.

Given the short notice of this possibility, officers undertook to make an application and this was submitted to TEO by the closing date of 8th July 2025, with TEO being

Not Applicable

249

made aware that if successful the use of the funding would first need to be approved by Council.

The bid was approved by TEO and the sum of £20,000 has been offered.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers the offer and accepts the additional funding towards its Good Relations Action Plan, to be used to develop projects that will support social and racial cohesion in the Borough.



APPLICATION FOR FURTHER FUNDING TO ADDRESS RACIAL TENSIONS / IMPROVE SOCIAL COHESION

TOTAL AMOUNT BID FOR: £20,000

1. Please outline the emerging / existing need in your council area, relating to issues around social / racial cohesion

Ards and North Down Borough Council areas is host to asylum seekers in a local hotel. Protests have been a regular occurrence outside the hotel since 2022. Although peaceful to date, the number of protestors attending has increased. Those present are often misinformed about the service users in the hotel and this can be observed by their banners/placards.

ANDBC has also recently seen an increase in racial targeting on individuals living in local areas and towards landlords who are renting their houses as HMO's. Graffiti, classed as race hate, in a number of local estates has also increased.

Funding could be used to help to address social cohesion and assist the GR team with resources to use in local communities to help those living there understand the culture of newcomers being located in their communities, while helping newcomers become aware of the culture in NI.

Ballyholme Beach in Bangor has experienced racial ASB which was amplified through social media, including derogatory comments and inciting hatred.

Tensions are also increasing between asylum seekers within the hotel between cultures. It can be difficult to communicate especially as English is not their first language together with the uncertainty of the future for those housed there.

Concerns have also been raised in relation to those using social media to target individuals working locally with asylum seekers and resulting in fears for safety. Local businesses have also witnessed an increase in race hate incidents.

PSNI statistics for the last 365 days for Ards & North Down District:

Hate Crime has risen by 58.6% (58 to 92 crimes) –

Hate Incidents (ie No Crime) has risen by 36.1% (133 to 181 incidents) - Race Hate accounted for 110 of the 181 incidents and actually rose by 39.2%



2. Please provide a brief summary of any proposed intervention strategy, including how it focuses on supporting local project delivery, achieves value for money and aligns to one or more key aims of the T:BUC Strategy

The following aligns with T:BUC key aims of Our Safe Community and Our Shared Community.

The Good Relations team would welcome additional funding to help better inform local communities of the facts and some myth busting in relation to asylum seekers and refugees.

Funding would be used to inform communities through lived experience as this has been proven to be a powerful tool when attempting to break down barriers.

Discussions will be held, in due course, with local women's groups to initiate integration and inclusion between them and women in the hotel. It can be difficult to build relationships as the service users in the hotel are being moved on quite quickly.

Discussions will include awareness raising of how the women have fled persecution in their own countries and just want a safe space to call home for themselves and their families.

Working with the local communities can also help identify families living in the local areas who may also need support and friendship that can lead to better integration.

Training will be offered for councillors around immigration.

Training will be offered to service users in the hotel regarding culture and expectations when living in Northern Ireland, local information on Esol classes and other relevant programmes. Also how to integrate into the communities, if they are granted refugee status.

Good Relations officers will approach local communities that are displaying signs of racial tension to offer them support, should funding be awarded. Areas to approach will be:

Bloomfield, Bangor

Redburn, Holywood

Whitehill, Bangor

Council procurement guidance will be followed at all times to ensure best value for money is achieved.



3. Please outline how the impact of the additional funding on racial / social cohesion will be measured

OBA's, provided by TEO, will be used for all programmes including pre and post evaluations and one off events.

The use of the OBA format will enhance the existing statistics.

As well as OBA's, Good Relations will work with PSNI to gather information and statistics.

Other methods to gather evidence will include:

Observation of protests.

Engagement of service users.

Engagement of Councillors.

Engagement of community groups.

Reduction of observed racial hatred locally.

PLEASE NOTE

1. Any funding received through this scheme remains subject to the terms and conditions of the DCGRP, as per your existing 2025/26 Letter of Offer.
2. The extra funding **does not require** matched funding.
3. The desire is to see money flow through the council to local groups in their area where possible.
4. Upon written confirmation of a successful application, councils may commence delivery immediately – Letters of Variance will be drafted in due course.
5. Applications must be submitted by **5pm on 8 July 2025**.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

Q1. Do the proposed action plans demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations?

Yes, the proposed action plans in the document demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.

Please give reasons for your answer:

1. Demonstrated Commitment to Promoting Equality of Opportunity:

Addressing Under-representation in Recruitment (Annex A - "Recruitment, Advertising, Marketing and Outreach"): The action plan directly tackles under-representation of specific Section 75 groups within the NICS workforce.

- Religious Belief: Actions include targeted outreach, broad advertising, Positive Action Advertising, and annual review of community background composition to address imbalances.
- Gender: Similar to religious belief, there are plans for targeted outreach, diverse advertising, and regular monitoring of gender composition in the workforce and applicant pools.
- Age: The plan seeks to diversify the age composition through targeted outreach to education sectors, promoting work experience schemes, and expanding entry routes like apprenticeships and student placements.
- Racial Groups: Actions include targeted outreach to minority ethnic communities, promoting career opportunities through various channels, and working towards the Race at Work Charter commitments. The report notes an increase in NICS staff from a minority ethnic background from 0.3% in 2017 to 0.5% in 2023, and female representation at senior levels has risen from 37.6% in 2017 to 42.8% in 2023.
- Disability: The plan outlines targeted outreach with the disability sector, promoting NICS career opportunities, and Positive Action Advertising. The audit acknowledges the need for an improved reasonable adjustment process and notes that the proportion of Civil Service staff who have declared a disability is lower than the economically active population.

2. Improving Data Collection (Section 3.9): The Department acknowledges significant gaps in Section 75 data, particularly for disability (44.5% missing at 1 Jan 2024) and sexual orientation (66.4% missing at 1 Jan 2024). The launch of a communications campaign in November 2023 to increase declaration rates, resulting in a 2% reduction for disability data and 7% for sexual orientation data from January 2023 to January 2024, demonstrates a commitment to building an evidence base for future actions.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

3. Policy and Peer Support for Diverse Groups (Section 3.5): The document highlights the introduction and updating of policies to be more inclusive, such as the Menopause Policy, Domestic and Sexual Abuse Policy, NICS Trans Equality Policy, and various guides and toolkits. The establishment of new staff networks (Disability, Race and Ethnicity, Cancer Support, Student) alongside existing ones (LGBTQ+, Women's) signifies a commitment to supporting diverse groups within the NICS.

4. Addressing Inequalities in Services to the Citizen (Section 3.17, 3.19, 3.20): Digital Access: Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services explicitly address inequalities in access to government services for older people and persons with disabilities through the Digital Inclusion Programme, partnerships with organisations like Age Friendly Network, and bespoke training.

5. Land and Property Services (LPS): While the audit found no direct evidence of inequality in LPS's operational delivery on S75 grounds, LPS continues to adapt services for particular customer groups (e.g., payment options, tailored support, translation services) and plans to further improve understanding of customer needs, review complaints procedures, and develop a Frontline Customer Framework with consideration for vulnerable customers.

6. Learning and Development Adjustments (Section 3.5): NICSHR's steps to adapt training materials and delivery methodologies for staff with disabilities or dependents (e.g., asking about specific needs, regional/virtual options, screen reader compatibility, flexible start times, childcare policy) show a proactive approach to promoting equality of opportunity in professional development.

7. Demonstrated Commitment to Promoting Good Relations:

Inclusive Workplace Culture (Section 3.5): Initiatives like increased visibility and understanding of diversity and inclusion through attendance at events (PRIDE, Belfast Mela), and the development of resources such as the LGBTQ+ Role Models Guide and Inclusive Language Guide, contribute to fostering an inclusive workplace culture.

8. Staff Networks (Section 3.5): The establishment and support of various staff networks (Disability, Race and Ethnicity, LGBTQ+, Women's, Cancer Support, Student) facilitate peer support and understanding among different groups, which can contribute to good relations.

9. Addressing Pension Inequalities (Section 3.10): NICSHR's action to introduce legislation to remedy discrimination in pensions for male survivors of opposite-sex marriages/civil partnerships and same-sex partners demonstrates a commitment to fairness and good relations, especially in areas that have historically caused friction.

10. Cross-Departmental Collaboration on Mental Health (Section 3.11): The Mental Health Forum initiated by NICSHR, aiming to share learning and best practices across the NICS, indirectly contributes to good relations by fostering a supportive and understanding environment for mental well-being across different groups.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

11. NISRA's Data Harmonisation (Section 3.13, 3.14): By working to ensure cross-government harmonised standards and guidance for Section 75 variables, NISRA is promoting consistent data collection and reporting, which can lead to better understanding and more targeted interventions for various groups, thereby contributing to good relations by ensuring data is inclusive and comparable.

12. Engagement with Equality Commission (Section 3.16, Annex A): Finance Division's engagement with the Equality Commission to ensure its budget development aligns with Equality Scheme commitments, and the commitment in Annex A to engage with ECNI annually to review progress on the action plans, demonstrate a clear intent to work with the relevant oversight body to promote equality and good relations.

Q2. Do the proposed action plans demonstrate the Department's commitment to complying with its statutory duties to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public life?

Yes, the proposed action plans demonstrate a strong commitment to complying with the Department's statutory duties to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life. This commitment is evident through both past achievements highlighted in the audit and the specific actions outlined in the draft Section 75 Action Plan (Annex A) and implied within the Disability Action Plan (referenced as Annex B).

Please give reasons for your answer:

1. Explicit Recognition of Statutory Duties (Section 1.3, Footnote 1):

The document directly states the Department's statutory duties under Section 75(1) and 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which includes "due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity" (which encompasses disability).

Crucially, Footnote 1 explicitly references Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act, which "places a duty on public authorities to prepare a plan outlining how they propose to have due regards to the need to: i. promote positive attitudes towards disabled people, and ii. encourage participation by disabled people in public life." This direct mention confirms the Department's awareness and acknowledgement of these specific duties.

2. Comprehensive Audit of Inequalities (Section 3.1, 3.2):

The undertaking of a "further audit of inequalities in 2024" that specifically included a review of the existing Disability Action Plan demonstrates a proactive approach to understanding and addressing issues related to disabled people.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

The assessment of the Civil Service workforce profile across Section 75 groups, incorporating feedback from external benchmarking exercises like "Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive Accreditation," and internal staff networks, shows a dedicated effort to identify areas for improvement.

3. Past Progress and Achievements (Section 3.5, 3.8):

The document highlights significant progress made since the last audit (2018-2024) in strengthening the NICS's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion for disabled people:

Diversification of NICS workforce: Specific initiatives mentioned include:

- Outreach to under-represented groups, including disabled people.
- Launch of a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for disabled applicants.
- Development of a Ring-Fencing Policy for successful disabled applicants.
- Facilitation of work experience opportunities.

4. Increased Visibility and Understanding: Attendance at events like the "Harkin International Summit" implies engagement with disability-focused discussions.

5. Policy and Peer Support: Establishment of a new Disability Staff Network during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Learning and Development: NICS's steps to address training material/delivery suitability for staff with disabilities by:

- Asking staff for specific needs/adjustments upon enrolment.
- Adapting course materials, methodologies, and venues.
- Offering regional training and virtual learning options compatible with screen reading software.

7. External Benchmarking: The NICS has achieved "Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive accreditation," demonstrating recognition from a specialist body in this area.

8. Addressing Remaining Inequalities (Section 3.8, 3.9, Annex A):

The audit clearly identifies areas where inequalities continue to impact disabled people:

"An improved reasonable adjustment process to better support disabled applicants and colleagues and to meet the duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995)." This directly acknowledges the need for practical support for participation.

"The proportion of Civil Service staff who have declared a disability is lower than the economically active population." This highlights the ongoing challenge in encouraging participation.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

Significant gaps in disability data (44.5% missing at 1 January 2024) are acknowledged, and the communications campaign launched in November 2023 to increase declaration rates directly supports the evidence base needed to monitor progress and inform future actions for disabled people.

9. Proposed Actions in Annex A (Recruitment, Advertising, Marketing and Outreach for "Persons with a disability"):

"By Autumn 2025 deliver a communications and outreach plan with targeted outreach activity, including strengthening existing links with the disability sector." This directly addresses promoting positive attitudes and encouraging participation by actively engaging with the disabled community.

"Promote NICS career opportunities using a broad range of advertising channels, as well as Positive Action Advertising to target under-represented groups." This includes disabled people.

"Targeted outreach activity with the disability sector to raise awareness..."

10. Digital Inclusion for Disabled People (Section 3.17):

The "Digital Inclusion Programme activities" of Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services explicitly target "Persons with a disability" to encourage digital participation. This is a concrete step to enable participation in modern public services.

11. Increased partnership with organisations on the Digital Assist Steering Group and engagement with organisations representing people with disabilities on training, awareness, and review of signage/communications directly promotes positive attitudes and encourages participation by ensuring accessibility.

Q3. Are the proposed actions appropriate to meet that compliance? If not, why and what actions should the Department be taking?

The proposed action plans largely demonstrate an appropriate commitment to meeting the Department's statutory duties to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life. The document outlines a commendable range of existing initiatives and new proposals.

1. Explicit Duty Recognition: The document's explicit mention of Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act (Footnote 1) and its corresponding duties is a strong starting point. It shows the Department understands its legal obligations.
2. Comprehensive Scope: The actions cover various key areas:
 - Employment (NICS as an employer): This is a significant focus, covering recruitment, retention, and career progression. Actions like the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, Ring-Fencing Policy for disabled applicants, and targeted outreach are direct and appropriate ways to encourage participation in public life (through employment in the Civil Service).

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

- Workplace Support: Measures like reviewing the reasonable adjustment process, establishing the Disability Staff Network, and adapting learning and development are vital for fostering positive attitudes and enabling participation once employed. The focus on mental health support is also highly relevant.
3. Service Delivery: Addressing digital inclusion for disabled people (Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services) and improving customer understanding and accessibility (LPS) are crucial for ensuring disabled people can access and benefit from public services, thereby encouraging their participation in society.
 4. Data-Driven Approach: Acknowledging the significant data gaps for disability (44.5% missing) and launching a communications campaign to improve declaration rates is essential for evidence-based policymaking and monitoring progress. This demonstrates a commitment to truly understanding the landscape of inequality.
 5. Learning from External Benchmarking: The engagement with and achievement of "Employers for Disability NI's Disability Positive accreditation" shows a willingness to learn from best practices and demonstrate commitment through independent verification.
 6. Proactive Policy Development: Updating existing policies and introducing new ones (e.g., Menopause Policy which can impact disabled women) and developing inclusive guides (e.g., Neurodiversity Line Managers' Toolkit) demonstrate a proactive approach to creating an inclusive environment.

Areas for Potential Further Action/Refinement.

1. Specificity and Measurable Outcomes for "Promoting Positive Attitudes":

While the plan has many actions for encouraging participation, the explicit measures for promoting positive attitudes could be strengthened. Often, positive attitudes are seen as an outcome of participation, but specific, targeted actions can directly influence societal perceptions.

2. Robustness of "Reasonable Adjustment Process" Improvement (Section 3.8):

The report stated "improved reasonable adjustment process" needs clear, quantifiable targets and mechanisms for feedback from disabled staff. The fact it is still identified as an "area of inequality" suggests past efforts may not have been fully effective.

3. Encouraging Participation in "Public Life" Beyond Direct Employment:

While NICS employment is a significant form of public life participation, the duty extends more broadly (e.g., advisory bodies, boards, public consultations).

Accessible Consultation Processes: Ensure all public consultations (including on policies not directly related to disability) are fully accessible to disabled people, using multiple formats, engaging with disability groups, and offering various feedback mechanisms beyond written responses.

Appendix 2 – Draft response- Consultation on DoF Audit of Inequalities and the draft 5-year Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan each covering the period 2025 to 2030.

4. Review and Evaluation of Specific Actions:

While the document mentions monitoring progress, the detail on how the effectiveness of specific interventions (e.g., outreach activities, new policies) will be evaluated is limited.

Q4. Are there any further actions required?

Yes, building upon the already commendable proposed actions, there are several further actions the Department could consider strengthening its compliance with statutory duties, particularly in promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and encouraging their participation in public life. These suggestions are aimed at enhancing the scope, depth, and impact of the current plans.

1. Enhance Proactive Communication and Visibility for Positive Attitudes:

Public-Facing Campaigns Highlighting Disabled Role Models: Go beyond internal NICS communications. Launch or actively participate in public campaigns that showcase disabled individuals in various public life roles (not just within the NICS) and their positive contributions. This could involve media partnerships, short video series, or collaborations with disability advocacy groups to share compelling stories. This directly combats negative stereotypes and fosters positive attitudes within the wider community.

2. Active Engagement with Youth and Education:

Beyond general outreach to the education sector for recruitment, develop specific programmes aimed at promoting positive attitudes towards disability among young people, and encouraging disabled young people to consider public service careers from an early age. This could involve school visits, mentoring schemes, or taster days.

3. Deepen the Commitment to Accessible Public Services and Consultations:

- **"Accessibility by Design" Policy:** Implement a formal "Accessibility by Design" policy for all new digital services, physical spaces, and communication materials. This means accessibility is not an afterthought but an integral part of planning and development from the outset, ensuring inclusive access for all from day one.
- **Audits of Existing Services for Accessibility Barriers:** Conduct regular, independent audits of all public-facing services (digital and physical) to identify and remove accessibility barriers that might hinder participation by disabled people. This should include sensory, cognitive, and physical access.
- **Inclusive Public Consultations:** Ensure that all departmental public consultations on any policy area (not just those directly related to disability) are fully accessible to disabled people. This means providing information in multiple accessible formats (e.g., Easy Read, BSL/ISL, large print, audio), offering diverse ways to respond (e.g., online forms, phone, in-person meetings with support), and actively consulting with disability groups in the design of the consultation process itself. This encourages their active participation in shaping public policy.

Unclassified

260

ITEM 14

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 July 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Corporate Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Administration
Date of Report	04 July 2025
File Reference	EQ15
Legislation	Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 49a of the Disability Discrimination Order 2006
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Request to hold Orange Victims' Day service of commemoration at the Ward Park Cenotaph
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Final Decision Report

Background

The Council has received a request from the Bangor District LOL 18 to hold an Orange Victims Day service of commemoration at the Ward Park Cenotaph on Sunday 7th September 2025.

This will be a religious service at the cenotaph to commemorate the life of all Orangemen/Women lost during the Troubles with 50 – 100 in attendance consisting of members of Bangor District LOL18 and band.

Section 10.2 of the Land and Property Policy states: Permission granted under this policy to use Council land or property is without prejudice to any planning, building control, environmental or other legislative or regulatory requirements.

Not Applicable

Screening

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of nine categories outlined in the Act.

This request has been screened, and it has been determined that this request required an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) before the Council could consider this request fully. An EQIA commenced April 2025.

Methodology

An EQIA is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy to determine the extent of differential impact upon the groups within the nine equality categories and in turn whether that impact is adverse.

If it is decided that the policy has an adverse impact on one or more of the nine Section 75 categories, then the Council must consider measures that may mitigate the adverse impact and alternative ways of delivering the policy aims which may lessen or remove the adverse impact on the relevant equality category.

In order to determine whether the policy has any adverse or differential impact, it is necessary to consider the people affected by the policy, their needs and experiences and the equality categories to which they belong.

The Equality Commission considers that EQIAs require seven separate elements.

Step 1	Defining the aims of the policy
Step 2	Consideration of available data and research
Step 3	Assessment of Impacts
Step 4	Consideration of: i. measures which might mitigate any adverse impact. ii. alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity
Step 5	Consultation
Step 6	Decision by Council and publication of results of the EQIA
Step 7	Monitoring for adverse impact in the future and publication of the results of such monitoring

This EQIA has closely followed the methodology published by the Equality Commission in its Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

This EQIA Final Decision Report represents Step 6 of the process (Appendix 1).

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approve the use of land request from the Bangor District LOL 18 to hold an Orange Order Victims' Day service of commemoration at the Ward Park Cenotaph on Sunday 7th September 2025 subject to standard T&Cs in accordance with the Council's Land and Property policy.

Request to hold an Orange Victims Day event at Ward Park Cenotaph, Bangor, 7th September 2025

Equality Impact Assessment Final Decision Report



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Background to the policy</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Defining the aims of the policy</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Consideration of available data and research</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Assessment of impacts</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Consideration of measures to mitigate</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Consultation responses</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Conclusions</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Monitoring for adverse impact</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Appendix 1: Section 75 profile of Ards and North Down Borough Council residents</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Appendix 2: Monitoring returns for Ards and North Down Borough Council employees</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Appendix 3: NI Life and Times Survey</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>Appendix 4: Relevant Ards and North Down Borough Council policies and research</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Appendix 5: Other relevant legislation and agreements</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Appendix 6: Equality scheme consultees</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Appendix 7: Written response</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Appendix 8: Notes from public consultation meeting</i>	<i>75</i>

Preface

Under the statutory duties contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Ards and North Down Borough Council gave an undertaking to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA) on each policy or group of co-joined policies where screening had indicated that there may be significant implications in relation to one or more of the nine Section 75 categories.

This draft Final Decision Report has been made available further to the formal consultation stage of the EQIA relating to the **Request to hold an Orange Victims Day event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, Bangor, 7th September 2025.**

This EQIA document is available on our website at
https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/EQIA-Request-to-use-Ward_Park

This EQIA has been undertaken in accordance with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland guidance:

www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/PracticalGuidanceonEQIA2005.pdf

If you have any queries about this document and its availability in alternative formats (including large print, Braille, disk, audio and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English), then please contact:

Head of Administration
City Hall
Bangor
BT20 4BT
Tel: 0300 013 3333
Text: 07718 159 275
Email: alison.curtis@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

The EQIA Final Decision Report will be made available publicly by 1st August 2025.

Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a duty on all public authorities to have due regard, in the carrying out of their functions, to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- between men and women generally
- between persons with a disability and persons without
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Schedule 9 of the Act sets out the detailed procedure for the implementation of this duty including the publication of an Equality Scheme and the conduct of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) of selected policies.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 also places a duty on all public authorities to have regard, in the carrying out of their functions, to the need to promote good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

Purpose of this EQIA

In common with all other councils and designated public authorities in Northern Ireland, under Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Council has a statutory obligation to ensure that all its policies and procedures are not likely to have an adverse impact on those of different identities and including their religious beliefs, political opinions and ethnic origins.

In keeping with this obligation and having received a request from Bangor District Loyal Orange Lodge (LOL) 18 to hold a memorial service at the cenotaph in Ward Park on 7th September 2025, it was determined that this request should be subject to consideration through the Council's normal procedures as set out in the Land and Property Policy.

Section 10.2 of the Land and Property Policy does allow for the use of Council land, including Ward Park, for events and other purposes, but 'without prejudice to any planning, building control, environmental or other legislative or regulatory requirements'. This would therefore extend to the Council's Section 75 obligations.

The request to hold this event was duly processed in compliance with the Council's Land and Property Policy. The various stages of the process are outlined below:

- A request to use Council land for the event was received.
- An internal consultation email was issued to the Corporate Leadership Team (Chief Executive and Directors), Heads of Service, Service Unit Managers and any other relevant officers for comment.

- The responses were consolidated.
- Comments received included mention of the requirement for screening further to Section 75 obligations.
- The request was screened and it was determined that an EQIA was required.
- The request was also tabled for noting at the internal screening panel (February 2025) and the external consultative panel (March 2025).
- This decision was then presented in March 2025 Corporate Committee and ratified at March 2025 Council.

The EQIA process was therefore undertaken, including a 12-week consultation period which ended at 4pm on 19th June 2025.

Further to the consultation, this EQIA Final Decision Report sets out the updated position in terms of the actual and potential impacts attaching to the request to the Council to hold a memorial service at the cenotaph in Ward Park, along with recommendations as to how the Council should proceed mindful of its statutory obligations.

This report will then be afforded due consideration by the Council before the Council makes a decision on the request.

Background to the policy

2024 request

In August 2024, Ards and North Down Borough Council received an application from Bangor District LOL 18 to hold an Orange Victims Day event at the Ward Park Cenotaph on Sunday 8 September 2024, ‘to commemorate the life of all Orangemen/Women lost during the Troubles, commonly known as Orange Victims Day’.

Section 10.2 of Ards and North Down Borough Council’s Land and Property Policy allows for the use of Council land for events and other purposes, ‘without prejudice to any planning, building control, environmental or other legislative or regulatory requirements’ and would extend to the Council’s Section 75 obligations. Although previous events of this nature may have taken place, this was the first occasion that an application of this nature had been considered under the policy.

Following internal consultation and equality screening, it was agreed that an EQIA would be required in order to determine any potential adverse impacts on groups and individuals attached to any of the nine Section 75 categories.

The time required to prepare, consult and consider findings of an EQIA meant that it was not possible to make an informed decision on the land request in advance of the event on 8th September 2024. Rather, Bangor District LOL 18 was advised to reapply with adequate notice for the 2025 event.

An associated request to use of a flagpole was turned down. This decision was in line with the Council’s Flag Policy, which stipulates that the Union Flag should only be flown at war memorials within the Borough on 15 designated days per calendar year for the period of Remembrance (around 11 November) or for a Remembrance Service for a period not exceeding two weeks.¹

2025 request

On 18th February 2025, the Council received a request from Bangor District LOL 18 to hold an Orange Victims Day event at the Ward Park Cenotaph between 2pm and 3pm on Sunday 7th September 2025. The event would comprise music and a religious service. The organisers estimated that between 50 and 100 people would be in attendance, consisting primarily of members of Bangor District LOL 18 and its band.

The Orange Order

The Orange Institution is a membership organisation comprised of Protestants committed to the protection of the principles of the Protestant Reformation and the

¹ <https://ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/article/1792/Equality-Impact-Assessment---Council-Flag-Policy>

1688 ‘Glorious Revolution’ (the deposition of James II and VII and accession of William III and Mary II as monarchs of England, Scotland and Ireland). It was founded in 1795 following a series of confrontations between Protestants and Roman Catholic ‘Defenders’.

The Orange Order does not accept non-Protestants as members nor anyone who has a close relative who is Catholic.²

Orange Victims Day

The Orange Institution has designated 1st September as Orange Victims Day, an annual event to honour ‘the 338 Orangemen and one Orangewoman murdered by terrorists during the Troubles’ and ‘highlight the ongoing plight of the injured and bereaved’.³

The inaugural Orange Victims Day took place on 1st September 2018. The date was chosen to mark the anniversary of an IRA attack on Tullyvallen Orange Hall, South Armagh, ‘the largest loss of life inflicted on the Orange Family from a single incident during the terrorist campaign’.⁴

Orange Victims Day is also commemorated on other dates by local lodges. The first weekend in September was selected by Bangor District LOL 18 to commemorate the date of the loss of members of LOL 18. Bangor District LOL 18 marked Orange Victims’ Day on 8th September 2024 with a parade that ended at Ward Park and with the private laying of a wreath on the Ward Park Cenotaph (see above).

Ward Park

Ward Park is a 37-acre site located off Hamilton Road, Bangor, surrounded by residential properties, a hospital, schools, a college, a public library and sports facilities. Gifted to the people of Bangor by the Ward family in 1909, it is owned and maintained by the Council. The Park also includes a large war memorial or cenotaph located alongside the main gun from a German U-boat.

Throughout July and August there is a free music concert at the bandstand each Sunday between 3pm and 5pm. According to the Council, Ward Park, ‘is accessible to all ages and widely used by children going to and from school, by dog walkers, by families attending the play park and feeding the ducks, by residents and visitors enjoying free summer events, by sports groups including Park Run and North Down CC and by many who simply want to enjoy some fresh air in beautiful surroundings.’⁵

² Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto Press, 1976)

³ www.goli.org.uk

⁴ www.goli.org.uk

⁵ <https://ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/article/1551/Ward-Park-Improvement-Scheme>

Methodology

An EQIA is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy to determine the extent of differential impact upon the groups within the nine equality categories and in turn whether that impact is adverse.

If it is decided that the policy has an adverse impact on one or more of the nine Section 75 categories, then the Council must consider measures that may mitigate the adverse impact and alternative ways of delivering the policy aims which may lessen or remove the adverse impact on the relevant equality category.⁶

In order to determine whether the policy has any adverse or differential impact, it is necessary to consider the people affected by the policy, their needs and experiences and the equality categories to which they belong.

The Equality Commission considers that EQIAs require seven separate elements.

Step 1	Defining the aims of the policy
Step 2	Consideration of available data and research
Step 3	Assessment of Impacts
Step 4	Consideration of: i. measures which might mitigate any adverse impact ii. alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity
Step 5	Consultation
Step 6	Decision by Council and publication of results of the EQIA
Step 7	Monitoring for adverse impact in the future and publication of the results of such monitoring

This EQIA has closely followed the methodology published by the Equality Commission in its Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.⁷

This EQIA Final Decision Report represents Step 6 of the process.

⁶ Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Equality Commission for NI, 2004
⁷ <https://www.equalityni.org/Publications/Employers-Service-Providers/Public-Authorities/Practical-guidance-on-equality-impact-assessment>

Defining the aims of the policy

The Council’s decision on the request to hold an Orange Order Victims Day event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, Bangor on 7th September 2025 must aspire to be consistent with existing legislation and Council policies (including the Council’s Land and Property Policy) while taking into account the findings of the EQIA and including the views expressed by those consulted therein.

The Council must also ensure that it continues to keep in mind best value principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness while serving the needs and interests of ratepayers, residents and visitors to the Borough.

Bearing these considerations in mind, the overarching aim of the Council’s decision in relation to the request can be framed as:

‘Mindful of the Council’s ongoing duty to protect and promote equality of opportunity and good relations within the Borough, to have in place a decision with regard to the requested event that strikes an appropriate balance between respecting the rights of those who see this as a fitting act of commemoration while acknowledging that the event may have the potential to reinforce sectional community allegiance in the context of Northern Ireland.’

Consideration of available data and research

This section provides an overview of the data and research that was considered in the draft EQIA consultation report.

Statistical data

Demographic profile of Ards and North Down population

On Census Day 21st March 2021, the usually resident population of Ards and North Down Borough Council was 163,659. This made it the fourth largest Local Government District, with an increase in population of nearly 5 per cent since the previous Census in 2011.

A full breakdown of the Ards and North Down Borough Council population by Section 75 categories is shown at appendix 1. In summary, according to the 2021 Census:

- 68 per cent of the population of Ards and North Down Borough Council belong to or were brought up in a Protestant and Other Christian religion; 14 per cent belong to or were brought up in the Roman Catholic religion.
- 17 per cent were aged under 15 years; 22 per cent were aged 65 and over. The median age was 44.
- 49 per cent of the usually resident population were male; 51 per cent were female.
- 31 per cent of the population were single (never married or registered a civil partnership); 51 per cent were married or in a civil partnership; 11 per cent were separated or divorced; and 7 per cent were widowed or a surviving partner from a civil partnership.
- 91 per cent were straight or heterosexual; 2 per cent were gay, lesbian, bisexual or of another sexual orientation.
- 2 per cent of the population were from a minority ethnic community.
- 25 per cent had a long-term health problem or disability that limited their day-to-day activities.
- 14 per cent stated that they provided unpaid care to family, friends, neighbours or others.

Demographic profile of Ards and North Down Borough Council employees

2023 monitoring returns that show that the Council employs 882 people. The make-up of Council employees by Section 75 category is included in full at appendix 2.

In summary:

- 78 per cent of employees are identified as Protestant; 15 per cent Roman Catholic.
- The majority of employees are aged between 41 and 60.

- 68 per cent are male; 32 per cent are female.
- Over half of employees (51 per cent) are married or in a civil partnership.
- 71 per cent of employees identified as heterosexual. 28 per cent did not indicate their sexual orientation.
- 1 per cent identify as being from a minority ethnic community background.
- 4 per cent are disabled.
- 41 per cent have dependants.

NI Life and Times

The NI Life and Times is an annual survey of the whole NI population that includes topics such as community relations. While views may differ between council areas and at smaller geographies, it is a useful barometer of general opinion.

Relevant findings are included at appendix 3. In summary:

- 47 per cent of people surveyed in the 2023 NI Life and Times Survey felt that their own cultural identity was respected by society. People from a Roman Catholic community background were most likely to agree, while those with 'No religion' were least likely to agree.
- People from a Protestant community background were most likely to agree that their neighbourhood is a place where they can be open about their cultural identity.
- People from a Roman Catholic or Protestant community background were most likely to agree that where they live is a neutral space.
- People from a Protestant community background were also most likely to agree that 'The culture and traditions of the Protestant community add to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland society.' People with 'No religion' were least likely to agree.

Relevant research

The draft EQIA consultation report included a range of background information on policies and guidance that might have an influence on the Council's decision on the request to hold an Orange Order Victims Day event at the Ward Park Cenotaph. These are set out in the appendices to this report and include:

- Appendix 4: Relevant Ards and North Down Borough Council policies and research
- Appendix 5: Other relevant legislation and agreements

Assessment of impacts

In accordance with the EQIA process, having gathered information on the policy and those affected by it, the Council must:

- i. assess whether there is a differential impact on one or more of the nine Section 75 grounds;
- ii. determine the extent of any differential impact; and
- iii. decide whether that impact is adverse.

Differential impact suggests that a particular group has been affected differently by the policy (either favourably or unfavourably), while adverse impact is an indication that the effect is less favourable (i.e. negative) and is potentially unlawful.

In order to determine whether the policy has any adverse impact, it is necessary to consider the people affected by the policy, their needs and experiences and the Section 75 categories to which they belong.

The following section summarises the assessment of impacts as set out in the draft EQIA report based on the evidence available at that time.

Differential impact

Prior to consultation, the initial evidence suggested that the request may have a differential impact on three Section 75 grounds in particular, i.e. religious belief, political opinion and ethnic origin (including national identity). This impact would relate primarily to the different perceptions of the Orange Order by the two main communities in Northern Ireland, in turn related to considerations of national identity and allegiance.

It was also maintained that while the focus would be likely to fall primarily on these grounds, there is the possibility that age and disability may also come into play (see below). There was no evidence to suggest that the proposed request was likely to have a differential impact with regard to the other Section 75 grounds (i.e. marital status, sexual orientation, men and women generally, persons with dependants and persons without).

Adverse impact

In the draft EQIA, prior to consultation, it was suggested that the decision may have the potential to adversely impact people primarily with regard to their religious belief, political opinion and national identity, but the precise extent of this impact was not yet been determined, both locally and more generally. It was therefore deemed necessary to use the EQIA process, and in particular the public consultation and stakeholder engagement, to consider further the tangible impacts of the request in terms of:

- i. the promotion of good relations generally across the Borough;
- ii. the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment for those who are employed by the Council, including those working in Ward Park and those employed more generally
- iii. the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations to all employees, users and potential users of Council facilities and premises within the Borough, including Ward Park.

The draft EQIA Consultation Report identified the following potential adverse impacts.

Access to services

When set against the range of Council policies and guidance documents from relevant agencies advocating a shift towards a shared future and shared spaces (see above and appendices 4 and 5), the draft EQIA considered that it is difficult to see how the request sits comfortably alongside this aspiration.

At the same time, since 2018 events attached to Orange Victims Day have featured regularly in early September across many parts of Northern Ireland and especially in those areas characterised by significant Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities – including Ards and North Down. Prior to public consultation, the draft EQIA considered furthermore that ‘a cenotaph is an appropriate location for a service of remembrance of this kind.’

Nevertheless, the draft EQIA Consultation Report went on to consider that given the exclusive membership principles attaching to the Orange Order (see above), it cannot be ignored that the proposed service at the cenotaph may have the potential to create a ‘chill factor’, and hence adversely impact on users and potential users of Ward Park on the afternoon of Sunday 7th September. In particular, it has the potential to impact adversely on those users of the park from a Roman Catholic and/or Nationalist and/or Republican background or perhaps those from a religion other than Protestantism or with no religion.

It was also suggested that an adverse impact may also extend to the following:

- Younger people with no experience of the Troubles who may prefer to look towards a shared future and the promotion of shared, open and inclusive environments;
- Older people with memories of the troubled history of Northern Ireland who may wish to avoid further reflection and instead focus on a shared future and in a shared space;

- Those who are, have been or are responsible for those who have been injured or disabled by events that are remembered in different ways by the two communities;

The draft EQIA consultation report also considered that those with a disability attending the event whose particular needs have not been addressed.

Good and harmonious working environment

The consultation report also suggested that the proposal may have the potential to have an adverse impact on employees from a Roman Catholic and/or Nationalist and/or Republican background, or those who do not identify with any religion or community background, by not aligning with the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment. This will be especially relevant to those who work in Ward Park itself.

Promoting good relations

Over several years, the Council has put in place a suite of policies designed to promote good relations across the Borough, alongside policies and procedures designed to manage public spaces and events in an inclusive, dignified and respectful manner.

At first glance it is not easy to see how this request sits comfortably alongside these initiatives and aspirations including those contained within the Council's community plan, the Good Relations Strategy and the Event Management Toolkit.

Instead, it was argued that the proposed single identity event may have the potential to have an adverse impact on residents, visitors and employees from different backgrounds including those from Roman Catholic, Nationalist and/or Republican communities or those who do not identify with the Orange Order or Protestantism more generally.

Over time Ward Park has been developed by the Council as a shared space, and it now incorporates a range of facilities and amenities to cater for those of all ages and from diverse backgrounds and communities. In essence, the request asks that the aspiration for the park to be a shared space should be placed on hold for a limited period of time on the afternoon of Sunday 7th September 2025 in order to accommodate this single identity event.

While the event itself may be appropriate, the location of the event in Ward Park undoubtedly places the Council in a dilemma, on the one hand acknowledging the Orange Order's legitimate desire to honour those members who lost their lives during the Troubles, while simultaneously endeavouring to ensure that Ward Park is seen as a welcoming shared space for those from all communities.

Guidance from government agencies and including the Equality Commission on these matters is not clear cut but recognises the need for discretion and sensitivity when reaching any decision. Likewise, the work of the Parades Commission implicitly acknowledges that some events, by their nature, inevitably will be single identity and that a range of local circumstances must be taken into account when reaching any determination on if and how these events should take place. The Commission also outlines a code of conduct to ensure that principles of dignity and respect are maintained at all times, and in particular for events staged at war memorials.

Prior to the consultation, the extent to which a single identity event of this nature is welcomed or tolerated by the wider community across the Borough has yet to be tested, but the current round of public consultation has been able to provide a useful barometer of attitudes and opinions locally and regionally, and in turn is therefore able to help inform the Council's decision-making.

Consideration of measures to mitigate

The EQIA process requires that if it is determined that the Council's decision regarding this request may have an adverse impact on one or more of the nine Section 75 grounds, then a series of alternatives should be put forward for consideration and an assessment of the possible impact of these alternatives undertaken.

In other words, the Council must consider measures that may mitigate any identified or perceived adverse impact and then identify alternative ways of delivering the policy aims that lessen adverse impact on the relevant Section 75 ground or that better promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Equality Commission guidance on this section states:

'The consideration of mitigating measures and alternative policies is at the heart of the EQIA process. Different options must be developed which reflect different ways of delivering the policy aims. The consideration of these measures is intertwined with the consideration of alternative policies. Mitigation can take the form of lessening the severity of the adverse impact.

'Ways of delivering policy aims that have a less adverse effect on the relevant equality category, or which better promote equality of opportunity for the relevant equality category, must in particular be considered. Consideration must be given to whether separate implementation strategies are necessary for the policy to be effective for the relevant group.'

In light of the above, and in order to help the Council reach a decision in relation to the proposed service, the following options were made available for consideration during the consultation:

Option 1: Decline the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph.

Option 2: Decline the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph but arrange an alternative venue within the Borough.

Option 3: Agree to the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, with no conditions attached.

Option 4: Agree to the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, with conditions attached to help maintain a good and harmonious environment.

It was also argued that, should the Council agree to the request, then it may still be appropriate to consider ways in which any potential adverse impact may be

mitigated. By way of example this could include reference to one or more of the following:

- Ensure that information is readily available for those visiting the park in order to explain the nature and context of the event;
- Arrange for those Council employees in Ward Park who have concerns with the event to avoid working while it is taking place;
- Liaise with LOL 18 to ensure that the event at the Cenotaph, including music and movement within the park to and from the Cenotaph, is dignified and respectful;
- Put in place appropriate arrangements to meet the needs of those with a disability attending the event.

The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on these matters before collating and analysing all comments received in relation to the proposed event. This feedback will then be used to inform future decision-making, including any mitigating measures or alternative policies if deemed appropriate.

Consultation responses

Approach to consultation

For the purposes of this EQIA, Ards and North Down Borough Council committed to carrying out a transparent and meaningful consultation with a broad range of stakeholders in a range of formats and at selected venues.

In line with Equality Commission guidance, Chapter 3 of the Council's Equality Scheme commits the Council to a consultation period normally lasting for a minimum of 12 weeks, to allow adequate time for groups to consult among themselves as part of the process of forming a view.

Mindful of this commitment, the consultation period ran from **27th March 2025 until 4pm on 19th June 2025**.

The EQIA consultation document and accompanying questionnaire was made available on the Council's website at www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/EQIA-Request-to-use-Ward_Park

The Council's social media and website was used to inform readers of the EQIA and the consultation period and how they may participate, including in confidence should they wish to remain anonymous.

Paper copies of the questionnaire and alternative language versions were also made available on request.

The EQIA was advertised in the County Down Spectator and the Newtownards Chronicle.

All consultees listed in the Council's Equality Scheme (appendix 6) were informed of the EQIA by email.

All public events were advertised widely using social media and through the local press.

A summary of consultation responses is included below.

Public questionnaire

The public questionnaire was available via the Council's Citizen Space online portal and in paper copy and in alternative languages on request.

By the deadline of 19th June 2025, a total of 879 completed questionnaires were received (877 online and 2 hardcopies).

Quotes are reproduced verbatim.

Demographic profile of respondents

More than three quarters of survey respondents (76.6 per cent) were residents of Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Twenty-seven responses were received from Ards and North Down Borough Council employees.

	Number	Percentage
Resident of Ards and North Down	673	76.6%
Ratepayer in Ards and North Down	517	58.8%
NI resident (outside Ards and North Down)	95	10.8%
Visitor	8	0.9%
Employed in the Borough	114	13.0%
Student	15	1.7%
Council employee	27	3.1%
Other	11	1.3%
Prefer not to say	58	6.6%

Nearly two thirds of respondents (61.4 per cent) were male and one third (30.3 per cent) female.

	Number	Percentage
Female	266	30.3%
Male	540	61.4%
Identified in another way	5	0.6%
No response/Prefer not to say	68	7.7%

The majority of responses (56.1 per cent) were from people from a Protestant community background. Seventy-six responses (8.6 per cent) were from people from a Roman Catholic community background, and 140 (15.9 per cent) were from people from no religion.

	Number	Percentage
Protestant	493	56.1%
Roman Catholic	76	8.6%
No religion	140	15.9%
Other Christian (including Christian related)	44	5.0%
Other faith or non-Christian community background	12	1.4%
Prefer not to say	114	13.0%

The majority of respondents (52.6 per cent) described their national identity as British. 29.4 per cent (258 respondents) described their national identity as Northern Irish, and 7.3 per cent (64) described their national identity as Irish.

	Number	Percentage
British	462	52.6%
English or Scottish	5	0.6%
Irish	64	7.3%
Northern Irish	258	29.4%
Other	11	1.3%
Prefer not to say	79	9.0%

88.7 per cent of respondents (780) identified as white. Other ethnic groups included African, Caribbean, Black, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Irish Traveller.

	Number	Percentage
White	780	88.7%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	11	1.3%
Other ethnic group	16	1.8%
Prefer not to say	72	8.2%

The following table summarises respondents' broad age bands.

	Number	Percentage
18-24	26	3.0%
25-34	101	11.5%
35-44	202	23.0%
45-54	165	18.8%
55-64	196	22.3%
Over 65	114	13.0%
Prefer not to say	75	8.5%

Twenty-three responses were received on behalf an organisation. This includes 13 responses on behalf of the Orange Order or a particular Loyal Orange Lodge.

	Number	Percentage
Yes	23	2.6%
No	852	96.9%
No response	4	0.5%

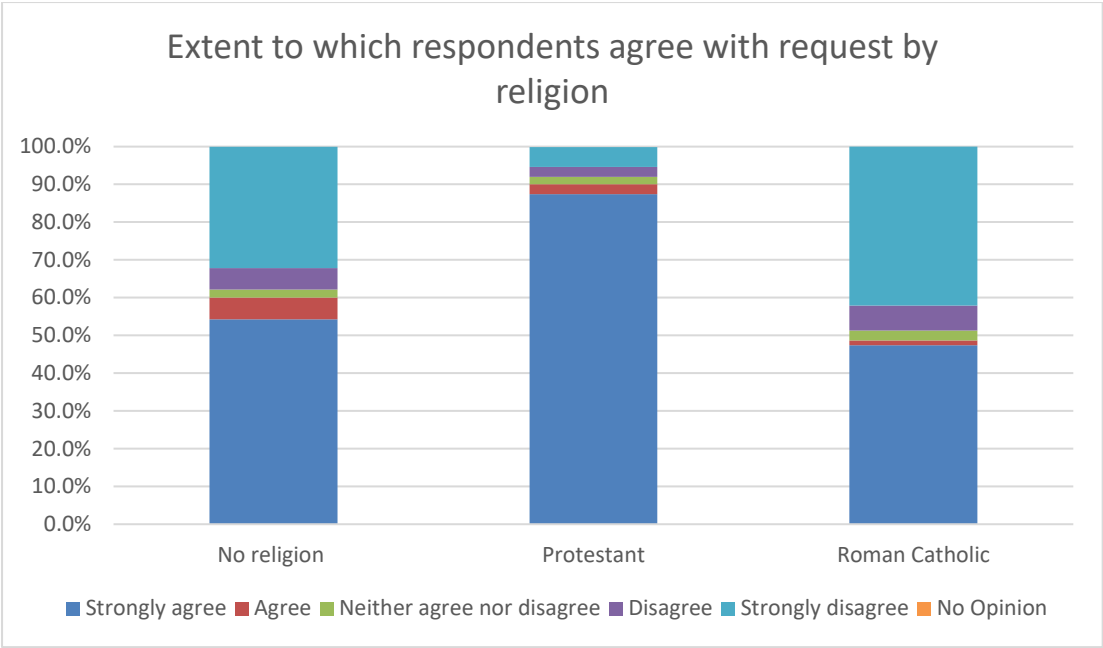
Extent to which respondents agreed with the request to hold an Orange Victims Day Service at the Ward Park Cenotaph

81.8 per cent of respondents (719) agreed or strongly agreed with the request to hold an Orange Victims Day Service at the Ward Park Cenotaph. 16.4 per cent (144) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	686	78.0%
Agree	33	3.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	15	1.7%
Disagree	30	3.4%
Strongly disagree	114	13.0%
No opinion	1	0.1%

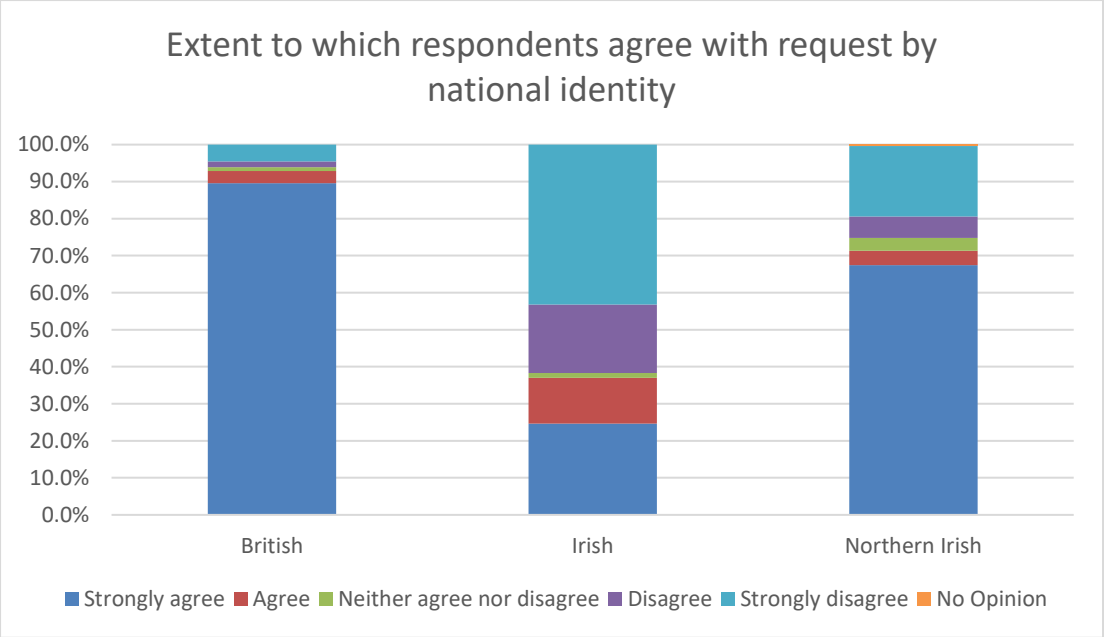
People from a Protestant community background were more likely to agree or strongly agree (90 per cent) than people from a Roman Catholic community background (48.7 per cent) and people of no religion (60.0 per cent).

	No religion		Protestant		Roman Catholic	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Strongly agree	76	54.3%	431	87.4%	36	47.4%
Agree	8	5.7%	13	2.6%	1	1.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	2.1%	10	2.0%	2	2.6%
Disagree	8	5.7%	13	2.6%	5	6.6%
Strongly disagree	45	32.1%	26	5.3%	32	42.1%
No Opinion	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%



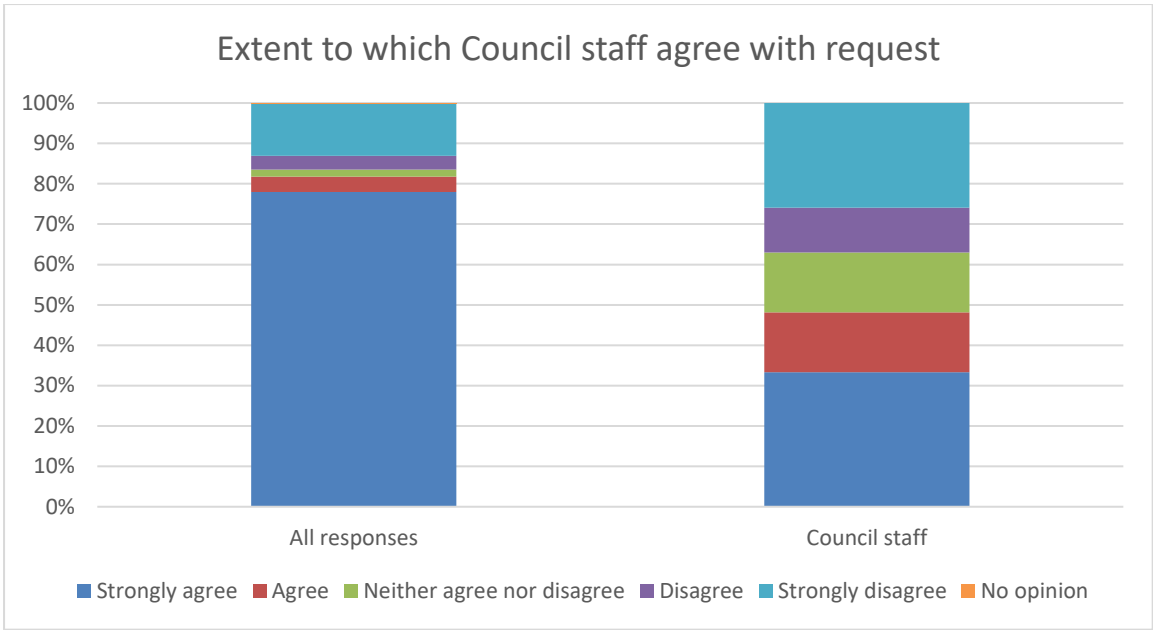
At 92.9 per cent, people with a British national identity were most likely to agree or strongly agree with the request. People with an Irish national identity were least likely (37.0 per cent).

	British		Irish		Northern Irish	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Strongly agree	414	89.6%	20	24.7%	174	67.4%
Agree	15	3.2%	10	12.3%	10	3.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	1.1%	1	1.2%	9	3.5%
Disagree	7	1.5%	15	18.5%	15	5.8%
Strongly disagree	21	4.5%	35	43.2%	49	19.0%
No opinion	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%



While the number of responses from Council staff was small (27), at 48.1 per cent (13), staff were less likely to agree or strongly agree with the request than the overall respondents in general.

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	9	33.3%
Agree	4	14.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	4	14.8%
Disagree	3	11.1%
Strongly disagree	7	25.9%
No opinion	0	0.0%



Respondents were also asked to explain why they agreed or disagreed with the request.

Among those who agreed or strongly agreed, there were 564 substantive responses. Respondents contended that all groups, including the Orange Order, should have the right to commemoration:

‘We should be able to pay our respects to our own victims in our own country. We respect everyone else’s culture. Let’s respect our own.’

They also highlighted that the service would be respectful and considered the venue to be appropriate:

‘A dedicated Victims Day service provides a solemn opportunity for remembrance and reflection’

‘The Cenotaph is recognised throughout our nation as a place where people congregate to remember those who gave their lives during times of war and conflict and it is only right and fitting that this Service is held here.’

Several respondents contended that refusal to permit the request would in itself be discrimination on equality grounds. It was also argued that the EQIA process was unnecessary and disproportionate, considered indicative of a lack of respect, censorship or discrimination in itself. For example:

‘we as a community need to remember and show respect to their memory, also the fact of having to do a survey for a memorial

service for 353 people who were murdered is a disgrace, this council should be ashamed of themselves!!'

'All dead should be remembered regardless of political or religious views. If you stop one section of the community from remembering their dead then you must equally stop all remembrance occasions for all otherwise it would be nothing but discrimination.'

While many responses reflected Protestant or Unionist identity, a number also spoke of shared remembrance, mutual respect and reconciliation:

'As a Roman Catholic, in a shared society we have to remember those who were lost on both sides of the troubles. It would be great to have this as a family friendly event to encourage engagement of all faiths.'

'The location also affords those who are not members of the Orange Order i.e. family, friends and members of the community the opportunity to pay their respects and join in the service and act of remembrance no matter what their religion or political beliefs are'

There were also 135 substantive responses from those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the request. This included respondents who felt that Ward Park should be a neutral, shared space: for example, 'Ards and North Down is an area for all — not somewhere to stage a divisive event such as this'; 'Ward Park should be treated as a shared space'.

Some respondents associated such events ('despite the organisers wishes') as characterised by anti-social behaviour that would be disruptive and unwelcoming to other park users, particularly families and carers using the playground or sensory garden.

Respondents also contended that the cenotaph was not an appropriate location, and such an event would be a misuse or politicisation of a civic memorial:

'If you say yes to this you cannot discriminate against others. Which may cause big problems in our area. [...] this is a WW1 memorial area and nothing to do with the Orange Order.'

A significant proportion of respondents were concerned that the event would be representative of a single organisation, religion or community and that it would be exclusionary, particularly of people from a Roman Catholic community background, with several respondents citing the Orange Order's policy on religion and membership. It was considered that the event could undermine inclusivity of shared space, alienate or intimidate people who do not share the organisers' beliefs and fuel community tensions. For example:

‘The troubles affected all sides of the community and to single out one distinctly exclusive group as deserving of particular attention feeds into the narrative, which is prevailing in parts of our society, that one “side” was impacted in a greater way than the other, or that their losses are somehow more worthy of honour.’

‘I am a Protestant but lots of innocent people were victims why should just one group be granted this.’

‘it’s simply another opportunity for triumphalism which raises issues we don’t need.’

‘The Orange Order are a specifically anti-Catholic institution and therefore sectarian in nature and their presence in a public park is intimidating and brings with it an unwelcome crowd.’

‘This will be unnecessarily divisive to the community [...] Our society is developing into a multicultural one and sectarianism should not be encouraged. Racism is an increasing problem in Northern Ireland and anything which celebrates sectarianism should be discouraged. This event does not promote good relations.’

One respondent who lives ‘in very close proximity’ to the park would find it ‘extremely intimidating’.

Several stated that they would support an inclusive victims’ day for all those affected by the Troubles.

Preferred option

Respondents were also asked to indicate their preferred option as were presented in the consultation document:

Option 1: Decline the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph.

Option 2: Decline the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph but arrange an alternative venue within the Borough.

Option 3: Agree to the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, with no conditions attached.

Option 4: Agree to the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, with conditions attached to help maintain a good and harmonious environment.

Accordingly, 83.0 per cent (730) of respondents would prefer the request to be granted, including 9.8 per cent (86) who would prefer conditions to be attached to help maintain a good and harmonious environment.

15.9 per cent (140) would prefer the request to be declined including 3.3 per cent (29) that would be supportive of arranging an alternative venue.

	Number	%
Agree to the request, with conditions attached to help maintain a good and harmonious environment	86	9.8%
Agree to the request, with no conditions attached	644	73.3%
Decline the request	111	12.6%
Decline the request but arrange an alternative venue	29	3.3%
No preference	5	0.6%
Other	4	0.5%

Options proposed by those who suggested an “other” option included commemorating all victims of the Troubles or ‘Shift the emphasis [...] to broader themes of peace, reconciliation, remembrance of the fallen (regardless of affiliation), or the desire for a shared future.’

Other conditions or mitigations suggested by respondents included:

- strict guidelines regarding the display of flags, emblems and symbols
- restrictions on music
- a dedicated quiet area
- consideration of other park users
- changing the date to align with annual Twelfth of July or Remembrance Day events
- change of venue to, for example, an Orange hall, church hall or private venue

Adverse impact in relation to Section 75 categories

Respondents were also asked to consider whether there would be an adverse impact in relation to one or more Section 75 categories.

Impact on Section 75 group	Number	%
Religious belief	159	18.1%
Political opinion	160	18.2%
Racial group	45	5.1%
Age	26	3.0%
Marital status	8	0.9%
Sexual orientation	35	4.0%
Men and women generally	24	2.7%
People with and without a disability	13	1.5%
People with and without dependants	13	1.5%
No adverse impact to any category	657	74.7%
No opinion	49	5.6%

Three quarters of respondents (657) felt there would be no adverse impact on any Section 75 category. Reasons provided by respondents included the short, dignified nature of the event; that remembrance is a fundamental right; that acts of remembrance have cross-political support; and that attendance at the event is voluntary and those likely to object could stay away.

18.1 per cent (159) felt there would be an adverse impact on people of different religious belief, and 18.2 per cent (160) felt there would be adverse impact on people of different political opinion. Reasons given included:

- Perception that the Orange Order is inherently exclusive including of people who are of a different religion and married to people of a different religion
- It is not a civic or shared commemoration.
- Park users may find the event unwelcoming and detrimental to its use as a shared or neutral space.
- Concerns about anti-social behaviour
- The event could be politically divisive and potentially inflammatory.

5.1 per cent (45) felt there would be an adverse impact on people from different racial groups. Reasons given included:

- Perception that the Orange Order is inherently exclusive including of people from minoritised ethnic racial groups
- Park users may find the event unwelcoming and detrimental to its use as a shared or neutral space.
- Concerns about intimidation for people from minoritised ethnic racial groups
- Concerns about anti-social behaviour

4.0 per cent (35) felt there would be an adverse impact on people of different sexual orientations. Reasons given included:

- Perception that the Orange Order's values and beliefs are hostile towards people from the LGBTQ+ community
- The event may create a chill factor for park users from the LGBTQ+ community

3.0 per cent (26) felt there would be an adverse impact on people from different age groups. 1.5 per cent (13) also felt there would be an impact on people with dependants. Reasons given included:

- Children and young people exposed to divisive culture
- Lack of relevance for young people and preference for events focused on inclusion and a shared future
- Detrimental impact on the perception of the park as shared or neutral space
- Concerns about anti-social behaviour

2.7 per cent (24) felt there would be an adverse impact on people of different genders. Respondents generally perceived the Orange Order to be a male-dominated organisation. One respondent noted an imbalance among those commemorated and that more than 'orangemen and one women' were affected by the Troubles.

1.5 per cent (13) respondents felt there would be an adverse impact on disabled people of different genders. One respondent noted 'According to the EQIA there was no mention of accessibility accommodations for those with a disability'. It was also noted that the event could create a chill factor including for those wishing to use the sensory garden.

Eight respondents (0.9 per cent) felt there would be an adverse impact on people of different marital status including because the Orange Order excludes people who are married to Roman Catholics.

Promotion of equality of opportunity

The survey also asked, ‘What impact do you feel the request will have on the promotion of equality of opportunity within Ards and North Down?’.

	Number	%
Very positive impact	311	35.4%
Positive impact	125	14.2%
No impact	260	29.6%
Negative impact	55	6.3%
Very negative impact	110	12.5%
No opinion	18	2.0%

Half of respondents (436) considered there to be a very positive or positive impact. Reasons provided included:

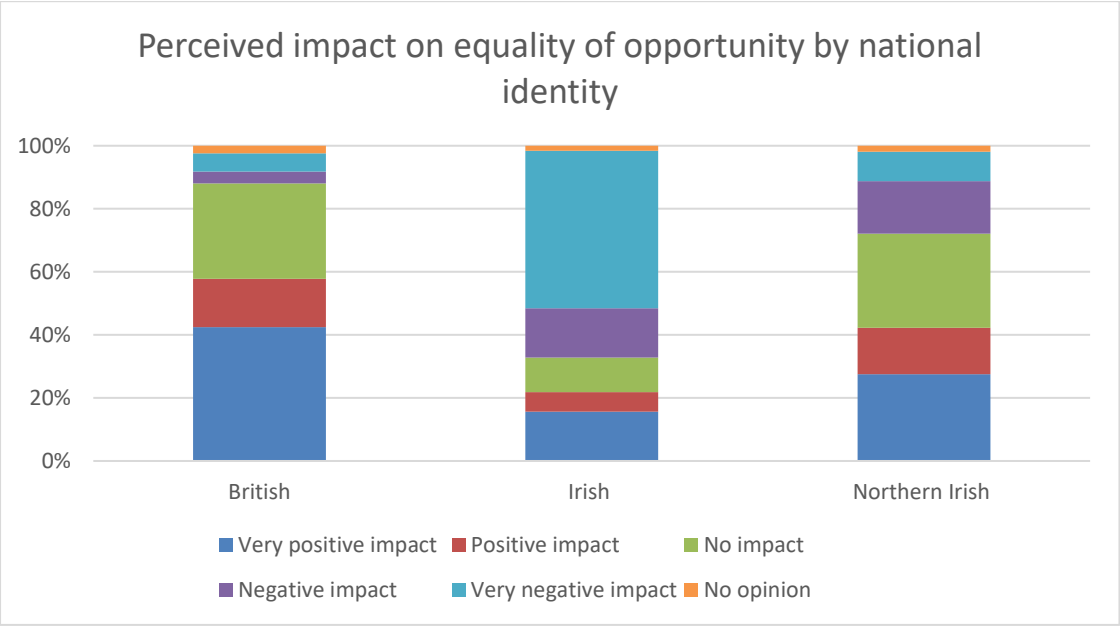
- It provides equality of opportunity for commemoration for people from Protestant and Unionist communities.
- It provides equality of opportunity for Orange victims and families.
- It promotes Ards and North Down as inclusive of different religious and political beliefs.
- It promotes Ward Park as a shared space.

18.8 per cent (165) considered there to be a negative or very negative impact. Reasons provided by respondents included:

- The event promotes one tradition and is exclusive of people who are not part of the Orange Order or who have different views and beliefs, in particular for people from the Roman Catholic religion, other religions, people with Nationalist political beliefs and people from LGBTQ+ communities.
- The event will create a chill factor and make Ward Park feel less neutral, welcoming or inclusive.

At 57.8 per cent (267), respondents with a British national identity were most likely to consider there would be a positive or very positive impact of equality of opportunities compared to 21.9 per cent (14) people with an Irish national identity and 42.2 per cent (109) with a Northern Irish national identity.

	British		Irish		Northern Irish	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Very positive impact	196	42.4%	10	15.6%	71	27.5%
Positive impact	71	15.4%	4	6.3%	38	14.7%
No impact	140	30.3%	7	10.9%	77	29.8%
Negative impact	17	3.7%	10	15.6%	43	16.7%
Very negative impact	27	5.8%	32	50.0%	24	9.3%
No opinion	11	2.4%	1	1.6%	5	1.9%



Promotion of good relations

The survey also asked, ‘What impact do you feel the request will have on the promotion of good relations within Ards and North Down?’.

	Number	%
Very positive impact	350	39.8%
Positive impact	144	16.4%
No impact	204	23.2%
Negative impact	57	6.5%
Very negative impact	104	11.8%
No opinion	20	2.3%

56.2 per cent (494) felt that there would be a positive or very positive impact on good relations including by fostering recognition, inclusion, dialogue, respect and healing including between communities.

The event was also described as an important cultural expression for the Protestant and Unionist communities that make up a significant proportion of the Borough's population.

There was also concern that refusal of the request would be harmful for good relations, fuelling resentment among the Protestant and Unionist communities in particular and validating perceptions of anti-Unionist bias within the Council ('It shows the council respects everyone's rights, not just a few.'; 'If this is turned down, the message will be: some victims matter more than others.').

18.3 per cent (161) of respondents felt that there would be a negative or very negative impact on good relations. Reasons provided included:

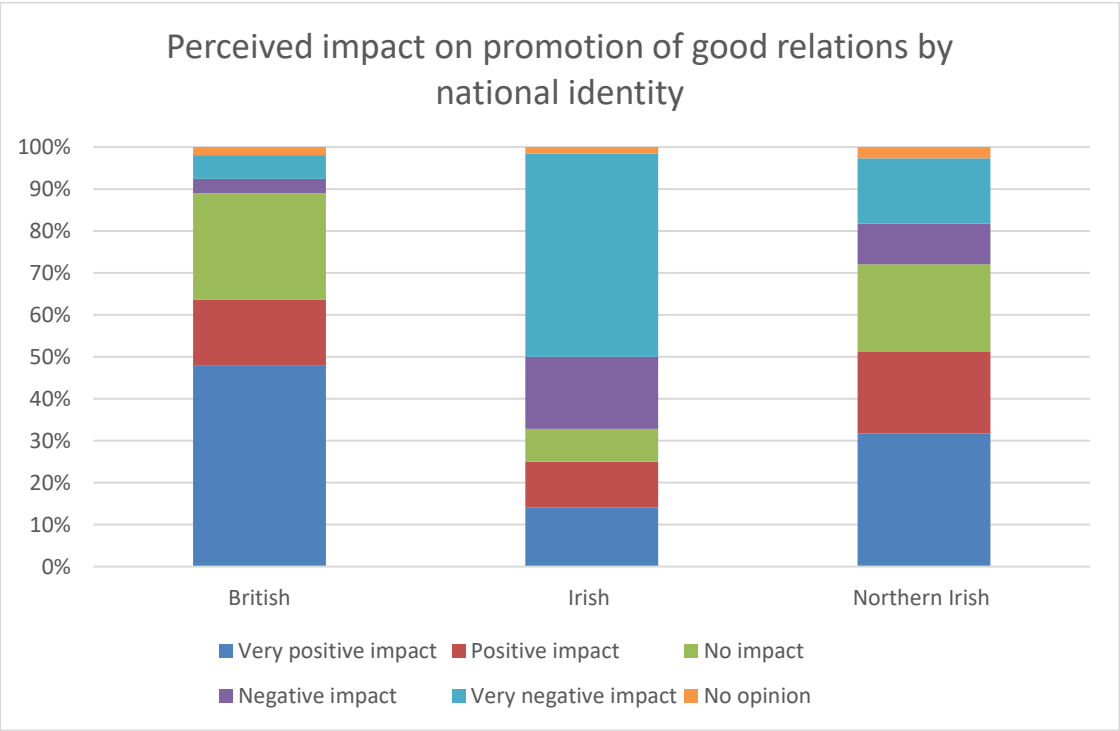
- The event promotes one tradition and is exclusive of others, particularly people from Roman Catholic or Nationalist community backgrounds and people of no faith.
- It may support a 'hierarchy of victims' by commemorating only those associated with the Orange Order.
- The event will create a chill factor and make Ward Park feel less neutral, welcoming or inclusive.
- The event may increase divisions and tensions, damage community cohesion and provoke public disorder or media controversy.

Similar to those who felt there would be a positive impact on good relations, respondents who felt there would be a negative impact also considered the risk of undermining the Council's credibility as a public body with a duty to promotion good

relations ('It makes it look like the Council works for one side only.'; 'Even asking the question has caused tension.').

At 63.6 per cent (294), respondents with a British national identity were most likely to consider there would be a positive or very positive impact on good relations compared to 25.0 per cent (16) people with an Irish national identity and 51.2 per cent (132) with a Northern Irish national identity.

	British		Irish		Northern Irish	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Very positive impact	222	48.1%	9	14.1%	82	31.8%
Positive impact	72	15.6%	7	10.9%	50	19.4%
No impact	117	25.3%	5	7.8%	54	20.9%
Negative impact	16	3.5%	11	17.2%	25	9.7%
Very negative impact	26	5.6%	31	48.4%	40	15.5%
No opinion	9	1.9%	1	1.6%	7	2.7%



Measures to avoid the potential for adverse impact

If the request is granted and the event goes ahead, 72.6 per cent (638) of respondents felt no conditions needed to be attached to mitigate any potential adverse impacts.

	Number	%
Yes	147	16.7%
No	638	72.6%
No opinion	43	4.9%
Don't know	51	5.8%

Among the 16.7 per cent (147) that felt measures should be attached, suggestions included:

- Policing and stewarding to protect participants and the public and prevent disorder and anti-social behaviour
- Restrictions on size, duration and timing to minimise disruption to other park users
- Restrictions on flags, symbols and emblems
- Restrictions on content and nature of music
- Restrictions on content and nature of speeches
- Clear, timely advance publicity to allow people to make a decision about park use on the day
- Publicity including the rationale for the event and how it can contribute to good relations
- No Council branding or staff presence that might lead to perceptions of Council bias
- Change of location including not using the cenotaph and using a less central location in the park
- Commemoration of all victims of the Troubles
- A commitment to future reciprocal or shared commemorations
- Follow-up or supporting education and reconciliation programmes
- Monitoring impact for future equality assessment

How the EQIA was carried out

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with how the EQIA was carried out.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	51	5.8%
Agree	105	11.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	223	25.4%
Disagree	125	14.2%
Strongly disagree	286	32.5%
No opinion	89	10.1%

17.7 per cent of respondents (156) agreed with how the EQIA was carried out and 46.7 disagreed (411).

Those who disagreed with how the EQIA was carried out considered the requirement to carry out an EQIA unjustified for the nature of the event; a waste of public money; and politically or culturally motivated by bias against Protestant and Unionist culture.⁸

Findings in the draft EQIA Consultation Report

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with the findings in the draft EQIA that was the subject of the public consultation.

	Number	%
Strongly agree	29	3.3%
Agree	67	7.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	303	34.5%
Disagree	98	11.1%
Strongly disagree	135	15.4%
No opinion	247	28.1%

10.9 per cent (96) of respondents agreed with the findings and 26.5 per cent (233) disagreed.

⁸ Those who agreed with how the process was carried out were not asked to provide a reason.

Among those who disagreed, responses were similar to those given in objection to the EQIA process above.

Other criticism included:

- Use of Wikipedia as a reference source
- Rejection of the contention that the event could create a ‘chill factor’ and make people feel unwelcome
- The findings are detrimental to good relations by fostering contention and division. While respondents who agreed with the EQIA findings were not asked to provide a rationale, a small number of respondents did acknowledge the findings were balanced and welcomed its identification of potential positive benefits arising from the event.

Written responses

One written response was received from Alex Easton MP (see appendix 7). His letter offered strong support in favour of the request, arguing ‘that such a service is both justified and appropriate, and I struggle to see how any individual, regardless of their beliefs, could reasonably object to a solemn religious service commemorating those who were murdered for their faith.’

Public meeting

An in-room public meeting was held in Bangor City Hall on Thursday 22nd May 2025 from 7.00 to 8.30pm. A total of 38 members of the public attended the event. A note of this meeting is included at appendix 8.

The meeting was lively but generally respectful, characterised by widespread support for the event along with numerous concerns as to how the request had been handled.

In general, those in attendance were unanimous in contending that the proposed event should not be perceived as contentious, nor indeed as a single identity event as, in theory, anyone would be able to attend.

Ward Park was also seen as an appropriate neutral venue for such an event.

It was further argued that an EQIA was therefore unnecessary, disproportionate and an inappropriate use of council budget.

The role of the Council in processing the request was subject to close questioning, including a perceived bias in the way in which the request had been handled.

Some time was then taken outlining the process for dealing with the request under the Council's Land and Property Policy and the Council's vulnerabilities if due process was not followed.

The fact that previous events, including the ceremony in 2024, had not undergone similar scrutiny was discussed at length. Participants argued that they 'could have turned up and done it anyway, as there is no consequence.'

It was maintained that the Orange Order were being treated unfairly and that certain Council staff were deliberately obstructing their efforts, 'mischief making' or acting in conjunction with certain political parties.

There was unanimous support for the proposal under option 3 that the event should be allowed to go ahead with no conditions attached and that future events should not be subject to further scrutiny.

Online meeting

An online public meeting was arranged for Tuesday 27th May from 1.00 to 2.30pm. There were no attendees.

Consultative Panel meetings

The request to hold an Orange Victims Day at the Ward Park Cenotaph was discussed at two meetings of the Consultative Panel in March 2025 and June 2025.

The first meeting included a presentation followed by a question-and-answer session, while the second was primarily an update on feedback from the consultation process.

Those in attendance recognised and respected the right of the Orange Order to hold such events but raised concerns as to how this event may impact on those who use Ward Park.

The diverse needs of those using Ward Park were referenced on several occasions. The need to ensure that shared spaces were respected was also discussed, and while there was not strong consensus as to how the request should be handled, it was recognised that Section 75 duties should not be ignored in any decision-making.

It was argued that if the event does go ahead then it will be important to ensure that it does so in a respectful manner, mindful of the need to maintain a good and harmonious environment for all users of Ward Park.

The results of the consultation were seen as unsurprising but reflected on the demographic profile of the Borough.

The needs of those represented by panel members were once more to the fore at this second meeting, including a consideration of how similar requests from minority groups may be handled.

Conclusions

Further to the request received from Orange Order LOL 18 on 18th February 2025 to hold an event comprising music and a religious service in Ward Park on 7th September between 2pm and 3pm, in line with the Council's Land and Property policy, an EQIA has been undertaken to consider this request.

The Council's Land and Property policy makes explicit that any request for events on Council land must follow due process and must have due regard to the Council's statutory duties, including Section 75.

To proceed without this assessment would have placed the Council in a vulnerable position should any decision to proceed be subsequently challenged, and this is a risk that the Council would be ill-advised to take.

The consultation duly generated a significant level of response, primarily from those living within the Borough, and overall indicated considerable support in favour of the proposed event.

While the Equality Commission is adamant that an EQIA consultation should not be regarded as a referendum or 'head count', the combined weight of evidence from both quantitative and qualitative feedback would indicate significant local endorsement for the event as originally planned and requested.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents (73.3 per cent) felt that the event should be allowed to proceed with no conditions attached (option 3), and that the likelihood of the event having an adverse impact on the promotion of either good relations or equality of opportunity within the Borough was seen by many respondents as low.

This is not to ignore the minority who indicated concern that the event may have an adverse impact on other users of the park, or that it may serve to harm good relations more generally.

16.7 per cent of respondents (147) felt that If the request is granted, and the event goes ahead, measures should be attached to mitigate potential adverse impacts. This includes respondents generally in favour of the request concerned about adverse publicity and protests the event.

Suggested mitigations to restrict the size and duration of the event are already considered in the event organiser's request, which specifies that the event will last no longer than one hour and have no more than 100 attendees.

Other suggested mitigations to commemorate all or other victims of the Troubles would fundamentally change the intent of an Orange Victims Day event, and the public consultation recognised the right of the event organisers to hold such an event

provided it is executed in a dignified and respectful manner in keeping with policies and procedures.

Both the Land and Property Policy and the associated Event Management Toolkit make clear that any request to use Council land must comply with certain conditions. The Toolkit states:

‘The Council carries out all its duties and responsibilities in compliance with Section 75 of NI Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006).

‘This ensures all Council officers and others delivering services on behalf of the Council are made aware of their responsibility to be cognisant of the range of needs of those to whom they are providing services. There is a breadth and diversity of needs across all users which should be taken into consideration in arranging any event.’

In light of these obligations, it is recommended that the organisers of the event should continue to liaise closely with Council officers to ensure that the event, music and ceremony are dignified and respectful and align with relevant Council policies and procedures and thereby aim to avoid making the Council vulnerable to subsequent challenge.

In a similar vein, organisers of the event should liaise with the Council to ensure that appropriate facilities are available for those attending the event, taking into account Section 75 grounds including age, dependency status and disability.

For other users of the park, informational signage giving prior notice of the event may be useful, along with directional signage on the day itself.

With regard to staff, there was some indication from respondents that the event may have the potential to harm good relations among staff or disrupt a good and harmonious working environment.

To avoid the possibility of the event having any adverse impact on staff directly affected by the event (e.g. park keepers) then it is recommended that the Council should engage with relevant staff prior to the event and put in place appropriate staffing arrangements on the day.

After the event, it is recommended that the event organisers and Council officers jointly carry out a ‘lessons learned’ review of the event to help inform decisions regarding any future requests.

The EQIA process has been valuable in helping the Council weigh the various factors that must be taken into account when making a decision on this request. It may also assist the Council should similar requests be made in future years.

The current procedure is thereby able to provide useful data to be able to help inform assessments of similar requests and which may negate the need for an EQIA on each and every request in the future.

Monitoring for adverse impact

The final stage in the EQIA process is the establishment of a system to monitor the impact of the proposed revisions and/or any agreed mitigation in order to find out its effect on groups within the Section 75 equality categories.

The results of the monitoring are required to be reviewed on an annual basis and published in the Council's annual Section 75 report to the Equality Commission.

This may also assist the Council should similar requests be made in future years.

Where the monitoring and analysis of the event show that the proposed request had resulted in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arose which would allow for greater equality of opportunity and/or good relations to be promoted, the Council must ensure that future decisions are reflected on to achieve better outcomes for the relevant Section 75 groups.

The Council therefore needs to agree how the impact will be monitored. This may involve:

- collation and analysis of any comments, queries and complaints received with regard to this and comparable events;
- consideration 'lessons learned' from a joint post-event review with Council officers and event organisers

Appendix 1: Section 75 profile of Ards and North Down Borough Council residents

On Census Day 2021, the usually resident population of Ards and North Down Borough Council was 163,659. This made it the fourth largest Local Government District, with an increase in population of nearly 5 per cent since the previous Census in 2011.

Numbers indicate the actual population with percentage breakdown relative to the total population in brackets.

All data is drawn from the NI 2021 Census unless otherwise stated.⁹

Religion or religion brought up in

At 68 per cent, Ards and North Down Borough Council has a higher proportion of people from Protestant and other Christian backgrounds than Northern Ireland as a whole (43 per cent). It also has a higher proportion of people for identifying as from no religion (17 per cent compared to 9 per cent across Northern Ireland).

In the settlement of Bangor itself, where Ward Park is based, 14 per cent of the population is from a Catholic community background and 68 per cent from a Protestant and other Christian community background.

	Roman Catholic	Protestant and other Christian (including Christian related)	Other religions	None
NI	869,753 (46%)	827,545 (43%)	28,514 (2%)	177,360 (9%)
ANDBC	22,262 (14%)	111,175 (68%)	2,237 (1%)	27,984 (17%)

Political opinion

The following table shows the results of the most recent local council elections for Ards and North Down Borough Council in May 2023.

Party	Seats	Gains	Losses	Net gain/loss	Seat %	Votes %
DUP	14	1	1	0	35.0	29.03
Alliance	12	3	1	+2	30.0	26.59
UUP	8	0	0	0	20.0	15.60
Independent	3	1	1	0	7.5	11.16
Green	2	0	1	-1	5.0	5.94
SDLP	1	0	0	0	2.5	3.72
TUV	0	0	1	-1	0.0	4.83
Sinn Féin	0	0	0	0	0.0	1.66
NI Conservatives	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.59

⁹ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/2021-census/results>

Ethnic group

On Census Day 2021, 98 per cent of the population of Ards and North Down Borough Council was from a White ethnic background. This is similar to the Northern Ireland population as a whole (97 per cent).

	White	Irish Traveller	Roma	Indian	Chinese	Filipino	Pakistani	Arab	Other Asian	Black African	Black Other	Mixed	Other ethnicities
NI	1,837,575 (97%)	2,609 (0%)	1,529 (0%)	9,881 (1%)	9,495 (0%)	4,451 (0%)	1,596 (0%)	1,817 (0%)	5,244 (0%)	8,069 (0%)	2,963 (0%)	14,382 (1%)	3,568 (0%)
A N D B C	159,892 (98%)	24 (0%)	19 (0%)	388 (0%)	500 (0%)	308 (0%)	87 (0%)	28 (0%)	468 (0%)	309 (0%)	135 (0%)	1,236 (1%)	266 (0%)

Age

Arts and North Down Borough Council has a larger proportion of older people aged 65 and over than any other Council area. The median age is 44.

Population projections show that the proportion of those aged 85 and over are expected to more than double within the next 25 years.

	0–14	15–39	40–64	65+
NI	365,213 (19%)	594,361 (31%)	617,125 (32%)	326,475 (17%)
ANDBC	27,763 (17%)	44,206 (27%)	55,466 (34%)	36,225 (22%)

Marital status

The 2021 Census showed that 51 per cent of people over 16 years of age in Ards and North Down Borough Council were either married or in a civil partnership. This is higher than the NI population as a whole (46%).

	NI	ANDBC
Single (never married or never registered a civil partnership)	576706 (38%)	41434 (31%)
Married or in a civil partnership	693250 (46%)	68618 (51%)
Separated (but still legally married or still legally in a civil partnership)	57272 (6%)	4466 (3%)
Divorced or formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved	91130 (6%)	9860 (7%)
Widowed or surviving partner from a civil partnership	96384 (6%)	9611 (7%)

Sexual orientation

Statistics also show that 800 households in the Borough were living in a same-sex couple relationship on Census Day 2021.

	NI	ANDBC
Straight or heterosexual	1,363,858 (90%)	122,148 (91%)
Gay, lesbian, bisexual or other sexual orientation	31,616 (2%)	2,619 (2%)
Prefer not to say or not stated	119,268 (8%)	9,223 (7%)

Dependants

A person with a dependant is a person who has personal responsibility for the care of a child, for the care of a disabled person or the care of a dependent older person.

People in Ards and North Down Borough Council are slightly more likely to have caring responsibilities for a dependant than across NI as a whole (14 per cent compared to 12 per cent).

	Provides no care	Provides weekly unpaid care
NI	1,567,135 (88%)	222,213 (12%)
ANDBC	134,334 (86%)	21,331 (14%)

Men and women generally

At 51 per cent, women make up a slightly larger proportion of the population of both NI and Ards and North Down Borough Council than men (49%).

	Males	Females
NI	936,132 (49%)	967,043 (51%)
ANDBC	79,705 (49%)	83,951 (51%)

Disability

According to the 2021 Census, a quarter of the population of Ards and North Down Borough Council has a disability or long-term health condition that limits their day-to-day activities. This is similar to the NI population (24 per cent).

	All usual residents: Day-to-day activities limited a lot	All usual residents: Day-to-day activities limited a little	All usual residents: Day-to-day activities not limited
NI	217964 (11%)	245057 (13%)	1440158 (76%)
ANDBC	18092 (11%)	23252 (14%)	122315 (75%)

Appendix 2: Monitoring returns for Ards and North Down Borough Council employees

According to October 2023 monitoring returns, Ards and North Down Borough Council has 882 employees.

Religious belief/community background

78 per cent of employees are identified as Protestant and 15 per cent Catholic.

	Percentage
Non-determined	7%
Protestant	78%
Roman Catholic	15%

Ethnic origin

1 per cent of employees identify as being from a minority ethnic community background.

	Percentage
Black	0%
Chinese	0%
Other	1%
White	86%
No response/prefer not to say	13%

Men and women generally

38 per cent of employees are female and 62 per cent male.

	Female	Male
Percentage	38%	62%

Marital status

Over half the employee population is married or in a civil partnership.

	Percentage
Single	21%
Never married	1%
Married or civil partnership	51%
Co-habiting	5%
Divorced	4%
Separated	3%
Widowed	0%
No response	15%

Sexual orientation

71 per cent of employees identified as heterosexual. 28 per cent did not respond or preferred not to say.

	Percentage
Bisexual	0%
Heterosexual	71%
Homosexual	0%
No response or prefer not to say	28%
None	1%

Disability

4 per cent of employees are disabled and 96 per cent are non-disabled.

	Percentage
Does not have a disability	96%
Has a disability	4%

Dependants

41 per cent of employees have dependants

	Percentage
A child or children	36%
A dependent elderly person	2%
None	32%
Other	1%
Physical mental ill health/disability	1%
No response	27%

Age

The majority of employees are aged between 41 and 60.

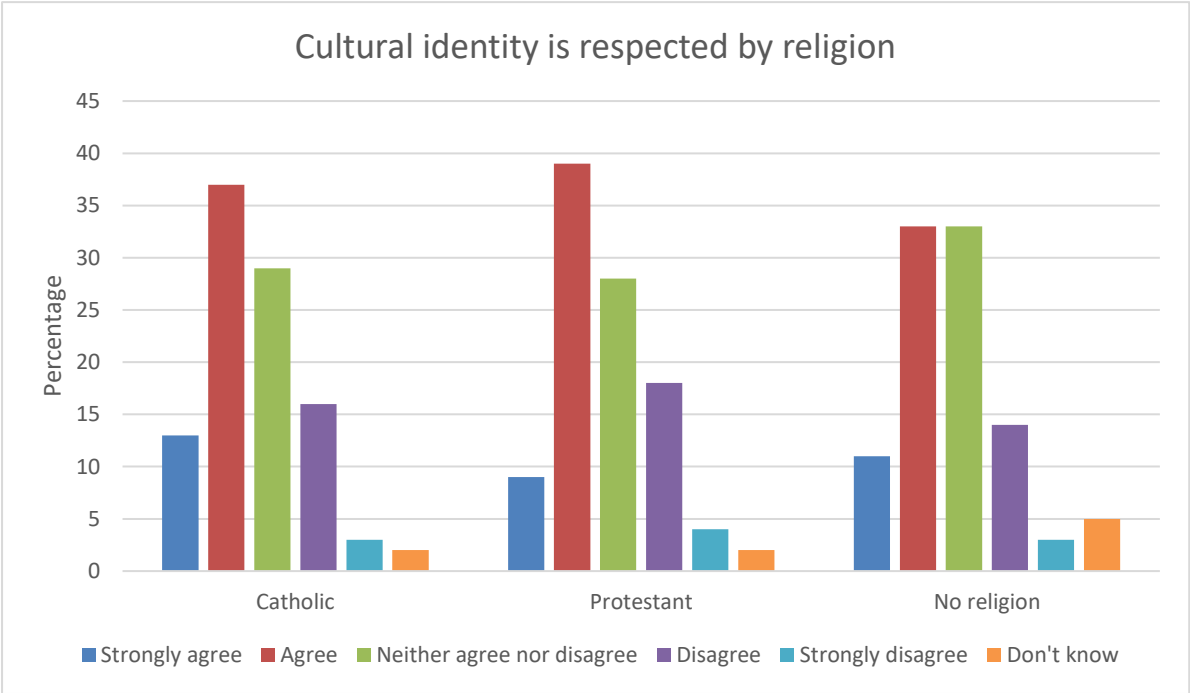
	Female	Male
25 and under	1%	3%
Age 26 to 40	23%	25%
Age 41 to 60	67%	56%
60+	10%	16%

Appendix 3: NI Life and Times Survey

The following data is drawn from the 2023 NI Life and Times Survey.¹⁰

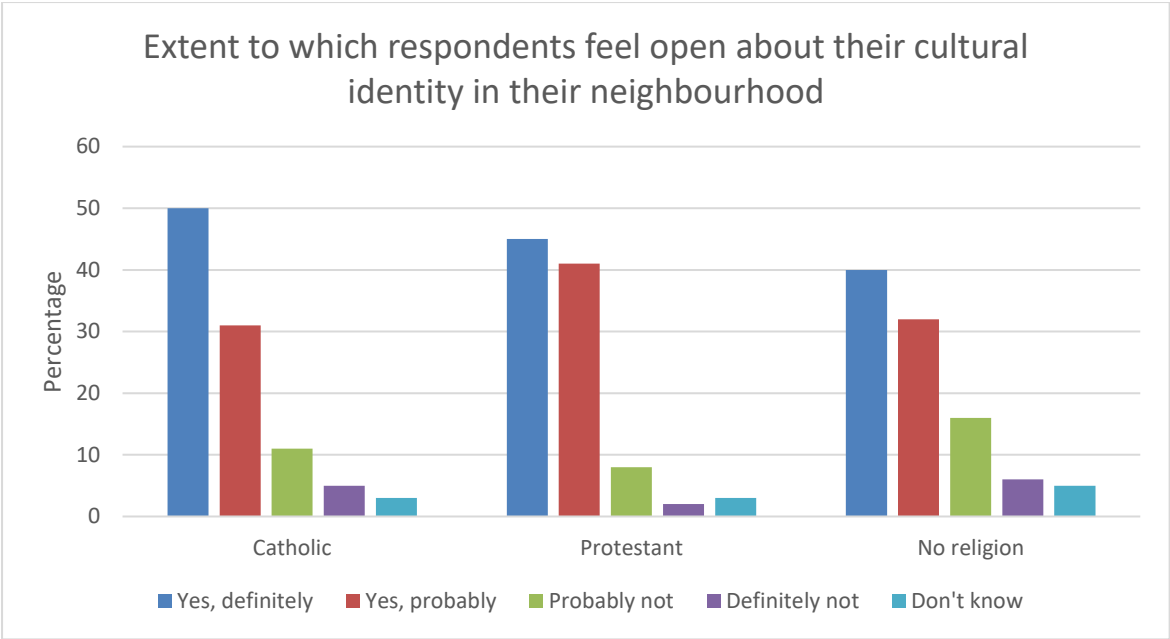
Cultural identity

47 per cent of people surveyed in the 2023 NI Life and Times Survey felt that their own cultural identity is respected by society. People from a Catholic community background are most likely to agree, while those with 'No religion' are least likely to agree.



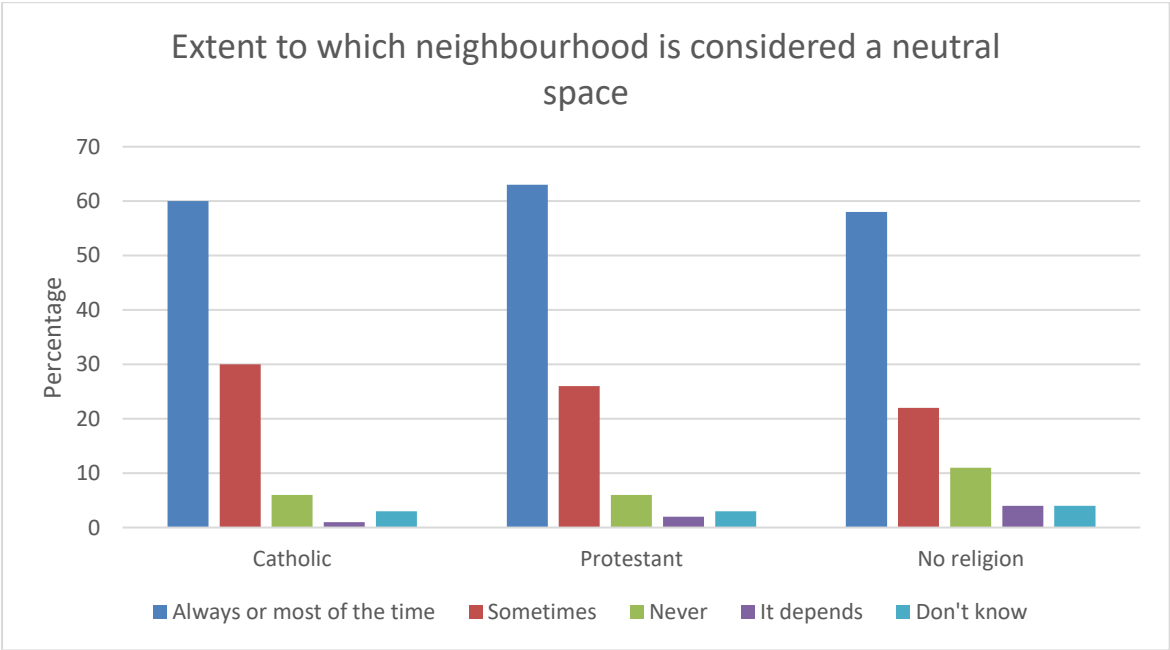
Respondents were also asked, 'Thinking of the neighbourhood where you live, is it a place where you feel you can be open about your own cultural identity?' People from a Protestant community background were most likely to agree, and people with 'No religion' were least likely to agree.

¹⁰ www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2023/



Neutral space

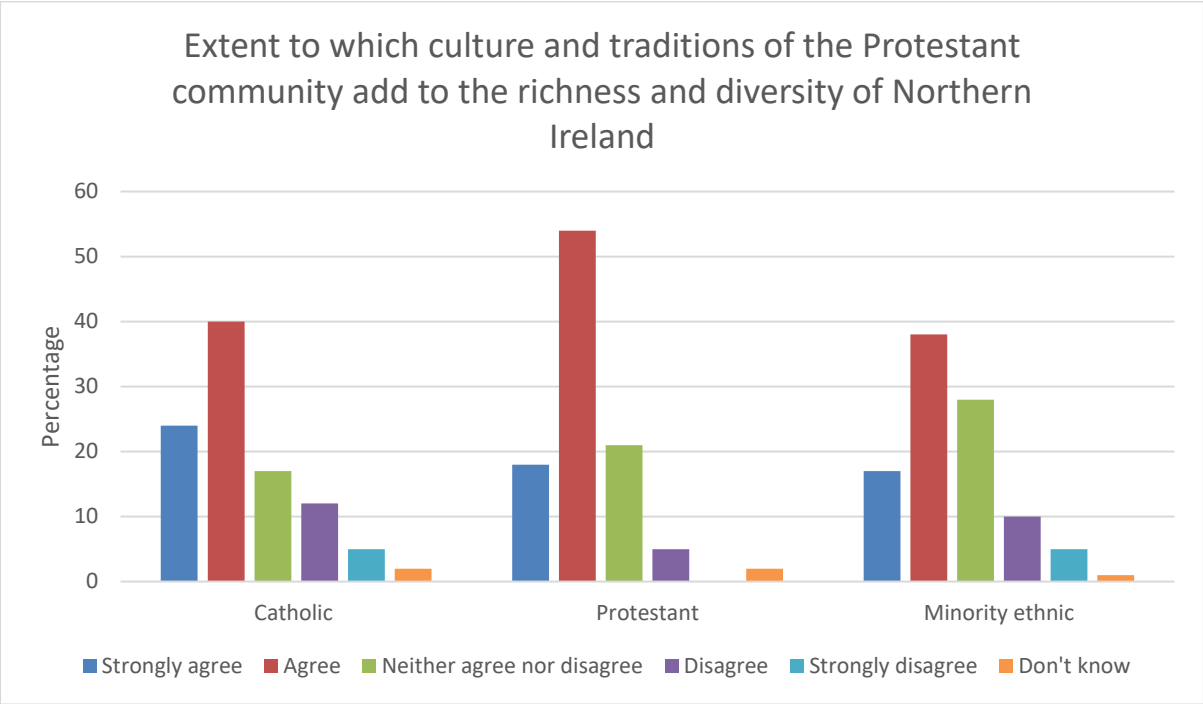
Participants were also asked, 'Thinking of the neighbourhood where you live, would you say that it was a 'neutral space'?' People from a Catholic or Protestant community background were most likely to agree, while people with 'No religion' were least likely to agree that their neighbourhood is a neutral space.



Culture and diversity

Participants were also asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement, 'The culture and traditions of the Protestant community add to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland society.'

People from the Protestant community were most likely to agree, and people with 'No religion' were least likely to agree.



Appendix 4: Relevant Ards and North Down Borough Council policies and research

The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017 to 2032

The Big Plan is Ards and North Down's community plan. It provides an overarching framework setting out a shared vision and ambition that the Strategic Community Planning Partnership has agreed to work towards over the next 15 years.

Its vision is that 'Ards and North Down is a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to be.'

Its overarching, cross-cutting ambition is:

'To have empowered, resilient individuals and communities, to reduce inequalities; to promote good relations and sustainability; and to improve the accessibility of all public services.'

It contains five outcomes, 'that we aspire to accurately reflect the situation of the people who live in Ards and North Down by the year 2032':

- Outcome 1: All people in Ards and North Down fulfil their lifelong potential.
- Outcome 2: All people in Ards and North Down enjoy good health and wellbeing.
- Outcome 3: All people in Ards and North Down live in communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure.
- Outcome 4: All people in Ards and North Down benefit from a prosperous economy.
- Outcome 5: All people in Ards and North Down feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment.

Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan 2025–28

In accord with its Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan, Ards and North Down Borough Council is committed to promoting equality and good relations for everyone in the Borough. Equality, inclusivity and diversity are placed at the core of all of the Council's services and actions, as it strives to work towards achieving a shared future for all.

The Council's Good Relations Strategy outlines a plan to promote inclusivity, cohesion, and positive community engagement across the Borough in support of the NI Executive's Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy.¹¹

¹¹ www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/together-building-united-community-tbuc

Its four key themes are:

- Our Shared Community
- Our Safe Community
- Our Children and Young People
- Our Cultural Expression

During the consultation to develop the 2025–28 strategy, stakeholders highlighted the need for shared spaces, improved youth engagement, community safety, and greater support for inclusive cultural expression. Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of tackling socioeconomic disparities, addressing paramilitary influence, and creating more opportunities for intercommunity dialogue.

Equality Scheme for Ards and North Down Borough Council 2020–25

The Council's Equality Scheme and Equality Action Plan¹² detail the Council's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This includes screening of policies and procedures to identify if there are any adverse or potential adverse impacts on equality of opportunity or good relations; consultation on all Section 75 policy screening outcomes in accordance with the principles contained in the Equality Commission's Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities; and annual reports on progress.

Priorities in its action plan include:

- Design, commission and deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of people and communities in Ards and North Down Borough.
- Attract, recruitment and progress a diverse range of employees in a culture that celebrates diversity and inclusion ensuring employment practises are fair and equal.
- Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
- Shared spaces – provide an environment where all are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.

¹² <https://ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/article/1791/Our-Commitment-to-Equality>

Estate Strategy for Ards and North Down Borough Council 2020–25

The Council's Estate Strategy considers the land and property assets the Council owns and leases, 'to ensure that they are aligned to our aspirations, optimised in terms of resource efficiency and organised to support the needs of our community.' This includes becoming 'more outcomes focused' and managing the portfolio, 'for the benefit of the community [...] to serve both public and corporate priorities.'

Objectives include:

'To support a refreshed focus on communities and people, economic regeneration and tourism, the quality of our environment and the core services provided by the Council, and its partners'

The effectiveness of the estate is measured by benchmarks including:

- Demonstrating that property assets comply with statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Demonstrating that property is accessible for all service users and staff.
- Data relating to social outcomes

Land and Property Policy

The Council's Land and Property Policy provides the framework that the Council follows to manage its extensive portfolio of land and property including the granting of leases and licences and dealing with any associated land requests.

In the absence of an events policy, requests by third parties to run an event on Council land or property are also processed in accordance with this Land and Property policy. The policy states:

'Permission granted under this policy to use Council land or property is without prejudice to any planning, building control, environmental or other legislative or regulatory requirements and it will be a matter for the person making the request to ensure that they apply for such other permissions as required.'

Council officers should also signpost applicants when a request is approved to the Council's Event Management toolkit.

Event Management Toolkit

Ards and North Down Borough Council's Event Management Toolkit provides guidance on the safe management of events and contains event management plan and risk assessment templates.

The How to Manage your Event guide defines events as ‘organised activity open to members of the public to attend’ including community celebrations, cultural events, parades, processions and marches.

The guide states:

‘This document enables the Council to advise Event Organisers on:

- Key steps to planning an event.
- What legislation and byelaws apply to their event and how to find out information on these.
- Measures to protect the environment and surrounding landscape.
- Avoiding causing offence or discriminating against any group or individual.
- Adhering to relevant health and safety legislation at events.
- Finding organisations to assist with their event.’

In relation to equality, it states:

‘The Council carries out all its duties and responsibilities in compliance with Section 75 of NI Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006).

‘This ensures all Council officers and others delivering services on behalf of the Council are made aware of their responsibility to be cognisant of the range of needs of those to whom they are providing services. There is a breadth and diversity of needs across all users which should be taken into consideration in arranging any event.’

Equality screening of request to hold an Orange Victims Day at the Ward Park Cenotaph

Following the request received by the Council to use Ward Park to commemorate Orange Victims Day, the Council carried out an equality screening.

It considered that the request may yield positive benefits to groups attached to Section 75 categories relating to Religious Belief, Political Opinion and Men and Women generally, specifically ‘some of the Protestant community and those who associate with the Orange Institution’.

The screening further reflected that:

‘The observance of Orange Victims Day can raise awareness about the complexities of the conflict and the impact it had on some individuals and families involved [...]

‘Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 formalises the shift from managing diversity and difference to promoting diversity and integration. It requires public authorities to take a pro-active initiating approach to contributing to a shared society, rather than responding to the effects of a divided one. In this regard having Orange Victims Day at a shared space in Ward Park, Bangor could have a significant impact on good relations between Protestant and Catholic communities.’

However, the screening also considers that as Ward Park:

‘is regarded as “shared space” [the request] may have a negative impact on the Catholic community as the request mentions Orangemen/women victims only.’

It continues:

‘An event that commemorates victims from one section of the community may highlight the existing divisions between unionists (predominantly Protestant) and nationalists (predominantly Catholic). It can serve to reinforce political identities and deepen divisions between these groups.’

The screening also considers in relation to equality of opportunity for disabled people:

‘The event management plan has no mention of those attending the event with disabilities, the land and property policy specifically states that the organiser must have due regard to the Disability Discrimination Order. It is unclear how this has been achieved in the event management plan submitted.’

Appendix 5: Other relevant legislation and agreements

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement

In the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the participants endorsed the commitment:

‘that whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities.’

Also, in relation to national identity, Article 1 (xi) of the Agreement provides that the two Governments:

‘recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish Citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland.’

Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998

Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998¹³ established the Parades Commission for Northern Ireland. The Act empowers the Commission, among other requirements, to:

- a) promote greater understanding by the general public of issues concerning public processions;
- b) promote and facilitate mediation as a means of resolving disputes concerning public processions;
- c) issue determinations in respect of particular proposed public processions and protest meetings.

¹³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/2/contents

Processions must adhere to the guidance and legislation provided by the Parades Commission.

Parades and Related Protests: A Code of Conduct

The Parades Commission's Code of Conduct¹⁴ aims:

‘to ensure that those participating in public processions can do so legally and peacefully while at the same time minimising disruption, annoyance or offence to those who work or live on or near the routes along which they pass.’

Compliance with the Code is taken into account by the Commission when making decisions about public processions. This includes consideration of:

- Routes
- Timings
- Bands, including ‘standards of dress, performance, music and behaviour have the potential to enhance or diminish the public's perception of the organisation’
- Stewarding
- Notice
- Preparation

The Code also includes guidance for anyone participating in a public procession including in relation to behaviour, dress, bands, music, flags and dispersal.

Further guidance applies to processions in the vicinity of sensitive locations including war memorials, where

- Only hymn tunes should be played.
- Behaviour should be respectful.
- Marching should be dignified.

Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998

The Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998¹⁵ makes discrimination on the grounds of religious belief and political opinion unlawful, both in the workplace and in the provision of goods, facilities and services.

It also bans ‘harassment’ in the workplace on these grounds. Harassment is defined in Article 3A as:

¹⁴ www.paradescommission.org/getmedia/a8135b81-ee6-45e3-8e1c-33b5d073b312/NorthernIrelandParadesCommission.aspx

¹⁵ www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1998/3162/contents/made

‘(1) A person (‘A’) subjects another person (‘B’) to harassment in any circumstances relevant for the purposes of any provision referred to in Article 3(2B) where, on the ground of religious belief or political opinion, A engages in unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of-

(a) violating B's dignity, or

(b) creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for B.

(2) Conduct shall be regarded as having the effect specified in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) of paragraph (1) only if, having regard to all the circumstances, including, in particular, the perception of B, it should reasonably be considered as having that effect.

(3) For the purposes of this Order a person subjects another to unlawful harassment if he engages in conduct in relation to that other which is unlawful by virtue of any provision mentioned in Article 3(2B).’

Section 28 makes discrimination unlawful in relation to access to and use of public buildings.

‘(1) It is unlawful for any person concerned with the provision (for payment or not) of goods, facilities or services to the public or a section of the public to discriminate against a person who seeks to obtain or use those goods, facilities or services-

(a) by refusing or deliberately omitting to provide him with any of them; or

(b) by refusing or deliberately omitting to provide him with goods, facilities or services of the same quality, in the same manner and on the same terms as are normal in this case in relation to other members of the public or (where the person so seeking belongs to a section of the public) to other members of that section.’

Examples provided under Section 28 include access to and use of any place which members of the public are permitted to enter; facilities for entertainment, recreation or refreshment; and the services of any local or other public authority.

Employers also have legal obligations to promote fair participation in employment and associated responsibilities to promote a good and harmonious workplace.

Fair Employment Code of Practice

The Equality Commission's Fair Employment Code of Practice¹⁶ provides general guidance to employers with regard to good practice in the promotion of equality of opportunity. In relation to the working environment the code states that employers should:

‘promote a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere in which no worker feels under threat or intimidated because of his or her religious belief or political opinion e.g. prohibit the display of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti, or the circulation of materials, or the deliberate articulation of slogans or songs, which are likely to give offence or cause apprehension among particular groups of employees.

Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment: A Guide for Employers and Employees

The Equality Commission guidance on promoting a good and harmonious working environment¹⁷ states that

‘A good and harmonious working environment is one where all workers are treated with dignity and respect and where no worker is subjected to harassment by conduct that is related to religious belief or political opinion.’

However, the Commission acknowledges that, ‘the very restrictive nature of a “neutral” environment may give rise to other problems for employers’ and

‘This of course does not mean that working environments must always be devoid of anything that happens to be more closely associated with one or other of the two main communities in Northern Ireland.’

It continues:

‘Consequently, employers may find it preferable to facilitate diverse expressions of identity in a sensitive way which does not disrupt a good and harmonious working environment. Such an approach should be founded on choices that are reasonable, fair and appropriate at that time and in that place.’

The Commission considers that, ‘There are many ways in which we convey our religious or political identity to others’. In the category of ‘Symbols which are not

¹⁶ www.equalityni.org/FairEmployment

¹⁷ Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment, A Guide for Employers and Employees, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, October 2009

likely to disrupt a good and harmonious working environment' when 'displayed with decorum' and 'a sense of due proportion' are:

'emblems that may be associated primarily with one religion or community but are not directly linked to community conflict.

'Such marks of identity are unlikely to be regarded as creating an intimidating or hostile working environment. There are many examples of such emblems, including:

- Marks of religious observance, insignia associated with organisations attached primarily to one religion, community or culture (e.g., crosses, crucifixes, ashes, kippot, turbans, Muslim veils, pioneer pins, Christian Union badge, fáinnes, dreadlocks)
- Marks of remembrance, celebration or commemoration (e.g., poppies, shamrock)'

Symbols the Equality Commission considers to have potential to disrupt a good and harmonious working environment include:

'some individual emblems and symbols that, through their history and associations, and whether intended or not, have come to have a significance that has the potential to make those of a different identity feel uncomfortable or unwelcome.

'In this category are likely to fall a variety of symbols and emblems with the potential to cause disharmony, and especially those that have been directly linked to community conflict in Northern Ireland and/or to local politics. These include [...] Badges and insignia, e.g., Easter Lillies, Orange symbols'.

The guidance continues:

'in many other contexts these and other symbols may be wholly acceptable – for example, football shirts worn at a football match, or political emblems displayed in the context of political events or institutions. However, within the workplace and at workplace organised events such emblems may have the potential to cause unnecessary tension and be divisive.'

The Guide advises that it is for each employer to reach an informed decision with regard to its policies and the context in which it is operating.

Equality Commission Advice on Good Relations in Local Councils

In its Advice on Good Relations to Local Councils, the Commission presents eight key points for councils to consider when developing a good relations policy framework. This includes point six, whereby councils are to consider cumulative impacts on good relations and put in place appropriate mitigations. It provides an example:

‘a particular emblem or decision may have little adverse impact on the promotion of good relations when viewed in isolation or in the context of an environment that is otherwise generally welcoming to everyone, but might have a greater adverse impact if displayed in an environment in which it is merely one amongst a large number of similar items that are directed towards the interests of one particular community to the exclusion of others.’

Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997

Under this Order,¹⁸ not only may an individual be responsible at a criminal and civil level for subjecting someone to harassment on at least two occasions, but an employer may be vicariously liable for a course of conduct by one of its employees that amounts to ‘harassment’. The harassment may consist of bullying, intimidation or harassment, and does not need to be on a prohibited ground or discrimination.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s 2013 report, *The Display of Flags, Symbols and Emblems in Northern Ireland*,¹⁹ notes that:

‘The display of flags, symbols or emblems in a public space may act as a territorial marker or a method of harassment, irrespective of the intention behind its erection. The ECt.HR has noted that expression, which is not, on its face, offensive, can be offensive in certain circumstances. Consequently, when public authorities make decisions pertaining to the erection or removal of a flag, symbol or emblem, a broader discussion of the rights of those who live in the vicinity and those who travel in or through the area for purposes of accessing services is required. The existence of such displays may have an impact on individuals from other communities, acting as a form of intimidation which creates an access barrier to the area. This may have consequences for individuals accessing health care

¹⁸ www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1997/1180/contents

¹⁹ <https://nihrc.org/publication/detail/the-display-of-flags-symbols-and-emblems-in-northern-ireland2>

services and for children in accessing public recreational spaces, both of which are protected by international human rights law.’

Together: Building a United Community

The NI Executive launched T:BUC²⁰ in 2013. Its vision is:

‘a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.’

T: BUC’s aims are:

1. Our children and young people: to continue to improve attitudes amongst our young people and to build a community where they can play a full and active role in building good relations.
2. Our shared community: to create a community where division does not restrict the life opportunities of individuals and where all areas are open and accessible to everyone.
3. Our safe community: to create a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety.
4. Our cultural expression: to create a community, which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced.

Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition

Under the remit of T:BUC, the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition published their final report in December 2021.

The Commission differentiated between the individual expression of identity and civic identity, which, ‘might include local identities and a city identity, which is often the work of local Councils’:

‘The first aspect of shared space involves maximising the rights of individuals and groups to use and express themselves in public spaces. In this sense, shared space reflects people’s rights as citizens, their access to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and their access to the resources, facilities and amenities within our society. The state has a positive duty to protect these rights. The second feature of shared space is the creation of places of interaction and common experience. This involves the facilitation of

²⁰ www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/together-building-united-community-tbuc

events that are open, welcoming and that encourage diversity and learning. These will typically bring together people from different communities of interest and cultural identities at common events and impart a sense of belonging and a sense of place through the said event.'

It goes on to identify five key elements of shared space:

'It is a physical public space where people from all backgrounds can live, learn, work and play together

'It is a space that is free from symbols or displays of aggression, threat or intimidation that prevents a person entering and using the amenities within that space

'It is a space that requires balancing the right to freedom of expression and assembly with rights to security, freedom of movement and to live free from fear and intimidation

'It is a space that fosters interactions that move beyond joint access to or use of a particular space to create sustained connection and relationships between groups and individuals

'It is a space where identity or political perspective is not suppressed or hidden, but a space where diversity, cultural expression and difference can be expressed, tolerated and celebrated.'

It continues:

'The interface between shared space and good relations is therefore about the right to access areas, and the opportunity to experience the space together with other members of our diverse society. It does not deny or disallow differences, but rather provides for areas of commonality and binding ideas of citizenship. It is a place where expressions of cultural identity (that may have previously been grounds for threat or dispute) become grounds for tolerance and even celebration.'

UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

Report on the importance of public spaces for the exercise of cultural rights

In her 2019 Report on the importance of public spaces for the exercise of cultural rights,²¹ the UN Special Rapporteur's definition of public space is space that is:

‘publicly owned and accessible to all without discrimination, where people can share in the project of building a common society based on human rights, equality and dignity [...] while still nurturing and expressing their own identities. [...] The pursuit of social cohesion does not mean that controversies and debate cannot arise in public spaces. They are places where various, sometimes opposing, world visions can at times be expressed and where controversies can be debated in circumstances that respect the human rights of all.’

A potential problem is identified:

‘when a particular narrative or worldview, whether commercial, religious, political, national or exclusively reflecting the viewpoint of a majority group, becomes overly dominant and renders diversity invisible. The effect, intentional or not, is that public spaces may not be considered as shared spaces welcoming for all.’

Recommendations include:

- Adopting measures to ensure that all persons can effectively access, enjoy and contribute freely to public spaces, and facilitating such opportunities for groups facing obstacles in this regard;
- Providing training for relevant public officials on the concept of inclusive public spaces;
- Establish specialised, cross-disciplinary professional teams responsible for the design, maintenance and conservation of public spaces that are welcoming for all and create mechanisms for citizen participation in the management of such spaces.

Report on memorialisation processes in post-conflict and divided societies

The 2014 report on the field of cultural rights addressed memorialisation processes in post-conflict and divided societies²² considers memorialisation as

²¹ www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/reports/2019/report-importance-public-spaces-exercise-cultural-rights

²² https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/105/01/PDF/G1410501.pdf?OpenElement%20EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A_HRC_25_49_ENG.DOC&action=default&DefaultItemO%20Open=1

‘a long-term process in which the State must play an active and decisive role. The authorities that adopt and implement memory policies should ensure that such policies properly represent the views of the victims and are established in collaboration with civil society, especially human rights organizations.’

Public policy should be ‘multidimensional’, including memorials, parks and public space with education and other ‘steps [...] taken to build a culture of peace’.

The UN Special Rapporteur continues:

‘The memorialization of past times defined by violations of human rights and international humanitarian law provides an opportunity to reflect on the present and identify contemporary problems related to exclusion, discrimination, marginalization and abuses of power, which are often linked to toxic political cultures. Memorialization promotes the development of a culture of democracy and respect for human rights [...] In transitional contexts, memorialization processes can be effective only if they pursue the political goal of establishing democracy and a culture of peace.’

However, it also considers that ‘too much memory, especially if presented in the form of irreconcilable versions of the past, might hurt rather than help a society’ and that there is a need to establish, a ‘delicate balance between forgetting and remembering.’

The Special Rapporteur concludes that an essential element for successful memorialisation is collaboration between the authorities, citizens and civil society, especially representatives of those directly affected by past events, providing ‘the necessary space for those affected to articulate their diverse narratives in culturally meaningful ways’.

Other local council policies and practice

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Public Memorials: A Policy Framework

In 2024, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council published its framework²³ to support the erection of public memorials on council land and properties and other land throughout the Borough.

Public memorials are defined in this context to include monuments, statues, markers, or other landscape features that honour significant historical figures or events.

The policy states that:

‘Council will consider the impact the proposed memorial/installation may make on equality of opportunity and good relations activity that focuses on providing opportunities for civic and community leaders to promote the area as a model of best practice in developing respect, understanding and tolerance of the cultural, historical and traditional diversity of the residents.’

‘With regards to Council’s statutory obligations under Section 75 of the (NI) Act 1998, memorials and installations must be in keeping with good relations principles. Applications will not be considered if the memorial is seen to:

- Harden the attitudes and mindsets of one community over the other.
- Harden the boundaries between groups/communities.
- Appear to dehumanise or diminish one group/community.
- Appear as an imposition of one group/community over another.
- Erode the confidence of one group/community.
- Appear to undermine identity through negation of culture, language, and expression.
- Negatively impact or affect any member of the public.
- Serve to promote the values and rights of one group/community over another.

Each decision will be screened to identify potential adverse impacts.

²³ https://causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk/assets/policies/MEMORIALS-POLICY-FRAMEWORK.-FINAL_Updated-21.11.24.pdf

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's Memorials and Commemorations: A Policy Framework²⁴

‘recognises the need to have in place robust decision-making procedures for dealing with contentious issues that can arise locally and can disrupt good relations within and across local communities.’

It continues:

‘The guide aims to provide employers and employees with practical advice to assist in promoting and sustaining a good and harmonious working environment. While the primary focus of the guide is on religious belief and political opinion in the workplace, there can be read-across to other contexts and other protected aspects of identity including race, gender, disability, sexual orientation and age.’

By way of example, it considers:

‘the potential to raise significant legal challenges in relation to decisions on memorials or commemorations [...] if a request to erect a memorial or hold a commemorative event is refused, will that refusal constitute unlawful discrimination? Alternatively, if the memorial is put in place or the commemoration event goes ahead, could members of the public or Council employees reasonably claim to be harassed?’

The policy continues to outline a process whereby applications for a memorial or commemoration are considered first by a cross-party Equality Working Group, which then reports to the Council's Policy and Resource Committee prior to final decision making. The Council will consult with relevant stakeholders when reaching any decision. Each decision will be screened to identify potential adverse impacts, and where appropriate, an EQIA will be carried out.

The policy does not list potentially permissible memorials or commemorations ‘Given the large number of contested or politically sensitive issues in Northern Ireland’. Rather it considers that ‘local circumstances may dictate which memorials or commemorations are seen as contentious’, and the Council will exercise discretion in line with due process as outlined in the policy.

²⁴

www.midandeantrim.gov.uk/downloads/Commemorations_and_Memorials_Policy_Framework.pdf

Belfast City Council

Shared space principles

Belfast City Council's Good Relations Strategy, published in 2019, identifies four 'shared space principles' based on an understanding that that shared space is not neutral space, but a place where identity can be expressed in an open and non-hostile environment.

Its principles are:

- Welcoming – where people feel secure to take part in unfamiliar interactions, and increase an overall sense of shared experience and community;
- Accessible – well-connected in terms of transport and pedestrian links within a network of similar spaces across the city and managed to promote maximum participation by all communities;
- Good quality – attractive, high quality unique services and well-designed buildings and spaces;
- Safe – for all persons and groups, trusted by both locals and visitors.

Decade of Centenaries 2012–22

The Decade of Centenaries commemorated a decade of key historical moments and events between 1912 and 1922 that shaped Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Belfast City Council's Historic Centenaries Working Group drafted principles to be used to curate a programme of events and activities to be mark the Decade of Centenaries.

External event promoters seeking to use council premises such as City Hall were also required to abide by principles:

- The event should be based on historic accuracy, robust academic expertise and critical analysis and provide opportunities, where appropriate, to include a range of different perspectives and aim to increase understanding and appreciation of other perspectives and identities.
- The interpretation of events should be in a broad historical context and understanding of the national and European setting of the time.
- The event must not be triumphalist in nature, nor should it give rise to offense to any section of the community. It should not serve to deepen or harden existing divisions or belittle or demonise other groups.
- The event must seek to be inclusive and should be welcoming to all sections of our increasingly diverse community in Belfast.
- Organisers must ensure that at the event there are no commemorations or displays relating to recent paramilitary activities or organisations, cloaked in broader identity issues.

- The Council has a duty of care to our staff employed to work in supporting and servicing such events. Therefore, organisers of private events in the City Hall should avoid actions, behaviours or displays which would fall within the definition of harassment as outlined in Article 3A of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.
- The organisers should be aware of the Council's agreed statement on diversity and ensure that the event is consistent with it.

Advice from the Equality Commission

In a letter dated 29 September 2011 to Belfast City Council from the Equality Commission in relation to their flag flying policy, the Commission considered:

‘The Commission recognises that for local Councils there would be a difference between the customer base at the headquarters and that in more localised areas.’

Complaints

Following the decision not to approve the land request for Ward Park in 2024, there was significant political, public and media interest, both positive and negative.

One formal complaint was received from a member of the public via the Council's formal complaints process. It stated:

‘Absolutely disgusting that you prevented Bangor LOL from entering Ward Park to commemorate those murdered by the IRA. If you prevent peaceful commemorations, you encourage illegal gatherings. Typical North Down.’

There have been no other relevant complaints about events or commemorations during the lifespan of Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Appendix 6: Equality scheme consultees

Active Youth	Equality Commission NI
Adapt NI	Foras na Gaeilge
Andrew Muir MLA	Hamilton Road Baptist Church Bangor
Antrim and Newtownabbey Council	Helens Bay Presbyterian Church
Ards Chamber of Trade	Human Rights Commission
Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Council	IMTAC
Arts and Disability Forum	Irish Football Association
Aware NI	Kelly Armstrong MLA
Bangor Alternatives	Kilcooley Forum
Bangor Chamber of commerce	Kings Church, Bangor
Bangor Foodbank and community support	Local Government Staff Commission
Belfast Butterfly Club	Mae Murray Foundation
Branch Out	Men's Advisory Project Northern Ireland
Camphill Community Glencraig	Mid and East Antrim Council
Carers NI	Millisle District and Community Association
Children in Northern Ireland	MS Society
Commission for older people	North Down Community Network
Community Advice	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Connie Egan MLA	NOW Group
DEARA	Open House Festival
Decorum NI	Parkinsons UK NI
Department of Finance	Peter Martin MLA
Derry City and Strabane Council	Positive Futures
Downs Syndrome Association	Probation Board NI

Rare Disease

Redburn Loughview Community
Forum

RNIB

Shore Street Church, Donaghadee

Stronger Together

The Link Centre

The Rainbow Project

Towerview Methodists Church

Ulster University

West Church (Presbyterian)

Whitehill Community Association

Women’s Aid Ards and North Down

You 2 Me Play

Appendix 7: Written response

Dear Chief Executive

I hope this message finds you well.

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the ongoing Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) being conducted by Ards and North Down Borough Council concerning the request to hold an Orange Victims Day event at the Ward Park Cenotaph in Bangor on 7th September 2025.

As a proud Orangeman, I reflect on the brave men and women who sacrificed their lives for our country to uphold democracy. They were not afforded the opportunity to question the IRA before defending our nation, and it is in their honour that I address this matter.

While I understand the importance of ensuring equality and inclusivity in all council decisions, I am concerned that this particular EQIA may serve to unfairly scrutinise or potentially obstruct a sincere and respectful commemoration of those who lost their lives during the Troubles.

The Orange Order is a Protestant religious organisation that seeks to honour and remember its members who were targeted and murdered by the IRA because of their faith and identity. I firmly believe that such a service is both justified and appropriate, and I struggle to see how any individual, regardless of their beliefs, could reasonably object to a solemn religious service commemorating those who were murdered for their faith.

It is deeply troubling to consider that attempts to commemorate victims could be perceived as controversial or be subject to undue opposition. It is crucial that the tragic events of the Troubles, and the suffering endured by our community, are neither forgotten nor whitewashed out of history. The right to remember those we lost should be respected and protected.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could ensure that events such as this are not unfairly scrutinised or obstructed due to the identity or religious beliefs of those organising the service. Safeguarding our history, culture, and religious freedoms is of utmost importance.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Alex Easton MP

Appendix 8: Notes from public consultation meeting

The Chamber, The Castle, Bangor

Thursday 22nd May 2025, 7pm–8.30pm

Facilitated by

John Kremer (JK)

Attended by

38 members of the Public.

Purpose of meeting

The purpose of the public meeting was to obtain community feedback in relation to the use of land request received by the Council to hold an Orange Order Victims' Day event at the Ward Park Cenotaph in Bangor on 7th September 2025. This meeting formed part of the mandatory component of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process. JK provided an overview of the EQIA process, confirming that the Council was seeking public opinion on the request.

Summary of views

Attendees expressed their inability to understand why the proposed event was perceived as contentious. JK explained that being contentious is not the sole reason for an EQIA, it was the Council going through due process to consider potential adverse impacts and thereby avoid the risk of challenge.

An attendee clarified that the event was not intended as a single identity gathering, emphasising its open accessibility to all members of the public, not exclusively to members of the Orange Order (OO). JK explained that it was the Orange Order that was exclusively of a single religious identity.

Representatives from Bangor LOL 18 conveyed a perception of being unfairly targeted by the Council. They further explained that Ward Park was chosen as the proposed venue specifically for its perceived neutrality.

A point was raised asserting that the Council does not own Ward Park, deeming it public land accessible for use by any member of the public.

An attendee enquired whether an EQIA would be required if a Roman Catholic church requested to use the park.

Representatives from Bangor LOL 18 expressed a belief that the Council had used social media and the EQIA process to encourage objections and cultivate a biased opinion. They advocated for a common-sense approach.

They further explained that their access was 'refused' in 2024, a decision they considered 'unjust.'

A member enquired why Ward Park could be utilised for the 1st of July and 12th of July parades without an associated EQIA.

The group felt that the 12th of July parade would potentially cause greater public sensitivity, expressing their inability to understand who would object to the current request.

They emphasised that religious belief should not be a factor in this request, stating, 'Catholics died too,' and further adding, 'Other people died at the hands of the IRA that were not members of the OO.'

A member expressed strong frustration with the EQIA process, stating, 'members of the OO died so you can have your stupid EQIA,' a member/other member voiced a strong view that the process was an inappropriate burden in the context of the commemoration.

It was articulated that the £6,000 cost associated with the EQIA constituted a 'waste of public money.'

A member queried whether JK envisioned 'the likes of this' when Section 75 was first introduced in 2008. He asserted that its current application was being used 'inappropriately.'

JK explained that the Council undertake this process to ensure that they have taken due consideration and that doing this properly reduces the risk of being challenged in the courts (which would cost significantly more) for not going through the process. A member inquired about the specific circumstances that would trigger a judicial review.

A member stated that if a formal request had not been submitted for Council land use, the event could have proceeded without public knowledge or Council sanction.

A member said that other groups use the park without consent and believed that their own group should not be uniquely required to seek official permission.

Participants noted the belief that they 'could have turned up and done it anyway, as there is no consequence.' However, as ratepayers, they emphasised having 'upheld the law' and pursued the request 'the right way,' leading to a feeling of being 'punished' for their adherence to official procedures.

A member raised concerns regarding the Council's own event practices, stating that they 'hold music events every Sunday in July and August' and 'allow members of the public to drink and smoke on the cenotaph.' They went on to say that this was disrespectful for those who died.

They inquired whether all Council-permitted events are subject to an EQIA.

It was reiterated that the Orange Order consistently felt 'up against it' in their dealings with the Council and others too.

Participants expressed a perception that certain Council staff were deliberately obstructing their efforts, mischief making and acting in conjunction with certain political parties.

An attendee stated that the Council, perceived as 'a unionist council,' was being 'run by nationalists.' This comment was met with a round of applause and cheers from attendees.

A member expressed annoyance regarding an instance where a member of the public reportedly 'snuck into the park, under the cover of darkness, every year, to place an Easter Lily (Flower) on the cenotaph,' noting that he did not complain about that incident.

A member characterised the current process by Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) as 'overkill,' citing that Belfast City Council permitted the band Kneecap to perform on their land without such perceived 'nonsense' or similar extensive requirements.

It was widely felt that the cenotaph served as an appropriate location for the service.

It was stated that the Council has no jurisdiction over the parade itself, as this falls under the remit of the Parades Commission. Furthermore, in justification of the proposed route, it was stated, 'after all, we are not walking past chapels.'

Preferred option

JK enquired which option the group felt was suitable in this instance

Option 1: Decline the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph.

Option 2: Decline the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph but arrange an alternative venue within the Borough.

Option 3: Agree to the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, with no conditions attached.

Option 4: Agree to the request for an event at the Ward Park Cenotaph, with conditions attached to help maintain a good and harmonious environment.

The attendees unanimously agreed on Option 3, with the group concluding that no conditions would need to be imposed.

Impacts

JK enquired the groups thoughts on the impact of the request on either the promotion of good relations or equality of opportunity both within the Borough and more generally.

While acknowledging the presence of positive community relations in the Borough, a member expressed concern that refusing the request would have a detrimental impact on Unionist families, who have suffered and those experiencing hardship.

A member summarised the sentiment by stating, 'this will have a major impact on Unionists if stopped.' However, despite the lodge's acceptance of the process as a requirement, the view was again expressed that 'people in Council are stirring it up.'

Mitigation

JK asked how the group felt about the following mitigations:

- Ensure that information is readily available in order to explain the nature and context of the event;
- Arrange for Council employees in Ward Park who have concerns with the event to avoid working while it is taking place;
- Liaise with LOL 18 to ensure that the event, including music and movement within the park to and from the Cenotaph, is dignified and respectful;
- Put in place appropriate arrangements to meet the needs of those with a disability attending the event.

A representative who made the application to use the land stated that there was a lack of direct interaction with the Council since the request was submitted. They expressed the view that direct consultation with Council officers could have alleviated past tensions (referencing 2024) and provided those processing the request with a clearer understanding of its underlying rationale. The member further asserted that the application form used for Council land was insufficient for gathering the required information.

A member asserted that oversight for parades falls under the remit of the Parades Commission and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), going on to infer that the Council had limited authority in this regard.

It was subsequently proposed that the Council directly contact the PSNI to verify the lodge's history of problem-free events and its established positive relationship with the service. Another attendee stated that the PSNI would not be able to comment on this and there was little point in asking.

Next steps

JK outlined the next steps of the consultation, explaining that views could be submitted via the Citizen Space online platform or using the paper copies provided. He invited questions from the attendees.

Questions

The members enquired whether an EQIA would be required annually if the service were to be held again in subsequent years.

JK responded that the findings of this EQIA were expected to serve as a guide for the screening processes of comparable future requests made to the Council.

An enquiry was made regarding the Elected Members' final authority in the decision, particularly if objections were raised within the EQIA findings.

JK responded to confirm that a comprehensive report will be produced upon the completion of an EQIA, detailing the findings. This report will outline potential positive and negative impacts, identify any adverse effects, and propose recommendations to mitigate negative impacts and promote equality.

The EQIA report will be presented to Corporate Committee and ultimately Council for consideration. To ensure transparency, the report will be made publicly available, allowing stakeholders and the public to understand how equality considerations have been addressed.

JK concluded by stating that Elected Members ultimately are the decision makers.

JK thanked everyone for their participation.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm.

Unclassified

341

ITEM 17**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 July 2025
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	21 July 2025
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. Proposal currently being drafted related to supporting young people in sport for their consideration and then will be reported to Council. The Chief Executive has now met with the Rory McIlroy Foundation and a proposal will be presented to them in due course.	Graeme Bannister (Director of Community & Wellbeing)		
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 to close off the NOM	Peter Caldwell (Head of Assets & Property Services)		
370	Environment	13/09/19	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 to create a modern system to assist the Council in meeting the outcomes identified within the Community Plan	Council - September 2019 Referred to Environment Committee - October 2019 Environment Committee 02.09.20 Item 12 Council - April 2025 Item 14	Report to be brought back on the possible strengthening of no alcohol consumption byelaws on Council land and at the Borough's beaches and parks. Report to also explore options on possible restrictions of open fires and the use of disposable BBQs at beaches and parks. 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 Financial provision 2026/27	Richard McCracken (Interim Head of Regulatory Services)		
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. Leasing application has been received from Comber Rec.	Ian O'Neill (Head of Leisure)		

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 2024 C&W Committee. Community Engagement took place on 24th September 2024; meeting with councillors in January 2025, further engagement has been requested and clarity is still awaited on the details of that request. Report to June C&W Committee if that clarity is obtained in advance.	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 December 2024 - Advice still outstanding August 2025 - Advice now recieved, update report to be presented to Corporate Committee	Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)		
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	Referred to C&W in 2024. Legal advice sought in 2024. Legal advice has been received April 2025. Report to June C&WC.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)		

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>Letter sent to DfI (Mark McPeak) 11/01/23 Response received from DfI 12/01/23 advising the improbability of any DfI Roads owned street furniture being superfluous. Furthermore, diverting limited resources to undertake a separate and distinct audit was not a priority for DfI at this time. However, the maintenance team during cyclic road inspections would consider our request (that being: 'no longer relevant/out-of-date/unnecessary street signage, posts, project information etc') who will bring to the attention of the local engineer to consider.</p>	Peter Caldwell (Head of Assets & Property Services)	TO BE REMOVED ON THE BASIS OF THE RESPONSE FROM DFI	
545	Community & Wellbeing	16.11.22	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Cummings	<p>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.</p>	Council November 2022 Community & Wellbeing December 2022 and March 2023 and June 2023	<p>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. Report to June 2025 C&WC.</p>	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	Will be removed when June C&WC minutes are ratified at July Council.	
549	Community & Wellbeing	09.12.22	Councillor Douglas & Councillor Walker	<p>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.</p>	Council December 2022 Corporate Services Committee January 2023 Community & Wellbeing Committee January 2024	<p>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. Report going to March Community and Wellbeing Committee. N Dorrian met with White Ribbon in January 2025. Report to June C&W 2025 Committee.</p>	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	Will be removed when June C&WC minutes are ratified at July Council.	

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...' several chasers have been sent. 26.02.25 Email received from Virginia Lowe of the EA confirming there is no further update at this time. Compliance section continues to chase.	Ian O'Neill (Head of Leisure)		
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. August 2025 - Advice now recieved on other requests, update report to be presented to Corporate Committee	Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)		
585	Community & Wellbeing	16.10.23	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.		Report to C&W Committee in January 2025. Further report requested to future C&W Committee to include site visits to Causeway Coast & Glens and Newry Mourne and Down District Council as per amended recommendation at January C&W Committee. Since January C&W Committee a summer site visit has been organised. Report to be brought back to October 2025 C&W Committee. Meanwhile beaches continue to be monitored on a proactive basis.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)		

586	Corporate Services	16.10.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Martin	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.	Council October 2023 Corporate Services Committee November 2023 Corporate Services Committee September 2024	Report to CSC. Agreed to proceed to acquisition subject to terms & discussions with vendor. July 2024 - Letter now sent to vendor. Report to Corporate Committee in September 2024. August 2025: The Council has instructed its solicitor in relation to this matter, and they are liaising directly with the solicitor instructed by the landowners. There is currently discussions about payment of fees. The Council's solicitor is chasing the other party's solicitor for an update again this week. We have stressed that the Council is keen to move this forward.	Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)		
595	Community & Wellbeing	16.11.23	Councillor McCracken & Councillor Blaney	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.	Council 29.11.2023	Initial report to December 2024 C&W Committee. Second report to June 2025 C&W Committee.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)		

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 October 2025 Committee.</p>	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)		
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>	<p>Council 27.03.24 Item 18.3</p> <p>Environment Committee 10.04.24 Item 14</p> <p>Environment Committee 04.09.24 Item 14</p> <p>Environment Committee 06.11.24 Item 3</p> <p>Environment Committee 11.06.25 Item 3</p>	<p>Agreed that the Council writes to the Department for Infrastructure Rivers Agency, sharing the findings of the study undertaken by AECOM, and asking that enhanced coastal defence schemes be progressed for the inner and outer parades in Donaghadee.</p> <p>Further agreed that Council officers make meaningful engagement with local stakeholders and incorporate their responses in an update report to be brought back to Council within 6 months.</p> <p>Agreed that the Council proceeds with the 'Phase 1' further investigation work regarding potential Donaghadee sea defence enhancements.</p> <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 in 2025.</p> <p>Environment Committee April 2024 - Agreed to bring back a report.</p>	Peter Caldwell (Head of Assets & Property Services)		

624	Corporate Services	20.05.24	Councillor Kendall, Alderman McRandal and Alderman Graham	This Council notes that, subsequent to submission of a Notice of Motion in 2017, Council agreed to provide funding to assist in the building of a new war memorial in Conlig village; and to liaise with, and assist, the Conlig War Memorial Project Group in their efforts to build a monument to the seventeen men who are known to have lost their lives in World War I.	Council - May 2024 - Corporate Services Committee June	August 2025 : Officers had a meeting with representatives of the Conlig Community Regeneration group in May. The group has now instructed an architect to complete technical drawings and to seek approval in principle from utility providers for the War Memorial site at Conlig Green, as required by NIHE as part of the application to acquire the land.	Alison Curtis (Head of Administration) & Peter Caldwell (Head of Assets and Property)		
626	Community & Wellbeing	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 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 C&W committee. Report going to June 2025 C&WC.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)		
628	Place & Prosperity	18.08.24	Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers	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 8.5.25 (4) Prosperity Ctte - 5 September 2024 (Item 14.1) Council 28 August 2024 (Item 25.2) referred to P&P	Report presented to P&P 8.5.25 agreed and ratified Donaghadee Signage Working Group established. Audit completed of existing signage to provide rationale for additional signage. Update report to future P&P Committee Agreed at 5 Sept P&P and ratified by 25 Sept Council	Brian Dorrian - (Interim Director of Place) to lead	Awaiting confirmation of funding from variance request	
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. Funding approved for 25/26 to progress first stage. Report to June C&W Committee with progress report as communicated to DEA members and local community in April and May 2025 on next steps and plans for enhancement of the site. Update to October 2025 C&WC.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)		

631	Corporate Services	7.8.24	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)	Meeting with Rhys McClenaghan took place in January 2025. August 2025: Further meetings took place in June , report to follow when more information available.	Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)		
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 Committee 2 October 2024 (Item 11.1) Environment Committee 7 May 2025 (Item 3)	Agreed at EC 7 May 2025 to proceed with a three-month trial at Holywood and Donaghadee HRCs Agreed at April 2025 Environment Committee to proceed with Option 3 for a pilot scheme in Holywood and Donaghadee HRCs in order to obtain a proper evidence basis for demand; and that consideration of pedestrian access is included in the work around the future of the HRC estate as outlined in Option 1. Further report to follow. Agreed at Environment Committee 2 October 2024	Nigel Martin (Head of Waste and Cleansing)		
636	Community & Wellbeing	16.10.24	Councillors Boyle & 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	Council October 2024 Item 23.3 - Community & Wellbeing Committee November 2024	Report to April C&WC. To be referred back to a future C&WC as per April Council decision. Report to September 2025 C&WC.	Ian O'Neill (Head of Leisure)		

638	Place & Prosperity	22.10.2024	Councillors Harbinson & McCracken	<p>That this Council should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	Place & Prosperity Committee November 2024 (Item 14.2) Council October 2024 (Item 23.5)	Agreed at 7 Nov P&P and ratified by 27 Nov Council - initial report to be brought back to future P&P Committee	Brian Dorrian (Interim Director of Place) to lead		
639	Place & Prosperity	30.10.2024	Cllr Patricia Morgan and Alderman Trevor Cummings, Cllr Libby Douglas, Alderman Philip Smith, Cllr Rachel Ashe	<p>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.</p> <p>There is, however, a long-standing dilapidated hoarding in Castle Street which badly detracts from this important area of Town.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Considering this, Officers should do a report exploring all further options available to resolve this issue with some urgency.</p>	P&P 8.5.25 (12) P&P 6.2.25 (12.3) C.29.1.25 (7.4) P&P 9.1.25 (9.1) C.27.11.24 (16.1)	<p>Report presented to P&P 8.5.25 - agreed and ratified</p> <p>Reconsidered at P&P 6.2.25 - Agreed report to be prepared</p> <p>Agreed at Council 29.1.25 (7.4) item to be returned to Cttee for further discussion</p> <p>Agreed at Cttee 09.01.25 - report to be presented</p> <p>Deferred to Jan P&P</p> <p>Agreed at Council 27.11.24 referred to Dec P&P</p>	Brian Dorrian (Interim Director of Place) to lead	Awaiting confirmation of funding from variance request	

640		05.11.2024	Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Adair	<p>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.</p> <p>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; further commits to engage with the Chancellor at the earliest opportunity and demonstrate his absolute support for farmers affected by this budget 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.</p>	Council meeting 27.11.2024 - Heard and agreed.	Letter sent to Minister on 9 December and response received 13 January. Report to go to January Council.			
644	Community & Wellbeing	10.12.24	Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	That Council notes the poor condition of the Bowtown children's play park and its poor provision of accessible play equipment and tasks officers to bring forward a report on enhancing and improving the play park to meet the needs of local children.	Council 18.12.24 and Community and Wellbeing Committee 15.01.2025	Referred to the February 2025 meeting of Community and Wellbeing Committee. Reported to April C&W Committee. April Council determined that Director & HoS to visit site. Site visit took place on 3 June 2025. A masterplan/feasability study to be carried out.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)		
646	Place & Prosperity	10.12.24	Alderman Cummings and Councillor Douglas	That this Council brings back a report identifying potential sites around Comber to accommodate industrial units suitable for use by SME's, and outline their compatibility with the Department of Economy Sub Regional Economic Plan, and Sectoral Action Plans together with Invest NI.	PC 04.02.25 Council 18.12.24 (Item 15.4)	<p>Report to P&P 9.10.25</p> <p>Agreed at 4.2.25 that the Notice of Motion be adopted.</p> <p>FURTHER AGREED that officers report back, where relevant, to the Place and Prosperity Committee.</p> <p>To be heard at Planning Committee 04.02.25</p>	Alison Stobie (Interim Head of Economic Development)		

650	Place & Prosperity	16.12.24	Councillor Ashe and Councillor McCollum	That this Council notes the transformative benefits that street art, such as painted utility boxes, can have on communities including the potential to become tourist attractions or foster a sense of civic pride and notes the recent success of the painted utility boxes in Ward Park. That this Council also acknowledges the frustration and concern that graffiti, such as tagging, can cause and the subsequent costs of removal. Council notes it is important to facilitate the creation of local art in a safe, legal, and positive way enabling artistic creation and local regeneration while also reducing the proliferation of antisocial graffiti. That this Council returns a report which: Identifies suitable utility boxes which could be prospective 'canvas sites' for local art; Identifies prospective local artists who could participate in the project, with the input of the Council Arts Officer; and Identifies any external sources of funding, such as from the Department for Communities or the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	Place and Prosperity February 2025 (Item 12.1) Council January 2025	Agreed at P&P 6.2.25 - report to be prepared for future P&P - date TBC	Director of Place/Head of Regeneration	Awaiting confirmation of funding from variance request	
653	Environment	21.01.25	Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee	This Council recognises that the safety of people and communities is paramount, and that any dog irrespective of breed or type may display aggression. However, this Council also recognises that the provisions, as set out within the Statutory Rule The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024, under powers conferred by Articles 25(1)(c) and (8) of The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 (the 1983 Order), as relates to XL Bully dogs that make it an offence to rehome is unnecessarily cruel. Restriction of rehoming, even by establishments such as rescue centres and animal shelters has led, as is leading to, the unnecessary destruction and euthanasia of healthy animals, which have no history of violence or aggression, and goes against the 'unnecessary suffering' clause in the Welfare of Animals Act NI 2011. Therefore this Council will write to the DAERA Minister outlining our opposition to the continuation of the legislation as currently set out, and asks that the Minister allow for managed rehoming by shelters and other specific animal rescue establishments, of dogs including those considered to be XL Bullies with no history of aggression or violence, to suitable owners, to prevent further animal	Council January 2025 Environment Committee 05.02 25 Item 11.1 Environment Committee 11.06.25 Item 14	Letter from DAERA Minister dated 29.04.25 noted at June EC Reply received from DAERA Minister 29.04.25. Update report to be brought to June EC. Letter sent to DAERA Minister from the Chief Executive 14.04.25 Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion at Environment Committee 05.02.2025. Agreed to refer to Environment Committee at Council January 2025	Richard McCracken (Interim Head of Regulatory Services)	TO BE REMOVED	

654	Place & Prosperity	20.01.25	Alderman Brooks and Councillor Kendall	<p>This Council acknowledges the success of the Ards and North Down Borough Council Pipe Band Championships, hosted by this Council in Bangor and Newtownards.</p> <p>This Council notes that other areas of the Borough have the space, potential locations, and infrastructure required to host major events, for example 14,000 people attended the Donaghadee Lights Up event, and that a spread of large events across the Brough brings cultural, social and economic benefits, fostering a sense of whole- Borough inclusivity.</p> <p>Therefore, working with the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI, this Council will bring back a report considering the potential for the ANDBC Pipe Band Championships to be held across the Borough on a rotational basis in Bangor, Holywood, Newtownards, Comber and Donaghadee.</p>	<p>P&P 6.3.25</p> <p>Council 26.02.2025</p>	<p>Report to P&P 9.10.25</p> <p>Meeting arranged with Pipe Bands for 13.5.25</p> <p>Agreed at P&P 6.3.25 to adopt Notice of Motion</p>	Interim Director of Prosperity		
655	Environment	18.02.2025	Alderman Cummings and Councillor Douglas	<p>That this Council brings back a report outlining the design, cost and positioning of an additional plaque on the War Memorial in Comber, to accommodate a list of historically researched names, currently being collated as per War Memorial Trust guidelines, of the fallen in the Great War 1914-1918, which were previously not included</p>	<p>Council 26.02.2025</p> <p>Environment Committee</p> <p>5 March 2025</p>	<p>Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion at Environment Committee 05.03.2025.</p> <p>Report to future EC.</p> <p>Agreed to refer to Environment Committee at Council 26.02.25</p>	Peter Caldwell (Head of Assets & Property Services)		

656	Corporate Services	18.02.2025	Councillor Wray & Councillor McLaren	<p>That this Council recognises the impact that recent severe weather events have had on residents and business owners within our Borough.</p> <p>Council will develop an information, advice, and education initiative that will be accessible to all residents across Ards and North Down.</p> <p>The aim of this initiative will be to ensure residents are prepared for severe weather events such as storms and floods. This will include advice around precautions they can take, services they can avail of, and signposting. Officers will produce a report to members with suggested methodology such as a dedicated section on the Council website, workshops, and visual media, along with projected associated costs if any.</p>	Council 26.02.2025 - Corporate Services March 2025	Presented to 8.4.2025 CS Committee. Report to be brought back. Council 30.4.2025 updated wording of NOM. August update: Report to follow in September.	Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)		
657	Community & Wellbeing	18.02.2025	Alderman Adair & Councillor Edmund	<p>That Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Islandview Road Greyabbey to ensure future intermediate football standards by the local sporting clubs and community of Greyabbey.</p>	Council 26.02.2025 - Community & Wellbeing Committee March 2025	Agreed that Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Islandview Road Greyabbey to ensure future intermediate football standards by the local sporting clubs and community of Greyabbey	Ian O'Neill (Head of Leisure)		
658	Environment	03.03.2025	Councillor McClean & Councillor Cathcart	<p>That Council notes the tired and inconsistent presentation of Christmas lights and illuminations in Bangor City Centre, particularly during the Christmas period, and considers potential festive lighting improvements for Christmas 2025. Further, that Council tasks officers to bring back a report presenting options that draw on successful practice and displays elsewhere, including the use of festoon lighting over Main Street. The report should look at the feasibility of the future expansion of these concepts to the remainder of the Borough, if proven successful in Bangor.</p>	Council 26.03.2025 - Environment Committee 02.04.2025	Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion - Environment Committee 02.04.2025. Report to future EC.	Peter Caldwell (Head of Assets & Property Services)		

659	Corporate Services	17.03.2025	Councillor Gilmour & Alderman Graham	<p>That this council recognises the challenges faced by those who are blind and partially sighted and commits to working to make Ards and North Down a Visually aware Borough. This council recognises the expertise of the RNIB, their vision for a, world where blind and partiality sighted people participate equally, and their goal of breaking down the barriers for blind and partially sighted people in everyday life.</p> <p>Tasks officers to bring forward a report outlining what processes we already have in place and identifying what measures the council can take to ensure we are a welcoming, Visually aware Borough.</p>	Council 26.03.2025 - Corporate Services Committee 08.04.2025	Presented to 8.4.2025 CS Committee. August update - Report to be brought to Sept Committee.	Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)		
660	Community & Wellbeing	21.03.2025	Alderman Adair & Councillor Edmund	<p>That Council task officers to bring forward a report on options to enhance and improve pedestrian and vehicle access to Kirkistown Cemetery making use of the adjacent derelict Council owned former caretaker's site to improve access and road safety at the cemetery.</p>	Council 26.03.2025 - Community and Wellbeing Committee 09.04.2025	Agreed at April 2025 Council. June 2025 Land Survey being undertaken ahead of Architect being engaged. Report going to corporate committee in September.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)		
661	Corporate Services	21.03.25	Councillor McKee and Councillor Kendall	<p>That this Council notes with concern the announcement made by the Work and Pensions Secretary on Tuesday 18th March proposing changes to the social security system, particularly in relation to the potential impact on disabled people. It therefore writes to the Work and Pensions Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and the Minister for Communities expressing concern, requesting information on what will apply in Northern Ireland, the Executives plan to mitigate against the negative impacts of such proposals, given the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy and Programme for Government commitments.</p>	Council 30.04.25	NOM added to the Corporate Services agenda - May 2025. 30 June 2025 letters x 3 issued from CEX office.			

665	Community & Wellbeing	15.04.25	Councillor Morgan and Councillor Ashe	<p>We are all aware that dog ownership has increased significantly over the past years.</p> <p>There is fenced off area on "Muckers" in Comber, which is currently being used by NIW which when they have finished their work might lend itself to creating a dog park. This Council should bring back a report that explores the options for creating a dog park in Comber."</p>	Council 30.04.25	Assigned to June 2025 C&W Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)		
667		23.04.25	Councillor S Irvine and Alderman McIlveen	<p>That this Council notes with deep respect the tragic loss of four Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) soldiers - John Bradley (25) , John Birch (28), Stephen Smart (23), and Michael Adams (23) - who were murdered in a 1,000 lb IRA landmine attack on April 9, 1990, on the Ballydugan Road near Downpatrick.</p> <p>Recognises the pain and sacrifice felt by their families, comrades, and the wider community, and acknowledges the bravery of these young men who served their country during a difficult period in our history. Proposes that a permanent memorial be added to the cenotaph in Newtownards in honour of these four UDR soldiers, ensuring their memory is preserved within the heart of their home town for future generations. Requests that this Council engage with the families of the fallen, veteran organisations, and local stakeholders to develop appropriate wording and design for the memorial addition, and to ensure the tribute is carried out with the dignity and sensitivity it deserves.</p>	Council 28.05.25 and Corporate Committee June 2025				
668		23.04.25	Councillor Wray and Councillor Hollywood	<p>Council amends funding eligibility criteria to allow for voluntary dance groups to avail of grants within either the arts or sport funding streams. Council acknowledges the opportunities performance arts bring in terms of community wellbeing, education, tourism, and our local economy. Officers will provide a report on how Council can further grow performance art across Ards and North Down</p>	Council 28.05.25 and Community and Wellbeing Committee 18.06.25				

669	Place & Prosperity		Alderman McDowell and Councillor McCollum	Given the market failure and severe shortage of Business Accommodation in the Borough, as highlighted by the reduction of the non-domestic Rates base, that this Council urgently prepares a report detailing potential plans to develop different types of Business Accommodation in Bangor, Newtownards, Holywood, Comber, Donaghadee and Portaferry. This Business Accommodation would be to encourage start-up businesses, to help business to grow and to attract new business to the Borough.	P&P 12.6.25 (17.1) Council 28.05.25 and Place and Prosperity Committee 12.06.25	Report to be brought to future P&P Committee Agreed to adopt NoM at P&P 12.6.25 (17.1)	Interim Head of Economic Development		
670	Environment	07.05.25	Councillor Morgan and Councillor Irwin	This Council is pleased with the recycling rates for waste that have been achieved in the Borough, however there are currently limited facilities to recycle litter. This sends out a poor message to our residents and visitors. This Council asks that officers bring back a report that explores how, and when recycling litter bins could be introduced to the Borough. Indication of costs should be included.	Council 28.05.25 and Environment Committee 11.06.25	Agreed to adopt NOM at June 2025 Committee - report to be brought to future Committee Assigned to June 2025 EC Agenda	Nigel Martin (Head of Waste and Cleansing)		
671	Environment	20.05.25	Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee	Responsible Dog Walking in Public Spaces. This Council, as a 'Dog Friendly Borough' recognises the increasing use of public parks and footpaths by professional and recreational dog walkers, and the need to balance animal welfare, public safety, and the enjoyment of public spaces for all of our Borough's residents. This Council notes that: Multiple dogs under the control of a single individual may pose challenges to effective management and public safety. Excessive numbers of dogs being walked simultaneously can lead to increased risk of dog fights, interference with other park users, fouling, and uncontrolled behaviour; There has been an increasing number of professional dog walkers, offering services within the Borough and there is a lack of licencing, registration or other requirements which may lead to inadequate insurance, training and experience, adding further potential risks to people and pets; and · Many local authorities across the UK, including our neighbour Belfast City Council, have introduced limits on the number of dogs that may be walked at one time. The Council therefore resolves to: Produce a report outlining the costs and steps required to introduce a local restriction under the relevant	Council 25.06.25 Environment Committee - September		Richard McCracken (Interim Head of Regulatory Services)		

673	Environment	21.05.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Cochrane	That this Council notes the popularity of public spaces such as beaches during the summer months. Further to this Council will task officers to bring back a report to explore options for the extension of public toilet opening hours during the summer months to 9pm near beaches and other busy areas. Council Officers will further bring back a report on expanding baby changing facilities within our Borough at public toilets.	Council 25.06.25 Environment Committee - September		Nigel Martin (Head of Waste and Cleansing)		
672	Place & Prosperity	20.05.25	Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson	“That this Council agrees that:1. Bangor Marine should be invited to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders on Marine Gardens and confirm a guaranteed start date. 2. Should it prove necessary, Council will liaise with the Department of Communities to consider alternative options for the delivery of the project, including the potential for an arms-length regeneration agency, that is publicly owned but with commercial freedom. 3. Council should work with the developer to create a commercial marketing plan to deliver at least £50m of investment for the rest of Queen’s Parade. The initial plan should be brought to Committee before the end of 2025 and should dovetail with other critical developments in the area, helping to provide a catalyst for wider regeneration.	P&P 4.9.25 Council 25.06.25		Interim Director of Place		

674		11.06.25	Councillor Douglas and Alderman Adair	<p>That Ards and North Down Borough Council recognises the need to tackle all sources of pollution affecting water quality in Lough Neagh and in rivers throughout Northern Ireland. Further to this Council expresses alarm at plans by the DAERA Minister Andrew Muir to impose stricter phosphorus limits on over 3,500 local farms, manage low emission slurry spreading equipment and require compulsory uncultivated buffer strips for those in the arable and horticulture sectors; believes such measures could devastate agriculture, reduce livestock numbers, add cost and undermine food security; stresses that any future nutrient management policy, which is focused on more sustainable agriculture practices, must be the product of genuine partnership, rather than punitive policies that risk the viability of our agri-food industry, further stresses the need to redouble efforts, and actions, to address the sources of pollution in wastewater treatment, and calls on Council Officers to write to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs asking him to immediately withdraw the current public consultation on the Nutrients Action Programme 2026-2029 in order to provide time and space to develop a genuine multi-sectoral and multi-agency approach that</p>	Heard at Council 25.06.25	Letter sent to DAERA Minister from CEX on 7 July 2025			
-----	--	----------	---------------------------------------	---	---------------------------	---	--	--	--

675	Corporate Services	16.06.25	Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Cummings	<p>That this Council notes the importance of farmers and rural dwellers to our society; Recognises that farmers, agricultural workers and people living in rural communities can have lower access to cancer services due to the nature of their work and often living in isolated areas. We also recognise the impact that a cancer diagnosis can have on a family business such as a family farm, including housing, the extended family, and the welfare of livestock. Endorses the "Nip It In The Bud" campaign delivered by the Farming Community Network in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and acknowledges the benefits to the rural community. Pledges to do all we can, to raise awareness and save lives, particularly using our social media platforms, to help rural dwellers in this Council area be aware of the symptoms of cancer and to seek immediate medical advice if necessary as evidence demonstrates that early diagnosis and treatment can save lives.</p>	Council 25.06.25 Corporate Services Committee - September	NOM added to the draft Corporate Services agenda -September 2025. Ratified minute to go to Communications & Marketing team.			
-----	--------------------	----------	---	--	--	--	--	--	--