

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

3 December 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid meeting (in person and via zoom) of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee of Ards and North Down Borough in the Council Chamber, 2 Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom on **Wednesday 10 December 2025 commencing at 7pm.**

Yours faithfully

Michael Steele
Acting Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Apologies
2. Declarations of Interest

Reports for Approval

3. Northern Community Leisure Trust and Leisure Ards and North Down Joint Membership for Ards and North Down Borough Council (Report attached)
4. Independent Advice and Debt Services Consultation Response (Report attached)
5. Letter of Support for Irish FA National Football Centre (Report attached)
6. Ards and North Down Sports Forum Report - Request for Additional Funds (Report attached)

Reports for Noting

7. Active and Healthy Communities Directorate Budgetary Control Report (Report attached)
8. Performance Report Q1-Q2 2025-2026 Environmental Health and Regulatory Services (Report attached)
9. Performance Report Q1-Q2 2025-2026 Leisure (Report attached)

10. Performance Report Community Development (Report attached)
11. Cultural Expressions 2025-2026 (Report attached)
12. Notices of Motion
- 12.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McCollum and Councillor Wray

That this Council recognises the valuable work undertaken by the Community Safety team in tackling anti-social behaviour throughout the Borough. That this Council also acknowledges the significant and increasing pressures on those officers to meet the growing and complex demands of their workload. Furthermore, that Council notes the recent review of the criminal legislative framework to help tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and the greater powers which may devolve to Council, and tasks officers to prepare a report which outlines the needs of the Borough in relation to community safety and the resources currently available, details a range of measures appropriate to address those needs, including recruitment of additional officers, and identifies requisite funding requirements and opportunities.

- 12.2. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McKee and Councillor Kendall

This Council notes with deep concern the recent deaths of two-family dogs in our Borough, linked to panic caused by fireworks and the many other animals that suffer year on year. We recognise the severe distress fireworks cause to people, pets, livestock, and wildlife, and the growing public concern over unregulated use. We express our sympathies to the affected families and commend local animal welfare groups for their ongoing support.

This Council writes to The Department of Justice to request the commission of an urgent review of Northern Ireland's fireworks legislation, to include:

- 1.The potential introduction of stricter controls on the sale and importation of fireworks, limiting use to licensed, organised displays only.
- 2.Enhancing PSNI and Council enforcement powers to tackle illegal and antisocial firework use, and increasing the regulatory powers of the Department of Justice as the primary authority responsible for oversight and enforcement of fireworks legislation in Northern Ireland.
- 3.Establishing Northern Ireland-wide time restrictions to reduce unexpected noise and protect animals.

13. Any Other Notified Business

ITEM 14 *IN CONFIDENCE*****

Reports for Approval Delegated to Committee

14. Single Tender Action for part replacement of timing system at Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex (Report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF ACTIVE & HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE (16 MEMBERS)

Alderman Brooks	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Cummings	Councillor S Irvine
Alderman McRandal	Councillor W Irvine (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ashe (Chair)	Councillor Kerr
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McBurney
Councillor Chambers	Councillor McClean
Councillor Cochrane	Councillor McKee
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Moore

Unclassified

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ITEM 3**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Acting Head of Leisure Services
Date of Report	24 November 2025
File Reference	LEI25
Legislation	Recreation and Youth Services Order (1986) Local Government Powers Act Local Government Act 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Northern Community Leisure Trust and Leisure Ards and North Down Joint Membership for Ards and North Down Borough Council
Attachments	None

Background

Leisure operations across Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) are delivered through two operating/delivery models; Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT) operates the North Down leisure facilities with Serco as their delivery partner. Leisure Ards and North Down (Council) operates the Ards and lower peninsula leisure facilities.

NCLT centres are Aurora Aquatics Centre (AAC), Sportsplex, Bangor and Queens Complex in Holywood. Council centres are Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC), Comber Leisure Centre (CLC) and Portaferry Sports Centre (PSC).

Not Applicable

Currently there is no joint membership across both operations to give members access to all five centres (AAC, ABMWLC, CLC, PSC and Queens). Both operators already work collaboratively with regards to harmonisation for pricing, terms and conditions and other operations.

Opportunity to deliver a joint membership for ANDBC

An opportunity has arisen with cooperation between NCLT and Council to offer a joint membership across all 5 sites.

Table 1 shows current pricing across ANDBC leisure facilities.

Table 1

Centre / Management	Membership Types & Price Highlights	Notes / What's Included
ABMWLC, CLC, PSC (Council)	Gym + Classes + Swim: £35 per month (rolling) £350 annual	Access to gyms, classes, swimming at ABMWLC and health suite at CLC.
AAC (NCLT)	Gym + Swim + Classes: £39.90 per month (12-month contract) £46.85 per month (rolling) £399 annual	Full gym, classes, and 50m pool access. Swim-only option available.
Queens Leisure Complex (NCLT)	Gym & Classes: £27 per month (12-month contract) £36 per month (rolling) £270 annual	Gym and class access only; limited aquatic facilities.

Proposal

The joint membership proposal will be for two categories Fitness and Aqua and will be available for adults and concession/students.

- 1. Fitness will include Gym/Classes/Swim/Health Suite (Health Suite at AAC and CLC) and
- 2. Aqua will include Swim Water Aerobics.

Table 2 shows the proposed pricing structure and features offered within each membership category which has been agreed with our colleagues in NCLT.

Not Applicable

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Table 2

AND / NCLT membership	AND Current Pricing	NCLT Current Pricing	5 Centre (proposed) Rolling Contract
Fitness / Gym, swim, classes (Adult) Gym, Classes, Swim, *Health Suite	£35	£46.85 rolling £39.90 contracted	£49.95
Concession Fitness / Gym	£26.25	N/A	£34.95
Student Fitness / Gym	£24.50	N/A	£34.95
Aqua / Swim and Water Aerobics (Adult)	£25.50	£22.50 contracted	£34.95

*The membership will not include access to The Spa at ABMWLC, Leisure Waters at AAC, Splash Pool at ABMWLC or any of the Soft Play facilities across the centres.

Finance

In terms of costs for offering the programme to include updates from Legend (leisure management software) for creating the new membership category (Joint Membership - five Centres), producing membership cards and promoting the programme/branding £1,500 for both operators. This will come from existing revenue budgets. Projected income with 40 new members in Year 1 for both operators will generate income £19,000 per annum based on an average membership fee of £39 for each operator.

The income for each membership will be credited to the centre at which the membership is taken out. Financial reports from Legend will detail the income breakdown.

Table 3 covers the financial details for Council.

Table 3

Income Year 1	Expenditure Year 1	Net Expenditure Year 1
(£19,000)	£1,500	(£17,500)

Software operations

NCLT and Council are working with Legend - the leisure management software used across both NCLT/Serco and Lards centres. Legend is considering how best to produce one membership card which can be presented at any of the five centres.

Outcomes and Benefits

- Working collaboratively between Council and NCLT with benefits for all within the Borough.
- No detrimental cost to either NCLT or Council operated centres.
- Harmonised pricing structure.

Not Applicable

- Improved customer service across leisure operations with increased access to leisure facilities and increased customer satisfaction.
- Increased participation.
- Streamlined marketing and operational efficiency across joint operations.
- Equity and Inclusion with reduced disparity across the Borough with enhanced reputation for Council.
- Generation of additional income.

If approved, Leisure will be working towards commencing the membership offer from 1 January 2026.

The Northern Community Trust and the Serco Senior Team discussed and approved this proposal at its quarterly meeting with Officers on 24th November 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the joint membership for Leisure across Council and NCLT.

Unclassified

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ITEM 4**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Director of Community Development
Date of Report	25 November 2025
File Reference	CDV60
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	Independent Advice and Debt Services Consultation Response
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Independent Advice and Debt Services Consultation Reponse Appendix 2 - Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services

The Department for Communities (DfC) sought views on draft proposals on a proposed support framework for independent advice and debt services in Northern Ireland. For the purposes of this consultation, independent advice and debt services refers to the Department funded community-based advice and regulated debt advice services. It does not include specialist Housing Advice delivered by Housing Rights.

The document put forward draft proposals for how the Department will work with local government and independent advice providers to ensure that people can access consistent quality advice regardless of where they live in NI, with a focus on ensuring that the Department's investment:

Not Applicable

- supports independent advice and debt service-providers to meet needs on the ground;
- strikes the right balance between supporting frontline community delivery and regional services; and
- supports collaboration and joining up of services to minimise duplication, maximise resources and improve outcomes for clients.

Proposals were geared towards achievement of a cohesive partnership between DfC, the District Councils and the independent advice and debt sector, underpinned by 'Guiding Principles' that are a reference framework for how services should be delivered.

Members are asked to note that due to the closing date of 3rd of November 2025, Community Development submitted a response to The Department for Communities in order to meet that deadline. This response was formulated in relation the quarterly feedback received for the existing Advice Services in Ards and North Down.

A main issue highlighted by the local service and included therefore in the response is the regional phone line, which creates a barrier to maximise the full potential of reach, and leads to one off advice, where local services could deal with these queries.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council retrospectively approves the response.

Appendix 1

Response ID ANON-CU4R-PF9Z-7

Submitted to Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services
Submitted on 2025-11-03 09:19:04

Section 1 - Introduction

1 Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Section 1 cont'd - Organisation Details (1 of 3)

2 What is the name of the organisation?

Organisation name:

Ards and North Down Borough Council

3 Which of the following best describes your organisation?

Public Sector organisation

If Other, please specify below::

cont'd - Organisation Details (3 of 3)

5 Does your organisation operate more in urban or rural areas?

Evenly split

6 Is your organisation a regional organisation / community based or other?

Other

If Other, please specify below::

Local Authority

Section 2 - An Ambition for Future Service Delivery (1 of 3)

7 To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision?

Neither Agree nor Disagree

8 To what extent do you agree with the proposed individual outcomes?

Agree

9 To what extent do you agree with the proposed societal outcomes?

Agree

10 Are there any gaps in the proposed outcomes for individuals and society or anything else that you would like to see included?

No

Section 2 cont'd - An ambition for future service delivery (3 of 3)

12 To what extent do you agree that these principles are correct?

Agree principles - Impartiality: - Strongly Agree

Agree principles - Accessibility: - Strongly Agree
 Agree principles - Quality: - Strongly Agree
 Agree principles - Confidentiality: - Strongly Agree
 Agree principles - Independence: - Strongly Agree
 Agree principles - Free to the recipient: - Strongly Agree
 Agree principles - Person-Centred: - Strongly Agree
 Agree principles - Impactful: - Strongly Agree

13 Please share anything you would like to add specific to the individual values: (Do not enter personal data)

a) Impartiality::

b) Accessibility::

Regardless of ability or disability, this should include a list what is meant by accessibility, so all barriers removed.

c) Quality::

it is important that the quality of advice services is updated, and all providers are FCA registered and accredited

d) Confidentiality: :

e) Independence::

f) Free to the recipient::

g) Person-Centred::

h) Impactful::

Section 3 - Investment priorities (1 of 9)

14 To what extent do you agree with the headline Investment Theme A: Joining up to improve outcomes?

Agree

15 To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?

Agree theme A priorities - Supporting local delivery through integrated funding: - Strongly Agree

Agree theme A priorities - Person-centred triage and referrals: - Strongly Agree

Agree theme A priorities - Extend reach and support client need through collaborative partnerships: - Neither Agree nor Disagree

16 Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included?

No

Section 3 cont'd - Investment priorities (3 of 9)

18 To what extent do you agree with the headline Investment Theme B: Enhancing visibility and accessibility of services?

Agree

19 To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?
 Agree theme B supporting priorities - Empower clients to take initial steps to access independently.: - Strongly Agree

Agree theme B supporting priorities - A NI regional gateway as a visible point of access to advice services.: - Strongly Disagree
 Agree theme B supporting priorities - Provision of a regional debt advice helpline.: - Strongly Disagree
 Agree theme B supporting priorities - Multi-channel delivery in community-based advice services.: - Neither Agree nor Disagree

20 Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included?
 Yes

Section 3 cont'd - Investment priorities (4 of 9)

21 You said that you either see gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or that there is something else that you would like to see included.

Please provide details below:(Do not enter personal data)
 Details of gaps in theme B:
 A regional helpline may be a barrier to people at a local level.

Section 3 cont'd - Investment priorities (5 of 9)

22 Do you think Northern Ireland would be better served in the future by the existing delivery model including the regional helpline, or by the new proposed model which includes a regional gateway?
 Don't know

If you want to expand on your answer, please do so below: (Do not enter personal data):

The local existing model works whilst a regional helpline may put a further barrier in place for a local customer.

Section 3 cont'd - Investment priorities (6 of 9)

23 To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme C: Quality and Innovation in Services?

Agree

24 To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?

Agree theme C supporting priorities - Implementation of a quality standard for advice and debt services: - Agree
 Agree theme C supporting priorities - Department to take ownership of NIAQS: - Agree
 Agree theme C supporting priorities - Promote NIAQS: - Agree
 Agree theme C supporting priorities - Promoting best practice and innovation to improve delivery: - Agree

25 Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed headline theme or investment priorities, or anything additional you would like to see included?

No

Section 3 cont'd - Investment priorities (8 of 9)

27 To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme D: Measuring Performance and Impact of Services?

Agree

28 To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?

Agree theme D supporting priorities - Development of a consistent outcomes-based framework for advice and debt services: - Agree

Agree theme D supporting priorities - A clear understanding of client base: - Agree

29 Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed Investment priorities and headline theme, or anything additional you would like to see included?

No

Section 4 - Support and strengthen the Independent Advice and Debt Sector through effective regional support (1 of 2)

31 To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme E: Support and Strengthen the Sector?

Agree

32 To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?

Agree theme E supporting priorities - Integrated Infrastructure support provision that meets the need of community-based advice services:

Agree

Agree theme E supporting priorities - Support and build the capacity of the Independent Advice Sector to provide a quality service:

Agree

Agree theme E supporting priorities - Facilitate Collaboration and Partnerships:

Agree

Agree theme E supporting priorities - Provide Leadership and Advocacy activities:

Agree

33 Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included?

No

Equality Screening

35 Do you agree with the conclusions of the Equality Screening exercise?

Yes

If no, please provide your reasons: (Do not enter personal data):

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

36 Do you think the proposed draft framework presents any other issues for rural communities?

Don't Know

If you wish to expand on your answer, you may provide further comments: (Do not enter personal data):

NB – further outreach across the Borough would enable those in our rural communities to seek the help and support they need but may not be able access due to the cost of travelling to access help.

Privacy Notice



Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services:

Proposals for Consultation



Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Advice Services Team

Voluntary & Community Division

Department for Communities

8th Floor Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast BT2 7EG

Email: adviceanddebtconsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk

This document is also available from our website at:

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

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Section 1: Independent Advice and Debt Services in NI

Section 2: An ambition for future service delivery

Section 3: The Department's investment priorities for Independent Advice and Debt Services.

Section 4: Supporting the “infrastructure” of the Independent Advice and Debt Sector through effective regional support.

Section 5: Delivering the Framework



Ministerial Foreword for the Consultation

I am pleased to launch this draft support framework for independent advice and debt services for consultation. As Minister for Communities, I am committed to delivering policies and programmes that will have real and meaningful impact, such as good quality advice services that are readily accessible to all. I want services funded by my Department to be sustainable and provide tangible benefits for people right across Northern Ireland. Advice services provide a lifeline of support to people in need. They are an important means of supporting the Executive-wide ambition to improve wellbeing and address poverty.

Access to advice at the right time empowers people to make informed decisions and take control of their lives, supporting them to improve their financial wellbeing and resilience. We know that despite the pressing need for debt advice, there remains a significant gap between those who could benefit from it and those actively seeking and taking up that support. There is an opportunity in a new delivery approach to empower people to seek help sooner.

There is much to be achieved by all those involved in delivering advice or information, to actively engage in working together. This can best be delivered through effective joint up working across the statutory and Voluntary and Community sectors.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this framework, and in particular district councils which are responsible for commissioning services locally.

This is your opportunity to put forward your views. I encourage you to respond to this consultation to shape the future delivery of advice services, to ensure people across Northern Ireland receive quality independent advice when they need it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lyons'.

Gordon Lyons,
Minister for Communities

Introduction

The Department for Communities is seeking views on draft proposals to support the delivery of independent advice and debt services in NI. For the purposes of this consultation, independent advice and debt services refers to Department-funded community-based advice and regulated debt advice services. It does not include specialist Housing Advice delivered by Housing Rights.

This document puts forward draft proposals for how the Department will work with local government and independent advice providers to ensure that people can access consistent quality advice regardless of where they live in NI, with a focus on **ensuring that the Department's investment:**

- supports independent advice and debt service-providers to meet needs on the ground;
- strikes the right balance between supporting frontline community delivery and regional services; and
- supports collaboration and joining up of services to minimise duplication, maximise resources and improve outcomes for clients.

Proposals are geared towards achievement of a cohesive relationship between DfC, the District Councils and the independent advice and debt services sector, underpinned by 'Guiding Principles' that are a reference framework for how services should be delivered.

The document has been produced with engagement from Councils and a multi-stakeholder Reference Group. It has benefitted from the contribution of over 200 individuals providing lived experience, input from three Task & Finish groups on a few key areas: Quality Standard, Appeals and Tribunal Representation and Measuring Impact. The document also been informed by policy and practice insights from across the UK and Ireland. Details of the pre-consultation engagement and evidence-gathering process can be found in supporting documents.

Consultation arrangements:

We are inviting response via Citizen Space or email by 3 November 2025.

If you require this document in an alternative format or if you have any other questions please contact: AdviceandDebtConsultation@communities-ni.gov.uk

Section 1: Independent Advice and Debt Services in NI

This first section outlines the key features of Independent Advice and Debt Services in NI and the drivers for future policy and delivery.

What do we mean by “Independent Advice and Debt Services”?

Independent advice and debt services refers to Department-funded community-based advice and regulated debt advice services.

The Department funds the provision of independent advice and debt services, recognising the vital role of advice services in:

- empowering people, enabling early resolution of problems or preventing problems from happening;
- helping people understand and access their rights and entitlements; as well as
- assisting those who are struggling with life events and experiencing hardship or poverty.

Anyone may require advice across one or more areas. It is acknowledged that those at risk of, or experiencing poverty are more likely to benefit from timely access to information and advice.

Independent advice organisations are a trusted and valued source of help, offering free impartial advice to people based on their individual needs and circumstances. They deliver tailored advice on a wide range of issues (for example, social security benefits, housing, immigration, consumer, employment rights), access to legal advice and supporting debt solutions. Advice services will signpost and refer to other support services including

crisis intervention and charitable support. Advice provision can be described as:

- ‘generalist’, relating to a wide range of subjects.
- ‘specialist’ case-based advice where expert knowledge of a specific subject or topic defines the service provided, (e.g. debt advice and appeals representation).

Advice is distinct from the provision of simple information and guidance.

Advice services;

- diagnose the client’s problem and any related matters;
- identifies options and decide how it applies to a client’s specific circumstances; includes identifying the implications and consequences of such action and grounds for taking action; including form filling.
- provides information on matters relevant to the problem such as advising on next steps and identifying dates by which action must be taken.

The independent advice and debt sector also seeks to drive legal and policy change, through advocacy. This is informed by the lived experience of those experiencing or at risk of hardship and poverty, with a view to reducing disadvantage and inequality within society.

Need and Demand for Independent Advice and Debt Services

The need and demand for independent advice and debt services are driven by wider economic and social changes.

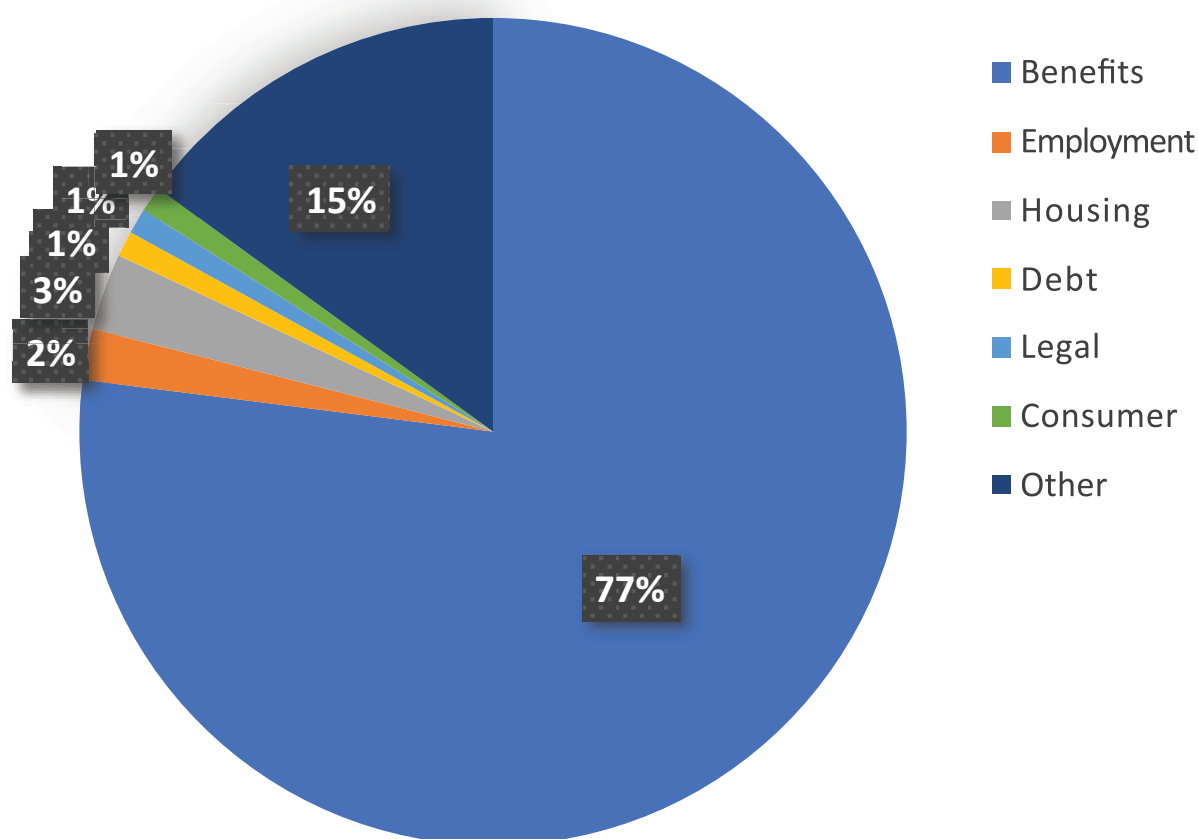
Demand tends to rise during periods of economic downturn and in recent years has been driven by the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and sharp rises in the cost of living. Changes to the benefit system also impact on both the need and demand for advice. The migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit (UC) is anticipated to increase demand for independent advice and support services.

From May 2025, approximately 47,800 households receiving income related Employment and Support Allowance began to receive invitations to move to UC. It is anticipated that this migration will be completed by March 2026.

In 2024/25 year, the funded generalist advice services supported 65,325 people with 216,977 issues, helping these service users to access more than £119m in additional income, through income maximisation and debt reduction.

Management Information for Community Advice Services 2024/25

Issues breakdown for general advice services 24/25



The most recent Money and Pension Service ‘Debt Need’ survey 2024 estimates that 167,411 adults, or 11.4% of NI’s adult population, are in need of debt advice. The numbers supported in NI for debt advice are significantly less than estimated need: while some people in debt may resolve their problem without accessing advice, many of those in need of debt advice are not presenting or are presenting too late for the full range of options to be available.

The Advice sector reports that people are presenting with more complex problems

involving a combination of issues, leading to more complex and time-consuming casework. The profile of service users is diverse and changing, with an increase in the numbers of working people being impacted by hardship and higher numbers of immigrants and refugees requiring access to advice services.

New ways of working and accessing services have accelerated in recent years and there is an increased need for advice and debt services to be accessible remotely.

Delivery and funding of Independent Advice and Debt Services

The independent advice and debt sector is part of a wider Voluntary and Community Sector. It comprises community-based advice services delivered in each council area, supported by regional advice organisations.

- **Community-based advice services** are place-based and delivered in various settings such as local centres and via outreach, differing by council area reflecting the needs of communities in urban and rural areas.
- **Regional delivery** is supplied through Advice NI and Law Centre NI. Advice NI operates two regional helplines, the Welfare

Changes Helpline and the Debt Helpline, including small business debt, while Law Centre NI provides legal help to local generalist advisers across the advice network in NI to enable them to secure independent legal advice on complex legal issues that supports them in their work and to refer complex queries and cases for resolution by Law Centre’s legal team. The service is also available to those members of the public who self-refer or who have been referred by other agencies.

- **Regional advice infrastructure support** is provided by Advice NI and Law Centre NI to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of front-line advice and debt services.

Community-based advice services	Regional Delivery	Regional Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 29 community advice service providers including outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NI Welfare Changes Helpline• NI Debt Advice Helpline• Law Centre NI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice NI• Law Centre NI

The Department is committed to ensuring people in Northern Ireland have access to independent advice and debt services, investing approximately £7m annually. This includes additional funding for advice provision to support people impacted by changes to the welfare system, and specific funding for regulated debt advice.

Councils play a key role as co-funders (investing approximately £2m annually) and as commissioners of community-based generalist advice provision to meet local need. This is central to the ambitions of Community Plans which focus on individual and community well-being.

How the Department for Communities works with others to meet the need for Advice and Debt Services

DfC is the principal funder of independent advice and debt services, alongside local government.

A range of other government and independent funders also provide support

DfC funds "infrastructure support" for frontline community providers through Advice NI and Law Centre NI



Community based independent advice and debt services link to wider system of supports both within government, statutory and wider VCS

- e.g.
- Money and Pension Service
 - Consumer Council
 - Housing Rights
 - Make the Call
 - Creditors

Community based independent advice and debt services operate across all 11 councils:

Regional providers:

- Advice NI - Regional Helplines (Debt and Welfare Changes)
- Law Centre NI

Scope for improvement in future support:

Our engagement with stakeholders has identified several areas where current arrangements can be improved to better respond to need and to achieve better outcomes. These form the basis for the priorities for investment detailed later in this framework.

Delivery

What happens now?

- Delivery of welfare advice is provided via community-based advice services and regionally (Welfare Changes helpline) with potential risk of duplication.
- Advice delivery channels may vary in community-based advice services.
- Weaknesses and inconsistencies in reporting including not capturing impact/outcomes.

How can we improve?

- Replace the regional Welfare Changes Helpline with a regional gateway with simple data gather and onward routing to appropriate services, reducing duplication.
- Consistent multi-channel delivery approach within community-based advice services.
- Outcomes based delivery with better measurement, including profiling and impact.

Community-based advice services

What happens now?

- Independent advice services are part of a wider system of statutory and non-statutory advice, including other community support services, not always joined up for holistic client outcomes.
- Best practice promotes referrals; however reporting and accountability does not always value and encourage referrals.
- Governance may not include other relevant partners or funders with interest in provision of advice services.

How can we improve?

- Support collaboration “joining up of services” (locally and regionally) to ensure early intervention and prevention to improve client outcomes.
- Improved referral pathways with future monitoring recognising the importance of triage and referral pathways as successful outcomes.
- Introduce a new regional advice partnership to promote effectiveness and accountability.

Sectoral support

What happens now?

- Infrastructure support delivered independently by the two regional providers with potential duplication.
- Lack of cohesiveness in the sector.
- No assigned ownership of the Quality Standard or accreditation process in place for assurance of quality services.

How can we improve?

- Regional Infrastructure support delivered through an integrated approach that meets the need of community-based advice services and minimises duplication. This will include distinct roles & functions.
- Single co-ordinated voice of the sector.
- Department-owned Quality Standard.

Funding

What happens now?

- Short-term funding arrangements.
- Existing funding split of 77% delivery vs 23% support.
- Multiple funding strands associated with community-based advice managed separately and via separate grant agreements with councils and Advice NI.

How can we improve?

- Longer term investment over five years to provide much needed stability.
- Strike the right balance between supporting frontline community delivery and regional services.
- Channel all funding strands relevant to community-based delivery through councils including debt for more integrated commissioning.

Section 2:

An ambition for future service delivery

This section outlines an ambition for Independent Advice and Debt Services: vision, outcome, guiding principles for delivery and core policy themes.

Context for future investment in Independent Advice and Debt Services

In this section, we have set out a vision for independent advice and debt services that contributes to the Programme for Government: Our Plan; ‘Doing What Matters Most’. This vision also supports the UK Financial Wellbeing Strategy and NI Delivery Plan.

We have five interconnected themes which set out the key priorities for investment and how we will collaborate with the sector to realise the outcomes. Final decisions on investment priorities will be subject to budget availability.

Programme for Government

People Mission

‘Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities.’

Our vision for the Independent Advice and Debt Services

Accessible, person-centred, independent quality advice and debt services which empower and support the needs of people in NI.

Outcomes for individuals and society

Individual outcomes

- People are supported with advice to resolve their problem(s)
- People are able to maximise their income
- People can participate more fully in society
- People experience less stress
- People can access support in the way that best meets their needs

Societal outcomes

- Local community advice services are sustained across NI
- The advice sector is an effective advocate for the people of NI
- Legal and policy change is achieved that benefits wider society

Investment Priorities

Joining up to improve outcomes

Enhancing visibility and accessibility of services

Quality and Innovation in Services

Measuring Performance and Impact of Services

Support and Strengthen the Sector

Underpinning these priorities are eight guiding principles which describes the way in which services should be delivered, reflecting the values of the independent advice sector.



Impartiality

An impartial service to everyone regardless of race, religious belief, political opinion, age, sex, sexual orientation or disability.



Confidentiality

A confidential service to clients that meets UK GDPR requirements



Quality

Advice and debt services are provided to a recognised quality standard.



Accessibility

All services are accessible to everyone in the community.



Independence

Independent of political parties, statutory organisations and government. Free from political interference and any conflicts of interest.



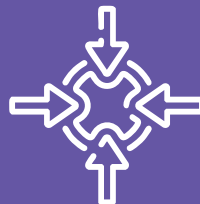
Free to the recipient

All independent advice and debt support are provided at no cost to the recipient.



Person-Centred

People are supported to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to more effectively manage and make informed decisions about their own lives and circumstances.



Impactful

Demonstrating effectiveness and impact of the services for individuals, government and wider society.

Section 3:

The Department's investment priorities for Independent Advice and Debt Services.

This section sets out thematic investment priorities for Independent Advice and Debt which will determine how the Department funds future services.

Investment Theme A: Joining up to improve outcomes

The Department's investment and the way that it works with other funders of advice services will support a collaborative delivery model, with strong partnerships and effective referral pathways between statutory and Voluntary and Community sector services working together to ensure people get the help and support they need.

People are increasingly presenting with complex needs that require effective support from multiple sources. Advice services will deliver optimal client outcomes when provided in tandem with other services.

Priorities for Investment:

Supporting local delivery through integrated funding

- An integrated fund enabling Councils to commission all community-based advice services, including debt advice and appeals representation. This will reduce complexity and the administrative burden on local delivery partners by bringing together the funding used to support generalist advice and local debt advice services.

Person-centred triage and referrals

- Effective triage approaches and referrals will be supported to frame a holistic approach with clients from the outset.
- Future monitoring will recognise the contribution of triage and referral pathways to successful client outcomes.

Extend reach and support client need through collaborative partnerships.

- Establishment of a Regional Advice partnership/forum which draws together the range of partners, stakeholders and referral bodies engaged in the provision of advice and debt services
- More collaborative local and regional partnerships with effective referral pathways to ensure early intervention and prevention. For example, referrals to and from creditors and community partners such as foodbanks, social supermarkets and faith-based groups. This is particularly important in relation to improving debt advice referral pathways to increase the uptake of debt advice and ensure early access.
- Proactive information and awareness-raising activities will be supported, to increase outreach.
- Improved two-way referrals with the Department's customer-facing functions maximising opportunities to improve client outcomes.

Investment Theme B: Enhancing visibility and accessibility of services

The Department's investment will recognise the need for advice and debt services to be visible and accessible for all those who need advice, in a way that reflects their preferences and requirements.

It is recognised that people will use different pathways to access advice depending on their individual situation and capacity.

Priorities for Investment:

Empowering clients to take initial steps to access advice independently

- Future investment will support the consistent provision of online resources such as: self-help guides, fact sheets and materials.

A NI regional gateway as a visible point of access to advice services

- The regional gateway will provide a telephone and digital platform for incoming enquiries. This will enable all prospective clients to determine their next steps. Support will include directing to self-service resources or the efficient onward routing of clients to the 'touchpoint' that best meets their needs for example, community-based advice services or other support services. This gateway will replace the current Welfare Changes helpline and provide a streamlined service to reduce duplication.

Provision of a regional debt advice helpline

- The Department will continue to support a regional debt advice helpline for personal debt and to support small business/sole traders. This will complement community debt advice provision providing seamless onward referrals where appropriate.
- This service will ensure accessibility and support ease of referrals from creditors and other regional access partners e.g. Land and Property Services, the Department's Debt Management centre and Make the Call partners.

Multi-channel delivery in community-based advice services

- The Department's support for Community based services will require multi-channel provision. The choice of channels should include as a minimum:
 - face to face and virtual meetings,
 - telephony,
 - email and messaging services

These options will be based on client's needs and will accommodate changing preferences as a client journey progresses.

In summary, these proposals support a three-strand delivery model with a focus on community-based advice services, complemented by a regional gateway and retention of regional debt helpline to ensure seamless referrals between the components to meet people's needs.

Investment Theme C: Quality and Innovation in Services

The Department's investment will support a formal quality standard as a fundamental part of the service.

All service users should be confident and trust that the advice they are getting is accurate, timely and delivered appropriately and consistently, irrespective of where they access the support. A recognised quality

standard will also benefit service providers and funders of independent advice and debt services.

The Department recognises the importance of innovation to improve the quality of advice service delivery. This will support the agility of the service to meet need and remain resilient and sustainable in the long term.

Priorities for Investment:

Implementation of a quality standard for advice and debt services

- Review and enhance the existing NI Advice Quality Standard (NIAQS) to include debt advice and map it across to other existing standards geared to the standard being accessible by the wide range of advice-giving organisations.
- Departmental ownership and implementation of NIAQS, including independent assessment and accreditation.
- Following implementation, all Department for Communities/Council-funded advice providers will be required to be accredited to the appropriate level as a condition of funding.

Promote NIAQS

- Investment will support the development of a clearly identifiable "brand" for NIAQS; this will include a logo for all accredited providers to display.
- The Department will promote and raise awareness of NIAQS with other funders of advice services.

Promoting best practice and innovation to improve delivery

- Future arrangements for the delivery of independent advice and debt services in NI will include an Innovation fund (subject to budget availability.) This fund would support regional and local projects, to explore new ways of improving service delivery.

Investment Theme D: Measuring Performance and Impact of Services

To ensure the Department's investment in advice and debt services is appropriately targeted, we need to ensure the right things are recorded.

This will enable us to better understand the needs, demands and outcomes, effectively shape services and demonstrate value for money.

Priorities for Investment:

Development of a consistent outcomes-based framework for advice and debt services

- The Department will work with District Councils and advice providers to design a single impact-focused outcomes-based framework. This will result in an agreed set of metrics with strengthened data capture and data reporting mechanisms.
- Reporting will include:
 - key performance indicators to allow for consideration of social value impact and value for money;
 - the use of qualitative evidence to reflect lived experience (e.g. client survey methodologies including the use of case studies); and
 - outcome measures to demonstrate the impact of the collaborative partnership capturing referrals and signposts within the sector and to wider support services.

A clear understanding of client base

- Develop and agree a set of measures to be captured to inform the profile of those accessing advice and debt services and focus to address barriers.

Section 4:

Support and strengthen the Independent Advice and Debt sector through effective regional support.

This section outlines how the Department's investment will provide effective regional "infrastructure" support to meet the needs of and strengthen the Independent Advice and Debt Sector.

Investment Theme E: Support and Strengthen the Sectors

The Department recognises the need to support the effective and efficient delivery of community-based advice and debt services through continued investment in regional “infrastructure” support that best meets the needs of the sector and people who use it.

Infrastructure support to the Voluntary and Community sector can include building capacity and skills within organisations through training, advice, information exchange, convening, policy work, consultancy and providing platforms and

access to resources. This support is delivered by regional organisations which support smaller organisations in the sector.

To deliver the priorities, there is a need for “advice specific infrastructure” that complements the support available through general infrastructure organisations e.g. NICVA. The provision of regional infrastructure support to the advice sector is delivered by Advice NI and Law Centre NI to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of front-line advice services.

Priorities for Investment:

Integrated infrastructure support provision that meets the need of community-based advice services

- The delivery of Advice infrastructure support will be integrated, requiring closer collaboration between the two regional organisations, with distinct roles and functions which are aligned and complementary.
- The infrastructure provision will be measured against its impact on meeting the support needs of community-based advice providers and its ability to maximise provision, reduce overlap and duplication, and ensure value for money.

Support and build the capacity of the Independent Advice Sector to provide a quality service, to include:

- Develop and deliver appropriate training to meet needs of sector.
- Support organisational development to enhance sustainability.
- Support the new arrangements for the NIAQS as appropriate.
- Support IT infrastructure needs of sector including referral pathways.
- Provision of digital resources for advisors and clients.
- Support provision of effective and timely communications and information
- Provide expertise in relation to complex social security cases and complex appeals/tribunal representation.
- Support development and implementation of new outcomes-based reporting requirements.

Facilitate Collaboration and Partnerships

- Support for sharing of peer-to-peer experience, advisor networks/forums, and access to expert support when required.
- Support effective communication and relationships between support organisations via strategic direction for the community-based advice service.

Priorities for Investment:

Provide Leadership and Advocacy activities

- Facilitate strategic engagement with Government and other regional organisations that work with specific categories of need.
- Provide a single co-ordinated voice for the sector and service users, campaigning on social policy and issues raised by the independent advice and debt sector to improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland.

Section 5: Delivering the Framework.

This section sets out the proposed implementation plans to support independent Advice and Debt Services

Delivering the framework

This section sets out the Departments plans for the implementation of the priorities in this framework to support future delivery of independent Advice and Debt Services.

Department for Communities and Council partners will continue to work collaboratively to maximise financial resources to improve the lives of those accessing independent advice and debt services. Under this framework, the Department is making a commitment to longer funding timeframes, which will provide much needed stability and scope for forward planning within the sector.

A phased approach is essential to ensure key priorities are progressed and to factor in any timescale requirements to implement any new commissioning arrangements. The development of a robust outcomes framework and progressing a quality standard for advice will lay the foundation for future quality-assured advice services.

The following section sets out at a high-level indicative plan, with three phases. This plan will be further developed with input from key delivery partners including local government, and the independent advice sector.

Phase 1 – Develop Stage – Laying the foundations by establishing defining outcomes and quality measures

- Develop an outcomes-based framework
- Progress Advice Quality Standard

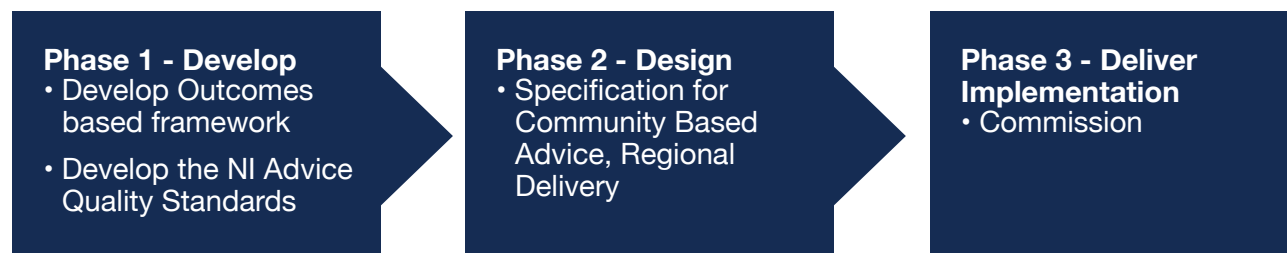
Phase 2 – Design Stage – Pilot and refine frameworks while developing service specification

- Pilot outcomes framework
- Appoint an independent NIAQS accreditation body
- Design service specification for community advice services (with councils) and regional delivery

Phase 3 – Delivery Stage / Commission services

- Department commissions regional services
- Council implements the service specification for community advice services

Visual of the High-level plan



Strong supporting and engagement structures will help ensure the implementation of the framework. As part of future arrangements, to complement existing engagement structures,

the Department will establish a new Regional Advice Forum to promote effectiveness and facilitate a more collaborative partnership model.

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Unclassified

ITEM 5

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Acting Head of Leisure Services
Date of Report	20 November 2025
File Reference	CW181
Legislation	Recreation and Youth services Order (1986)
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Letter of Support for Irish FA National Football Centre
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Letter to Councils from Irish FA

Members may already be aware of the Irish FA’s proposal to erect a National Football Stadium on a 50-acre site opposite the Galgorm Resort on the Fenaghy Road, Ballymena.

The proposed facilities would include four outdoor pitches, one indoor pitch, stands, training buildings and parking. The stadium would be a state-of-the-art training and development centre for elite and grassroots football.

The Chief Executive’s Office received a letter from the Irish FA on 19 November 2025 (see Appendix 1) outlining the plans for the project and confirming the consultation period ends on 28 November 2025. As Council will be unable to meet the consultation deadline due to the lateness of the receipt of the letter, it is suggested that Council send a letter of support.

Not Applicable

43

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council send a letter of Support from the Chief Executive to the Irish FA outlining the Council’s support for the project.

Appendix 1



44

17th November 2025

All Chief Executive Officers
City Councils, Borough Councils, or District Councils
Northern Ireland local government districts (LGDs).

RE: National Football Centre

Dear Chief Executive,

We would like to draw your attention to a flagship initiative currently underway: the development of the inaugural National Football Centre.

The Irish FA is progressing through its Pre-Application Community Consultation (PACC) process, following the submission of its Proposal of Application Notification (PAN) in September.

The purpose of this correspondence is to raise awareness of this strategically important project, enhance stakeholder familiarity, and inform you of the ongoing statutory consultation process.

Initial concept plans can be viewed via the link below, and we welcome and value all feedback:

www.irishfa.com/nfcconsultation

The statutory consultation period closes on Friday, 28 November 2025. However, we remain fully available to engage meaningfully with all stakeholders on any matters relating to this significant piece of legacy sports infrastructure.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Fitzgerald

Chief Operating Officer | 07738 176150 | graham.fitzgerald@irishfa.com

IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Clearer Twist National Stadium at Windsor Park, Donegall Avenue, Belfast BT12 6LU, Northern Ireland

T: +44 (0) 28 9066 9458 **E:** info@irishfa.com **W:** irishfa.com

VAT number 192 8340 89 Registered in Northern Ireland R0000327



Unclassified

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ITEM 6**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Acting Head of Leisure
Date of Report	17 November 2025
File Reference	SD155
Legislation	Recreation & Youth Services Order (1986)
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Ards and North Down Sports Forum Report - Request for Additional Funds
Attachments	

Members will be aware that on the 26 August 2015 Council delegated authority to the Ards and North Down Sports Forum, in order to allow it to administer sports grants funding on behalf of the Council. £70,000 had been allocated within the 2025/2026 revenue budget for this purpose. In addition, the Council requested that regular updates are reported to Members.

In September 2025, Officers advised Members that, due to the success of the Sports Forum Grants scheme in this financial year, an additional sum of circa £12,000 would be required above the £70,000 budget agreed for 2025/26 to meet the expected level of applications based on analysis of 2024/25 trends and year to date performance. At that stage, members approved the allocation of funding to facilitate eligible requests for the remainder of the year with the surplus being sourced from the success at ABMWLC in surpassing income targets.

Not Applicable

46

Continued high demand for Sports forum grants throughout September and October has led to that additional budget of £12,000 already being allocated and spent, bringing the total spend 2025/26 year to date to circa £82,000.

The table below demonstrates the spend across each of the grant categories at the time of November Ards and North Down Working group meeting on Tuesday 4th November 2025.

2025/26 Budget £82,000	Annual Budget	Awarded to Date	Remaining Budget
Anniversary	£2,000.00	£1,500	£500.00
Coach Education	£3,000.00	£500.00	£2,500.00
Equipment	£26,750.00	£26,656.05	£93.95
Events	£12,500.00	£11,922.76	£577.24
Seeding	£2,000.00	£799.91	£1,200.09
Travel and Accommodation	£32,750.00	£39,076.89	-£6,326.89
Discretionary	£1,000.00	£340.00	£660.00
Schools/Sports Club Pathway	£2,000.00	£0	£2,000
	£82,000.00	£81,045.61	£764.04

Officers continue to receive grant applications but because the budget is spent the application process has closed there no further applications have been accepted. It is estimated that a further £15,000 is allocated to the fund for this year which would bring the annual total up to £97,000. The additional £15,000 can be sourced from the success at ABMWLC in surpassing income targets.

Following the success of the 2025/26 period, an additional £30,000 has been requested in next year's budget.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves an additional £15,000 for the 2025/26 Sports Forum Grants.

Not Applicable

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ITEM 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Finance
Date of Report	27 October 2025
File Reference	FIN45
Legislation	Section 5 of Local Government Finance Act (NI)2011
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Active and Healthy Communities Directorate Budgetary Control Report - September 2025
Attachments	

The Active and Healthy Community's Budgetary Control Report covers the 6-month period 1 April 2025 to 30th September 2025. The net cost of the Directorate is showing an underspend of £ 348.0k – box A on page 3.

Explanation of Variance

The Active and Healthy Communities' budget performance is further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£272.8k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£43.2k adverse	3
Report 4	Income	£118.4k favourable	3

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

Not Applicable

48

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(272.8)	<p>Mainly due to vacant posts during the first 6 months.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Health & Regulatory Services (£134.6k) • Community Development (£71.6k) • Leisure (£77.3k)
Goods & Services		
Environmental Health & Regulatory Sers	30.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly due to the Council's share of the Animal Welfare Service (£23k). This wasn't budgeted as NI Councils are in dispute with DAERA over the funding for this service
Income		
Community Development	(26.0)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Centre income (£27.1k)
Leisure	(78.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing & Leisure Complex – (£62.5k) • Comber Leisure Centre – (£6.0k) • Portaferry Sports Centre – (£4.6k)

Not Applicable

49

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2025					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Active & Healthy Communities					
3100 Active Health & Communities Director	125,529	113,100	12,429	225,200	11.0
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	1,762,305	1,881,100	(118,795)	3,761,800	(6.3)
3300 Community Development	1,175,698	1,284,700	(109,002)	2,668,800	(8.5)
3400 Leisure	74,382	207,000	(132,618)	925,400	(64.1)
Total	3,137,914	3,485,900	A (347,986)	7,581,200	(10.0)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Active & Healthy Communities - Payroll					
3100 Active Health & Communities Director	100,958	90,200	10,758	180,600	11.9
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	1,921,371	2,056,000	(134,629)	4,111,900	(6.5)
3300 Community Development	1,134,198	1,205,800	(71,602)	2,292,400	(5.9)
3400 Leisure	1,850,864	1,928,200	(77,336)	3,891,200	(4.0)
Total	5,007,391	5,280,200	(272,809)	10,476,100	(5.2)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Active & Healthy Communities - Goods and Services					
3100 Active Health & Communities Director	24,571	22,900	1,671	44,600	7.3
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	238,941	208,800	30,141	509,900	14.4
3300 Community Development	564,694	576,100	(11,406)	1,744,100	(2.0)
3400 Leisure	289,648	266,800	22,848	993,100	8.6
Total	1,117,854	1,074,600	43,254	3,291,700	4.0
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Income					
3100 Active Health & Communities Director	-	-	-	-	-
3200 Environmental Health & Regulatory Ser	(398,007)	(383,700)	(14,307)	(860,000)	(3.7)
3300 Community Development	(523,194)	(497,200)	(25,994)	(1,367,700)	(5.2)
3400 Leisure	(2,066,130)	(1,988,000)	(78,130)	(3,958,900)	(3.9)
Totals	(2,987,331)	(2,868,900)	(118,431)	(6,186,600)	(4.1)

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Unclassified

50

ITEM 8**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Acting Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services
Date of Report	25 November 2025
File Reference	CW22
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Performance Report Q1-Q2 Environmental Health and Regulatory Services
Attachments	

Context

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council has in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlines 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)

Not Applicable

51

The Council's 18 Service Plans outline how each respective Service will 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 will be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Year (H1)	April – September	December
Half Year (H2)	October – March	June

The report for Quarters 1 and 2 is attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to 7 outcomes as follows:

Outcome 1

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

Key achievements:

- Participated in 22 interagency meetings with community groups
- New structured working partnership between Neighbourhood Environment Team and PSNI
- Monthly survey to service users to assess levels of satisfaction and areas of improvement.
- Processed a significant number of service requests made by members, MLAs and MP's particularly relating to public health, housing and pest control matters.
- Survey distributed to local sports & community groups to determine a baseline model re capacity for CPR training and AED provision.
- Facilitating quarterly meetings of the Over 50s Council (2 afternoon & 2 evening meetings, average 22 attending) with representations from SEHSCT, Capital Projects, Neighbourhood Environment Team and Community Planning.
- Recruitment exercise for Over 50's Council with 22 new members.
- Facilitating the inclusion of Over 50's Council and SWAN members as consultee for PHA Age Friendly evaluation through Social Market Research.
- Reviewing and updating of the ANDBC 'Big Guide'

Not Applicable

52

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Completed the 1st stage of replacing Neighbourhood Environment Team diesel vehicles with EVs
- The assessment, through the planning process, of the associated risk assessments for several Brownfield sites. This assists in the promotion and reuse of land affected by contamination, resulting in the return to use of vacant and underused land which can help address local housing need in areas well served by existing infrastructure.
- This Service also 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 contributes to the Councils commitment to the path to net zero
- Inspection of 14 premises licensed for the storage and use of petroleum and assessed compliance with requirements of the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013 in the 5 premises subject to permitting for vapour recovery under this legislation.
- Response to pest control issue at Millisle Beach Park. This included engagement with organisers of Kite Festival, to produce a revised site management plan that enabled the event to proceed (also Outcomes 3, 4 and 6).

Outcome 3

A thriving and sustainable economy

Key achievements:

- Supported businesses providing advice and guidance on compliance with food safety, health and safety and consumer protection;
- 170 total visits for Health and Safety, including inspections of workplaces, revisits, advisory visits and visits to investigate accident reports received.
- 469 Food Hygiene and Food Standards inspections were completed during the reporting period
- 53 Visits were carried out to premises in relation to Consumer Safety compliance including product alerts and requests for advice
- Supported businesses through the issue of Licences and issuing associated advice:
 - 67 Entertainments Licences Issued
 - 3 Amusement Permits Issued
 - 6 Places of Marriage and Civil Partnership Licences Issued

Not Applicable

53

- 141 of the 161 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 is fit for purpose and attracts developers to the Borough
- Supported Breeding Establishments through inspections for compliance and issuing of licences
- Awarded 'Mind, Body Business' health & wellbeing grants to 16 businesses
- Engaged with 25 businesses in Newtownards – Dementia awareness raising for staff and information sharing for public
- Promotion of job fairs and volunteering opportunities through older people's network and Over 50's Newsletter

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Inspected 94% of our caravan parks during Q1 and Q2
- Accommodated 8 Pop Ups for seasonal Control Orders on Beaches and Parks
- All 9 designated beaches remained safe for swimming in during the Bathing Season, with Ballyholme, Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn achieving excellent water quality results for the entire period. The annual Classification for Ballyholme has been set as 'Good', a significant improvement on its 'Poor' status in 2023.
- Inspected Entertainment Premises for compliance:
 - 46 Annual Inspections completed
 - 47 During Performance Inspections completed
- Response to public consultation on Dilapidation Bill.
- 259 Fly-tipping service requests successfully investigated.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- Attendance at Pet Nose Day, Mount Stewart, providing information and advice to dog owners.
- Facilitated and participated in interagency Ops for underage consumption of Alcohol
- 55 Project ELLA initiatives
- 173 Home Safety Checks provided (104 OP/Vulnerable adults and 69 U5/vulnerable children) resulting in over 1143 individual pieces of home safety equipment being provided and over 69 onward referrals to organisations including NIFRS, OT, falls team etc.
- 35 Certificates of Fitness issued for private rental properties in the Borough.

Not Applicable

54

- Visited more than 90 tobacco/vape retailers to promote compliance with age of sale legislation and test purchased 27 for vapes (8 sales)
- Intergenerational Project involving Over 50's Council, U3A and Youth Voice to launch Gen2Gen podcasts during Intergenerational Week.
- Dementia Action week engagement sessions.
- Dementia Awareness sessions to 17 staff
- Audit of community hall used as Dementia friendly church
- Tea Dance in Queens Hall with 76 people in attendance
- Ongoing engagement with key internal and external stakeholders regarding the review of our city and town centre CCTV system
- Provided advice and support to community groups and societies and issuing licences:
 - Issued Temporary Street Trading Licences for 2 community events
 - Issued Road Closure Orders for 6 community events.
 - Issued 4 Society Lottery Licences
 - Initiated a review of our city and town centre CCTV system

Outcome 6*Opportunities for people to be active and healthy***Key achievements:**

- Phase 3 of Whole Systems Approach to Healthier Weight and recruitment exercise for WSAHW Co-Ordinator complete.
- Cycle to Work scheme open again for applications and 18 bike checks carried out.
- Procurement of defibrillators and outdoor cabinets for installation at council-owned sites offering 24/7 public access
- Health & Wellbeing Officer appointed, and progress made with resuming employee health & wellbeing with a full programme of activities and health checks scheduled.

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

- NE successfully investigated 1677 service requests, had 16 successful prosecutions and 14 sets of control conditions issued. 187 abandoned vehicles were investigated and 16 subsequently removed by council contractor.
- 1st Duty of Care Fixed Penalties issued for Fly-tipping
- Officers have completed all e-learning
- Officers have completed the following training, Equality and Good Relations, Personal Safety, Purchase Order, Mindful Manager, Emotional Intelligence 1 & 2 and nature workshop.
- Three Officers completed the handling of Prescribed Breeds training alongside the Met Police.
- Home Safety staff have completed autism spectrum disorder training.
- One Licensing Officer attended Fire Risk Assessment Refresher Training.

Not Applicable

55

- 97% of customers satisfied upon completion of service request.

Emerging issues:

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

- PPE not suitable or robust enough for dealing with Prescribed Breeds
- No direct access to the ARU PSNI

Action to be taken:

- PPE researched and appropriate PPE ordered for all NE vehicles
- Direct access through PSNI arranged

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
% of Caravan and Petroleum Sites inspected annually and licences issued where appropriate	A significant number of PL visits are programmed for Q4. The target should be met by end of year	Complete remaining inspections as programmed.	Hazel McKee	March 2026
% of High Risk (H&S) Premises Inspected	This is an end of year target	Ensure all high risk inspections programmed are completed by end of year	Hazel McKee	March 2026
% spend against budget	Primarily due to vacancies existing across various service units. Some projects not able to be delivered.	A number of vacancies have been filled. Money available for projects diverted to meet other Service needs.	Gareth Kinnear	March 2026
% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period Q1-Q2	Appraisals completed but not signed off. Also staff returning from absence and	Sign off issues will be addressed, and full compliance will be	All SUMs	March 2026

Not Applicable

56

	unable to carry out during period.	achieved in Q3-Q4.		
% of premises which are permitted under the Pollution Prevention and Control legislation inspected	The remaining premises are not due to be inspected until Q4	Complete remaining inspections as programmed	Hazel McKee	March 2026
% Planning Comments made within 15 days	One officer deals with planning responses and there has been a recent handover with the officer taking up a secondment opportunity. 141 of 161 consultations were responded to within target.	Should staffing levels be maintained on a permanent basis a second officer will be trained to respond to consultations as part of succession planning and knowledge management.	Hazel McKee	March 2026
Project ELLA Delivery	School Summer Holidays	Uptake has increased and the annual target has now been surpassed.	Dawn Phillips	March 2026
FPNs Issued	High long term absence level	A full complement of officers	Dawn Phillips	March 2026
% targets achieved for PHA SLA	An objective cannot be achieved for Tobacco Control as the relevant legislation is not yet in place	Await new legislation Tobacco and Vapes Bill	Vivienne Boyd	March 2026


















Not Applicable

57

Environmental Health, Protection and Development - Performance Indicator Summary

Generated on: 24 November 2025

Last Update H1 2025/26

Perfor manc e Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performan ce Data Current Value	Performan ce Data Current Target
	Complete CP Market Surveillance exercises	2	1
	% of Caravan and Petroleum Sites inspected annually and licences issued where appropriate	56%	90%
	Implement a new Food standards delivery model.	74%	50%
	% of High-Risk Food Premises Inspected	96%	90%
	Complete H&S targeted inspection initiatives	1	1
	% of High Risk (H&S) Premises Inspected	67%	75%
	% spend against budget	88.59%	100%
	% staff attendance	94.13%	94.5%
	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	93%	100%
	% of premises which are permitted under the Pollution Prevention and Control legislation inspected	19%	90%
	% Planning comments made within 15 working days	88%	90%
	Project ELLA delivery targets	16	18
	% Customers satisfied with service upon completion of service request	97%	90%
	NET Improve(increase) total number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs). Recorded as total number of FPNs issued	125	213
	% of PTO applications completed within 180 days	91.4%	90%
	% targets achieved for PHA SLAs	93%	97%
	% of service requests responded to within 2 working days	95.2%	94%

Not Applicable

58

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the report.

Unclassified

59

ITEM 9**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Service
Date of Report	24 November 2025
File Reference	LEI26
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Performance Report Q1-Q2 2025-2026 Leisure
Attachments	N/A

Context

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council has in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlines 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 outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Not Applicable

60

Reporting Approach

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

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Year (H1)	April – September	December
Half Year (H2)	October – March	June

The report for Quarter 2 is attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to seven outcomes as follows.

Outcome 1

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

Key achievements:

- Monthly meetings with the Sports Forum with a range of stakeholders from across the Borough.
- NCLT monthly meetings with a range of stakeholders.

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Leisure sites continue to encourage recycling.
- The level of recycling rather than landfill continues to increase across the portfolio.

Outcome 3

A thriving and sustainable economy

Key achievements:

- Local business continues to operate from our facilities such as Parklands Café and The Beauty Spot.
- Leisure continues to develop partnerships with private business for example Origin Gymnastics.

Outcome 4

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

Not Applicable

61

Key achievements:

- Leisure contributes to providing a sustainable Borough for all residents and visitors with its management of accessible and affordable services and facilities
- Leisure has now recruited over 98% of previous staff vacancies.

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

- Leisure provides facilities which permit community groups to use safely and to develop their communities regarding their health and wellbeing.
- Leisure reflects the need for communities to flourish and develop through offering access to all and supporting groups with access to a wide range of facilities.

Outcome 6*Opportunities for people to be active and healthy***Key achievements:**

- Over 2.3 million visits during 2024/25 to our leisure sites highlights the opportunities for residents to be active and healthy during 2025/26.
- Year to Date over 1.2 million visitors across leisure sites.
- Over 100 sport clubs being supported by our sports development team to provide opportunities for residents to be active.
- Leisure Strategy has been finalised with delivery of the outcomes commencing during 2025/26.
- Council has agreed the Hybrid Delivery Model across leisure operations with a review for the lower peninsula to be completed.

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

- The inhouse team have delivered and continue to deliver a quality service significantly under budget. YTD for 2025/26 at period 6 (end of Q2) shows over £1million additional income has been generated above budget.
- Leisure has now recruited over 98% of previous staff vacancies.

Emerging issues:

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

- Continued issues with the fabric of the building for ABMWLC around leaks may start to impact on service delivery and negatively affect the membership base.

Not Applicable

62

- Splash Pool continues to be closed affecting service delivery in terms of access for 7-year-olds and under to facilities. Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC) is losing between £12,000 and £13,000 per month. Reputational damage to Council.
- Portaferry Sports Centre (PSC) has no operational boiler with no heat or hot water.
- % spend against budget – due to staffing resourcing issues in the first 2 quarters has resulted in an underspend position.
- Implementation of the Leisure Strategy was pushed back due to the strategy not being finalised until the start of Q2.
- Number of clubs affiliated with the Sports Forum has remained static from 2024/25 to the first 2 quarters of 2025/26 with 91 affiliated clubs. The reasons for this is lack of awareness of the forum due to staffing resources in Sports Development who are unable to get out and meet with clubs.
- % of completed Employee Appraisals April 2025 to March 2026 with 70% completed. The other 30% were not completed due to staff not being posted and issues with the appraisal Jot Form.
- Number of individuals attending Sports Education Courses, 199 attended to course of which 7 courses were offered to clubs. Clubs are running their own courses through Sport NI which is impacting the delivery of Sports Education courses by Sports Development.

Action to be taken:

- Council estates team are conducting building surveys regarding leaks at ABMWLC with a view to developing a scheme of works for issues to be resolved.
- Council estates team have employed a Technical Officer specifically for leisure and is based at ABMWLC.
- Council estates team are working with approved contractor regarding signing off on the tile specification for the Splash Pool. When this has been completed estates will produce a scheme of works including a timeline for completion.
- Council is working with the school, Education Authority and Department of Education for a resolution regarding the issues with the boiler at PSC. Leisure is now considering reducing membership fees and giving PSC members free access to ABMWLC.
- % spend which has been affected by staffing resourcing issues, the leisure transformation with new posts at new pay grades, leisure believes will attract key personnel over the Q3 and Q4 which will reduce the underspend.
- Implementation of the Leisure Strategy is being progressed during Q3 and Q4.
- Number of clubs affiliated with the Sports Forum - Sports Development are continuing to contact clubs in the Borough of which there are over 200 clubs, encouraging them to join and actively participate in the sports forum, however, resourcing with the required staffing structure would need to be considered to permit more outreach.
- % of completed Employee Appraisals April 2025 to March 2026 – Leisure is working through the remaining appraisals over Q2 and Q3 to achieve the target of 100%.

Not Applicable

63

- Number of individuals attending Sports Education Courses – Sports Development will continue to offer clubs access to courses and are considering working alongside Sport NI in delivering these courses.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Not Applicable









Leisure - Performance Indicator Summary

Generated on: 20 November 2025

Last Update H1 2025/26


Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	% spend against budget	(61.44%)	100%
	Income per head of population (164,200) Leisure Ards income only	£12.52	£20.00
	Income per member of staff (FTE) (60)	£34,435.00	£28,000.00
	Attrition Rate	5%	4%
	Retention Rate	95%	96%
	Number of Sports Capital Grants awarded to clubs	17	15
	Leisure Staff Transformation	90%	50%
	% sent to recycling rather than landfill for Leisure sites	71%	65%
	Implementation of Leisure Strategy – Year 1	0%	50%
	Number of fitness classes per week (Leisure Ards and Serco/NCLT)	264	250
	Total footfall across all Leisure sites (Ards)	731,000	500,000
	Total footfall across all Leisure sites (Serco)	731,000	500,000
	Number enrolled in Learn to Swim programme for Aurora Aquatics Complex and Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (Monthly)	5,035	2,900

Not Applicable

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Active Aging Memberships (Ards) *	2,700	2,000
	Number of Sports Forum Grants awarded	344	150
	Participation in Sports Development Programmes	1,134	250
	Number of clubs affiliated with the Sports Forum	91	110
	% staff attendance	94.88%	94.5%
	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	70%	100%
	Maintain Quest awards for all 4 leisure sites	4	2
	Number of individuals attending Sports Education Courses	19	50

Last Update H2 2025/26

Not Applicable

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Net Expenditure Per Head of Pop (164,200)		£7.05

Not Applicable

Unclassified

68

ITEM 10**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community Development
Date of Report	26 November 2025
File Reference	CW22
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	Performance Report Q1-Q2 2025-2026 Community Development
Attachments	

Context

Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council has in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlines 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 outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Not Applicable

69

Reporting Approach

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

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Year (H1)	April – September	December
Half Year (H2)	October – March	June

The report for Half year (H1) April – September 2025 is attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to 5 outcomes as follows:

Outcome 1

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

Key achievements:

- Community Development continue to fund and engage with Youth Voice
- Community Development delivered Grant workshops
- Staff continue to attend community meetings across the Borough
- Community Development continue to enhance direct provision

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Introduction of Solar Panels at 4 Community Hall facilities.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- Community development continues to work on the grants policy and the online system with partners across council
- Community Development manages the provision of the two social supermarkets
- Continuing the implementation of the PCSP action plan
- Continuing the implementation of the Good Relations Action Plan
- Continued implementation of PEACEPLUS plan
- Weekly patrols carried out by the PCSP Community Safety Officers
- Monthly meetings held with ASB forum
- Monthly meetings held of the support hub
- Shared Voices Programme underway in Schools around the Borough
- Delivery of PCSP grants programme
- Delivery and monitoring of EVAWG momentum and change fund

Not Applicable

70

- Delivery of Racial and Social cohesion funding

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- Commencement of Consultation of the Community Services Strategy and review of Community Development direct provision and a Hall operating model
- Delivery of 8 Council run summer schemes, 2 community led schemes, and 1 facilitator led scheme – 11 schemes in total, which is 1 more than 2024-25
- Continued increase of footfall at the community centres
- Increase hours booked at community centres
- PEACEPLUS projects to encourage activity across the borough

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Community Halls ahead of expected income budget by 19%.

Emerging issues:

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

Recruitment to fill vacant posts has been difficult and this has led to an underspend in staffing budgets














NB. Given the merger of two units which were formally in different departments, some KPIs may appear to be duplicated in the following table, e.g. staff attendance. One is for Community Centres, formally part of leisure services until 1st September 2025, and the other is for the service units that had been part of the former community and culture department.

Not Applicable







Community and Culture - Performance Indicator Summary

Generated on: 19 November 2025


Last Update H1 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	% spend against budget	92.67%	100%
	% staff attendance	95.38%	94.5%
	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026		100%
	Net Expenditure Per Head of Pop (164,200) Community Centres	£2.57	£2.00
	% spend against budget Community Centres	99.3%	100%
	Income per head of population (164,200) Community Centres	£0.99	£0.81
	Income per member of Staff (FTE) 23.5 Community Centres	£6,985.00	£6,000.00
	% sent to recycling rather than landfill for Community Centres	54%	60%
	Number of PEACEPLUS Revenue projects implemented	18	10
	Offer a space to every P7 pupil in the Borough to attend a session of the Bee Safe 9-day programme highlighting safety risks and how to stay safe both online and in person	0	800
	Number of participants on Living History visits to places that can be perceived as contentious followed by meaningful discussion	30	20
	Increase number of participants having a positive learning experience using Community development direct provision services	2,882	2,350
	A min of 140 households supported by the social supermarket's, with a target of 50% of those households to be enabled to break the cycle of poverty and to have a positive social outcome	216	70

Not Applicable

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Community Halls Transformation	20%	20%
	Total footfall at Community Centres (cumulative)	96,328	75,000
	% staff attendance Community Centres	98.23%	94.5%
	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026 Community Centres		100%
	Customer Engagement (Number of groups and engagement sessions)	6	4
	Total hours booked in Community Centres (cumulative)	16,886	14,000

Last Update H2 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
	Support the implementation of the Programme for Governments Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework in the Ards and North Down Borough by implementing a Change Fund grants programme.		100%

Not Applicable

73

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council note this report.

Unclassified

74

ITEM 11

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Active and Healthy Communities Committee
Date of Meeting	10 December 2025
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community Development
Date of Report	05 November 2025
File Reference	GREL415
Legislation	Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Cultural Expressions 2025-2026
Attachments	Appendix 1 - List of bonfire sites Appendix 2 - List of Beacon sites

Background

The Council's Cultural Expression programme supports inclusive local events and festivals that enable communities and groups to celebrate their culture and identity through grant aid. 75% of this financial support is provided through the Executive Office and 25% is provided by Council. When bonfires are associated with these local events and festivals, Council support is available where communities agree to core conditions which aim to lessen the negative social and environmental impact of community bonfires.

Update for 2025-2026

Funding from The Executive Office (TEO) in 2025/2026 was at a reduced amount following on from the reductions in 2023-2024 and again in 2024-2025.

The grant budget ringfenced and agreed by Council for the Cultural Expression (CE) programme of £100,000 enabled a return to previous years grant amount of £2,300 festival support for sites engaged in the CE programme.

Not Applicable

75

Discussions with individual bonfire representatives resulted in 27 sites (20 bonfires and 7 beacons) engaged in the Cultural Expressions programme in 2025-2026, 25 in July 2025 and 2 in October 2025. (Appendix 1 and 2). This was 4 more than last year due to the reconstitution of East End Residents Association; now known Ards Community Wellbeing Association. Sites re-entering programme are Millisle, Castle Gardens, Ballywalter Gardens in Kilcoole and Slidy Rock, Conlig.

Tensions on wider societal issues remain, such as immigration, however community representatives normally engaged in the CE Programme, continued to work with the Good Relations team.

After discussions between the Good Relations Team and local community representatives, a new CE agreement was reached and agreed by Council in April 2025.

Council continued to offer alternatives within the CE programme following restrictions put in place during covid.

- A local cultural festival or
- Educational programmes, either through facilitation/ talks online or
- A combination of both

A total of 7 sites requested the use of willow burners, (Appendix 2) in 2025-26, Ballywalter Beach, Ballyhalbert, Clandeboy, Killinchy and Rathgill in July and Portaferry and Kircubbin in October. Due to the weather at Halloween, Portaferry rescheduled their event but Kircubbin had to cancel due to the lack of volunteers. The cancelled beacon was charged at a reduced cost.

Monitoring

In the lead, up to 11th July the Good Relations team worked in partnership with a range of Council services and statutory agencies to address issues as they arose i.e. the Councils Enforcement Officers, Councils Parks Officers, NIHE, SEELB, DAERA, PSNI and NIFRS. Weekly meetings enabled agencies to collectively assess any concerns or perceived risks to minimise any damage to people and property during and in the lead up to the 11th July.

The Good Relations team regularly monitored associated bonfires signed up to the CE agreement (IP) (27) and those not signed (NIP) (23).

Most bonfires in and out of the programme did not cause any real concerns however, GR worked closely with the builders to try and alleviate concerns with those that did to ensure the bonfires would pass off peacefully and without incident. Bonfires causing most concern were:

- Castle Gardens (IP) – Concerns due to its size and proximity to surrounding houses and businesses. SEELB(EA) who own the land have stated they hope to sell/repurpose the land before 2026 season. Site is part of Ards Community Wellbeing Association.

Not Applicable

76

- Strand Avenue, Holywood (NIP) – Large amount of fly tipping occurred this year. GR Team and the NET officers took steps to identify and contact landowner who agreed to remove but with conditions that council did not agree to. As a result, the site was set alight on 11th July. The owner has since cleared the remaining debris.
- Slidy Rock, Conlig (IP). Site back into programme for 2025/26. Vastly less material on site in 2025, management of site by new builder worked well, very tidy.

Costs

The total cost to Council for, set up, clearance, reinstatement, beacons and barriers for the 2025-26 programme was circa £97,957. One hundred percent of this cost is met by Council. Costs are increasing annually due to the cost of living crisis and the surge in prices etc. The table below identifies the breakdown since 2023-2024. Savings were made in 2025-2026 by reducing the number of sites receiving sand and the wooden fences.

Year	Total Cost	Beacons on council land	Set up/ clearance, barriers net cost
2025-2026	£97,957	£47,300 (7)	£46,857
2024-2025	£98,274	£51,100 (7)	£47,174
2023-2024	£94,214	£49,000 (7)	£45,214

This cost to Council does not include the cost of clean-up for those built on NIHE land which is met by the Housing Executive.

Complaints

In 2025-2026 the Good Relations team received 10 complaints relating to flags and 11 to bonfires. Some of the sites reported were Cloughey (IP), Ballywhiskin (NIP), Churchill (IP), Ballyrea/Ballyvester (NIP) and Innishargie (NIP). This figure does not include recurring complaints about the same issue to the Good Relations team or complaints that do not come directly to Good Relations.

Feedback from Statutory Agencies

Following 11th July 2025, statutory representatives met to review lessons learnt from the Cultural Expressions programme and to consider improvements for 2026-2027.

PSNI – Flags observed on more bonfires and migrant boat raising issues on hate crime. Bonfires bigger than usual. Balligan Gardens bonfire embers across to Springhill. Late night with festival not finishing until 2.15am. Castle Gardens needs re-sited.

NIFRS – This year a lot more activity and call outs with more fires being burnt that are not related to the programme e.g. farmers. Between 10.00pm -1.00am all appliances in use including support from outside the area. Main sites that caused concerns are Bowtown, Castle Gardens and Glen.

Not Applicable

77

NIHE – There have been more requests for boarding as bonfires are getting bigger. Programme worthwhile, very few complaints overall. Looking at the possibility of doing something at Glenburn Road (3rd Site) and Churchill.

DAERA

Engaged sporadically in meetings. Updates were provided to them each week.

SEELB - reported that they will be considering their plans for the site at Castle Gardens, which could include better securing the site, disposing of the site or changing the use of the site. EA representative believes the programme works well for groups who want to engage and with good community links.

ANDBC – Costs reduced slightly due to reduction of wooden fences and sand on some sites. As new sites engage in the programme these costs may increase depending on the landowner.

What worked well

Collaborative working between the agencies worked well in terms of collectively and effectively dealing with issues of concern, reducing fly tipping and costs, and should continue to be built upon for 2026-2027. All statutory agencies agreed that whilst there are still some concerns especially around the size of some bonfires the programme continues to provide positive results.

All statutory agencies agreed community engagement in association with the CE Agreement has significantly reduced negative incidents that previously occurred during bonfire season.

Many sites who are in the programme (IP) and not in the programme (NIP) continue to engage with the GR team e.g. to enable the removal of unwanted fly-tipping.

West Winds, Newtownards – a UVF mural at the end of a gable wall was covered up for the festival because of a request to make the festival more family friendly. The wall has since been reimaged.

EA representative believes the programme works well for groups who want to engage and with good community links. GR have excellent relationships with the builders which is why it works so well.

All statutory agencies agreed there is less fly tipping accepted by bonfires and sites are generally tidier.

Review

Over the next few months officers will be meeting with key influencers and community representatives to consult upon the lessons learned and discuss what can be done to address on-going challenges.

The challenges for 2026-2027 include:

- Encouraging bonfires not in the programme back into programme
- Managing budgets
- Managing collection of materials before the agreed date.

Not Applicable

78

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes this report.

Appendix 1 – List of Bonfire locations

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No.	Area	Site	Type	Cultural Expression Agreement
1	Breezemount	Breezemount Park	Bonfire	Yes
2	Comber	Dermott's Crescent Comber	Bonfire	Yes
3	Comber	Cherryvalley Comber	Bonfire	Yes
4	Donaghadee	Beechfield Green	Bonfire	Yes
5	Conlig	Tower Road, Slidy Rock, Conlig	Bonfire	Yes
6	Kilcooley	Ballywalter Gardens Kilcooley	Bonfire	Yes
7	Millisle	Millisle Pier	Bonfire	Yes
8	Newtownards, Castle Gardens	Castle Gardens School/Movilla High School	Bonfire	Yes
9	Newtownards, Glen	Glenburn Road	Bonfire	Yes
10	Portavogie	Lawson Park, Portavogie	Bonfire	Yes
11	Cloughey	Calhame Football Pitch, Cloughey	Bonfire	Yes
12	Kilcooley	Ballyferris Walk field, Kilcooley	Bonfire	Yes
13	Newtownards, Bowtown	Bowtown/Abbot Crescent	Bonfire	Yes
14	Greyabbey	Greyabbey	Bonfire	Yes
15	Bangor, Whitehill	Hillcrest Walk, Whitehill	Bonfire	Yes
16	Bangor, Bloomfield	Ballyree Drive, Bloomfield	Bonfire	Yes
17	Newtownards, Scrabo	Tower Court, Scrabo	Bonfire	Yes
18	Bangor, Churchill	Churchill Park, Bangor	Bonfire	Yes
19	Ballygowan	Town centre, Ballygowan	Bonfire	Yes
20	Newtownards, Westwinds	West Winds playing fields	Bonfire	Yes

Appendix 1 – List of Bonfire locations

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21	Bangor, Ava Street	Green area in Ava Street	Bonfire	No
22	Ballyhalbert Caravan Park	Opposite caravan park	Bonfire	No
23	Bangor, Ballyrea/Ballyvester	Bloomfield 3rd bonfire	Bonfire	No
24	Ballywhiskin area	Pop up at caravan park	Bonfire	No
25	Bangor, Bloomfield	Kids Bonfire along fence line	Bonfire	No
26	Carrowdore	Football pitch behind school	Bonfire	No
27	Cloughey caravan park	Pop up at caravan park	Bonfire	No
28	Donaghadee, Cromellin	Cromellin Park	Bonfire	No
29	Donaghadee, Edward Street	Edward Street on beach Opposite community centre	Bonfire	No
30	Newtownards, Elm Drive, Glen	Cul de sac in Elm Drive	Bonfire	No
31	Hollywood, Redburn	Behind Redburn Primary site on road to cemetery	Bonfire	No
32	Kilcooley	Innishargie/ Ballyquinton	Bonfire	No
33	Kilcooley, Balligan	Balligan Gardens Kilcooley	Bonfire	No
34	Millisle caravan park	pop up at caravan park	Bonfire	No
35	Bangor, Lisnabreen	Lisnabreen, behind flats	Bonfire	No
36	Portavogie, Harbour	Princess Ann Road, Harbour	Bonfire	No
37	Bangor, Valentines	Valentines Playing fields	Bonfire	No
38	Newtownards, Weavers/Circular Road	Waste land at Circular Road (ceased)	Bonfire	No

Appendix 1 – List of Bonfire locations

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39	Hollywood, Strand Avenue	Turning circle, Strand Avenue, Hollywood	Bonfire	No
40	Newtownards, Old leisure centre	Old leisure centre site	Bonfire	No
41	Portavogie, Gowland	Gowland area	Bonfire	No
42	Hollywood, Redburn Loughview	Abbey Ring, Hollywood	Bonfire	No
43	Hollywood, Nature Park	Hollywood Nature Park	Bonfire	No

Appendix 2 –

List of Beacon sites in Ards and North Down Borough

No.	Area	Location	Type	Cultural Expression Programme
1	Clandeboyne	Clandeboyne Play park	Beacon	Yes
2	Ballyhalbert	E sign Ballyhalbert	Beacon	Yes
3	Ballywalter	Ballywalter car park	Beacon	Yes
4	Bangor, NIE	NIE Site	Beacon	Yes
5	Killinchy	Village Hall, Killinchy	Beacon	Yes
6	Kircubbin	The Green	Beacon Cancelled due to weather	Yes
7	Portaferry	Exploris Caravan park carpark	Beacon rescheduled	Yes