

January 22nd, 2026

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 28th January 2026 at 8:00 pm** in **Bangor Castle, Bangor**.

Agenda

Agenda

□ [C. 28.01.2026 Agenda.pdf](#)

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1. **Prayer**
2. **Apologies**
3. **Declarations of Interest**
4. **Mayor's Business**
5. **Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month of January 2026 (Copy to follow)**
6. **Minutes of Council Meeting held on 17 December 2025 (Copy attached)**

□ [Council 2025.12.17 Minutes.pdf](#) *Not included*

□ [Council 2025.12.17 Minutes PM.pdf](#) *Page 5*
7. **Minutes of Committees**
 - 7.1 **Audit Committee dated 15 December 2025**

□ [AC 2025.12.15 Minutes.pdf](#) *Not included*

□ [AC 2025.12.15 MinutesPM.pdf](#) *Page 39*
 - 7.2 **Environment Committee dated 7 January 2026 (Copy attached)**

□ [EC 2026.01.07 Minutes.pdf](#) *Not included*

□ [EC 2026.01.07 MinutesPM.pdf](#) *Page 54*
 - 7.3 **Place and Prosperity Committee dated 8 January 2026 (Copy attached)**

□ [2026.01.08 PP Minutes.pdf](#) *Not included*

□ [2026.01.08 PP MinutesPM.pdf](#) *Page 84*

7.3.1 Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity 5 February 2026 - Variance Request Urban Regeneration Programme

 *Item 7.3.1 Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity 5 February 2026 Variance Request Urban Regeneration Programme.pdf*

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7.4 Corporate Services Committee dated 13 January 2026 (Copy attached)

 *260113 CS Minutes.pdf*

Not included

 *260113 CS Minutes PM.pdf*

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7.5 Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 14 January 2026

 *AHC 2026.01.14 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

 *AHC 2026.01.14 Minutes PM.pdf*

Page 117

8. Invitation - Army Benevolent Fund - Belfast Blitz Concert

 *Item 8 Invitation to Army Benevolent Fund - Belfast Blitz Concert.pdf*

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9. Small Business Rates Relief Consultation Response

(Report attached)

 *Item 9 Small Business Rates Relief Consultation Response.pdf*

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 *Item 9.1 Finance Minister Oral Statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly Rating Policy.pdf*

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 *Item 9.2 - Consultation Paper Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) Options.pdf*

Page 149

 *Item 9.3 ANDBC Consultation Response - Small Business Rate Relief Options.pdf*

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10. Sealing Documents

11. Transfer of Rights of Burial

12. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)

 *Item 12 Notice of Motion Status Report.pdf*

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 *Item 12 Appendix Notice of Motion Tracker.pdf*

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13. Notices of Motion

13.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson

That this Council notes the growing popularity of Linear Park in Bangor East as a hub for the local community.

Further to this, officers will bring back a report exploring options for providing path markings in both Upper and Lower Linear Park for runners, such as distance indicators eg 1 km, 2 km), along with appropriate signage to assist those who wish to keep fit in the Park.

Officers will also examine options for upgrading the path and accompanying drainage system in Lower Linear Park between the bridge and the Ring Road , in light of persistent flooding and drainage issues.

13.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter

That this Council notes that the natural stone blinding pathways around Londonderry Park are prone to saturation with water resulting in significant standing water and sludginess which adversely impacts on the use and enjoyment of the park.

Council therefore requests that officers prepare a business case with a view to paving or tarmacating the paths in the park to improve the user experience.

13.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean

That this Council recognises its responsibility to ensure that our city, towns and villages are looking the best that they can be, to be welcoming places for visitors and our residents. It is therefore essential that the correct structures and policies are in place to ensure that within the resources made available all expected maintenance is being carried out efficiently and effectively.

A proactive maintenance regime was agreed when this Council was created and has worked well in some areas but hasn't had the desired impact in other areas. Basic maintenance and upkeep of our public realm particularly in our centres and prominent areas can and should be improved.

The Council therefore commits to reporting on a review of its current proactive maintenance and cleansing regimes, highlighting options and opportunities for improvement and associated budgetary requirements, so as to allow members to consider potential improvements in outcomes concerning the maintenance of Council property and the public realms.

13.4 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Brady and Alderman McAlpine

This Council pledges to write to Stormont to request the introduction of femicide as a specific hate crime which therefore carries an appropriate sentence, as well as specific deradicalisation support while in prison in order to prevent reoffending. Femicide is defined as the intentional killing of a woman due to factors such as hatred, discrimination or subjugation.

It also includes acts motivated by control, possession or domination over a woman, or in relation to her refusal to establish or maintain an emotional relationship, or as an act of limitation of her individual freedom.

The Council recognises that the motivation of this crime is rooted in a desire for the control and subjugation of women, driven by patriarchal attitudes in society.

That perpetrators can be partners but as our communities are changing, we are also seeing a growing trend of 'honour based' killings of women by family members.

That while femicide lies at the extreme end of the spectrum of violence against women, other acts motivated by control, possession, or dominance - such as domestic abuse, coercive control, and harassment - create the conditions in which femicide occurs. These acts serve as warning signs that when left unaddressed, can escalate to fatal violence.

And that by establishing femicide as a distinct criminal offence, we send a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated and that lives of women have inherent value deserving of specific legal protection.

13.5 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor Moore

That Council notes the success of the inclusion of effigies and emblems to the penalties for 'in-programme' bonfires; that Council tasks officers to engage with groups to add flags to the list of penalties for 'in-programme' bonfires; and that officers return a report updating Members on these actions by the June committee meeting.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

21 January 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid Meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on **Wednesday, 28 January 2026 at 8.00pm**.

Yours faithfully

Michael Steele
Acting Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Prayer
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Mayor's Business
5. Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month of January 2026 (Copy attached)
6. Minutes of Council meeting dated 17 December 2025 (Copy attached)
7. Minutes of Committees (Copies attached)
 - 7.1 Audit Committee dated 15 December 2025
 - 7.2 Environment Committee dated 7 January 2026
 - 7.3 Place and Prosperity Committee dated 8 January 2026
 - 7.3.1 Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity 5 February 2026 – Variance Request Urban Regeneration Programme (Report attached)
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MEMBERSHIP OF ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Alderman Adair	Councillor Harbinson
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Hennessy
Alderman Brooks	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Cummings	Councillor S Irvine
Alderman Graham	Councillor W Irvine
Alderman McAlpine	Councillor Irwin
Alderman McRandal	Councillor Kennedy
Alderman McDowell	Councillor Kendall
Alderman McIlveen	Councillor Kerr
Alderman Smith	Councillor McBurney

Councillor Ashe	Councillor McClean
Councillor Blaney	Councillor McCollum (Mayor)
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McCracken
Councillor Brady	Councillor McKee
Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Moore (Deputy Mayor)
Councillor Chambers	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Newman
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Thompson
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Smart
Councillor Gilmour	Councillor Wray

ITEM 6

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on Wednesday 17 December 2025 commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair: The Mayor (Councillor McCollum)

Aldermen:	Adair	McAlpine
	Armstrong-Cotter	McRandal
	Brooks	McDowell
	Cummings	McIlveen
	Graham	Smith

Councillors:	Ashe	Kendall
	Blaney	Kennedy (7.02pm)
	Boyle	Kerr (Zoom)
	Brady	McBurney
	Cathcart	McClean
	Chambers (Zoom)	McCracken
	Cochrane	McKee
	Edmund	Moore
	Gilmour	Morgan
	Harbinson	Newman
	Hennessy	Smart
	S Irvine	Thompson
	W Irvine	Wray

Officers: Acting Chief Executive (M Steele), Acting Director of Corporate Services (C Jackson), Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Director of Active and Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Director of Environmental Services (G Bannister), Democratic Services Officers (R King and S McCrea).

1. PRAYER

The Mayor (Councillor McCollum) welcomed everyone to the meeting and commenced with the Director of Environmental Services reading the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies at this stage.

C 2025.12.17 PM

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Apologies had been received from Councillor Douglas and Councillor Hollywood. An apology for lateness was received from Councillor Kennedy and Councillor McKee.

NOTED.

(Councillor Kennedy entered the Council Chamber – 7.02pm)

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor sought Declarations of Interest at this stage and no declarations were made.

NOTED.

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

The Mayor welcomed Councillor Katherine Newman to her first meeting following her appointment to the Council, noting that she brought valuable experience from the education sector.

The Mayor noted that Councillor Hollywood had recently become a father of twins (a boy and a girl) and offered her congratulations.

She expressed sympathy for the victims of the Bondi Beach tragedy which had occurred the previous weekend and her heart went out to the Jewish community and particularly those families who had been so horrifically bereaved, she noted that one victim was only 10 years old. It was intended to open a Book of Condolences and the Mayor would also be writing to the Lord Mayor of Sydney on behalf of the Council to express heartfelt sympathies and support. She expressed personal affection for the communities of Bondi Beach having visited on two occasions and recalled that the area was made up of strong communities that were integral, integrated and collaborative.

RESOLVED, that the Mayor's Business be noted.

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

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the month of December 2025.

The Mayor reflected on highlights for the month of December, explaining that she and the Deputy Mayor had visited towns and villages across the Borough to attend community Christmas events, including Christmas tree light switch-ons, organised by

dedicated volunteers and businesses. The Mayor expressed thanks to organisers for their hard work and commitment for making those events a magical experience for all, particularly children.

The Mayor recalled inter-generational collaboration projects, highlighting a visit to Bangor's Bramblewood Care Home where children from Bloomfield Primary School had joined residents in creating Christmas cards and collages as part of a project that had taken place over a number of weeks, fostering kindness and companionship.

The Mayor had attended Ballyholme Primary School which had hosted a coffee morning for pupils and older residents within the community, and which had included carol singing, music, mince pies and gifts for each senior guest. The Mayor noted the importance of such events for older people who may be isolated and reported that in a conversation with guests about their Christmas plans she had been struck by one person's response, who had stated that the event itself had been Christmas for them.

The Mayor's Christmas Tea Dance was held at the Queen's Hall, Newtownards, and had been a huge success despite some absences due to Storm Bram. She noted that many had braved the storm to participate however and highlighted the skills and enthusiasm of those that had attended, some were in their 80s and 90s.

Fittingly the Mayor's Charities had launched their 'Belonging' candles on the day of two significant events. The Mayor recalled an engagement at Orchardville's annual concert at Bangor Elim which had included a medley of song and dance.

Later she had attended Women's Aid Candlelight Vigil, held at Bangor Castle on a rainy evening to mark the end of Women's Aid's annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, remembering women who had been murdered in Northern Ireland including Sarah Montgomery from Donaghadee. She thanked all those who had attended including Councillor Kendall and Alderman McAlpine.

The Mayor added that 'Belonging' Candles were on sale at North Down Museum, Ards Arts Centre and through the Mayor's Office. The candles were hand poured by a local business and featured artwork by Deborah Robinson, they were £20 and all proceeds supported the Mayor's Charities.

Some of the Deputy Mayor's highlights had included a Christmas light switch on in Newtownards, a celebration event hosted by the Polish Association in Bangor and a Christmas event in relation to the Sir Samuel Kelly Lifeboat in Donaghadee. She thanked the Deputy Mayor for her assistance and the enthusiasm she brought to her engagements.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Hennessy, seconded by Alderman McRandall, that the information be noted.

6. **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING DATED 26 NOVEMBER 2025**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Item 7.5 - Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 12 November 2025 (Item 17 – Leisure Services – Procurement Exception and Capital Funding Approval for Essential Work)

The Director of Active and Healthy Communities referred to a discussion at the Active and Healthy Communities Committee on 12 November 2025 which had been taken in confidence.

At the Council meeting of 26 November, the Chief Executive had agreed to review the audio recording of that discussion to check a point of accuracy and return this to the Council meeting for clarification.

The point of accuracy had been raised by Councillor McClean and related to In Confidence section of the minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 12 November 2025.

After reviewing the audio, the Director had noted that Councillor McClean had asked 'Is this a full refit or a replacement of some of the components?' and the officer replied, 'it was a full replacement'.

In her view, the Director believed that this question had been inaccurately recorded in the minutes. Councillor McClean indicated to the Mayor that he was happy with the outcome of that.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the minutes be agreed as a correct record.

7. **MINUTES OF COMMITTEES**

7.1 **Planning Committee dated 2 December 2025**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

7.2 **Environment Committee dated 3 December 2025**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

Item 9 - Notice Of Motion 581 Cemetery Maintenance Six Month Review

Raising a point of accuracy, Alderman Adair stated that he had made a proposal to keep the cemetery maintenance progress reports under six monthly review, in addition to simply just noting the report.

He requested that the minutes be amended to reflect his proposal which had been agreed by the Committee. It was agreed that the record would be corrected.

Item 8 - Notice of Motion 585 - Maintaining Beaches and Our Coastal Environment

Councillor Morgan proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the Council notes and thanks the officers for the three reports that have been received that consider the cleaning and maintenance of our beaches. That Council notes that managed beaches are cleaned and managed in line with other Councils, and best practice. That officers bring back a further report detailing all reported incidents of public health and public nuisance concern recorded in relation to our amenity beaches and coastline within the past 3 years along with recommendations of how we best deal with such matters, taking account of the relevant legislation and our environmental responsibilities.

Councillor Morgan felt that there was a lack of evidence to suggest mechanical cleaning would solve the issue, noting that environmental damage or value for money had not been detailed. This proposed amendment sought to understand the problem before taking any further action.

The proposer noted that three reports, supported by study visits to beaches in other Local Council districts, confirmed that Ards and North Down's approach was consistent with wider practice.

This was further reinforced by four award-winning beaches in the Borough, all recognised in 2025. The proposer also commended the communication and education initiatives, including the coastal conference held at Portavogie.

Councillor Morgan emphasised that grass and seaweed were natural elements of the ecosystem rather than litter and noted that any intervention had to be sensitive to ASSI designations and the wider context of biodiversity decline in Northern Ireland.

In closing, Councillor Morgan stressed that there had been a need for a fuller understanding of the issue before decisions could be taken. She highlighted the importance of establishing the scale, timings and locations of the issues and of clarifying whether it represented a public health concern or simply a nuisance. She concluded that solutions had to be evidence-led.

The seconder, Councillor Harbinson, added his support, calling for careful, tailored solutions to coastal maintenance. He argued that mechanical cleaning was not appropriate for problems such as flies and seaweed build up. He referred to the ASSI designations of the Borough's beaches and noted that the East Strand at Portrush for example was mechanically cleaned for litter only. He too wanted further data and evidence of public health concerns to develop suitable solutions. He also noted that permissions were required from relevant agencies such as Northern Ireland Environment Agency for any coastal work.

Councillor Brady said he had previously abstained due to a lack of evidence and indicated his support for the amendment, having consulted an expert who had warned of the implications of mechanical beach cleaning and dismissed it as contrary to the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act.

He noted there would be ecological harm caused by removing seaweed, which supported beach wildlife and food chains, and referred to a global shift away from mechanical cleaning due to its damaging effects on biodiversity. He further highlighted the resource pressures that daily mechanical cleaning would have entailed, likening it to the story of King Canute attempting to halt the tide.

He noted that coastal erosion was linked to rising sea levels rather than a lack of cleaning and stated that seaweed posed no health risks. In response to previous arguments, he observed that rats were attracted to food waste, not seaweed. He further emphasised that mechanical cleaning would waste resources and threaten ecosystems and reiterated his support for evidence-led approaches.

Alderman Adair spoke against the proposed amendment, believing that it was a stalling tactic to delay beach maintenance progressing. He was also disappointed that the proposed amendment had not been shared with other party and independent groupings ahead of the meeting. He claimed that Alliance Party representatives had not attended the fact-finding visits arranged for the other Council districts and noted that the proposer of the amendment represented the Comber area which contained no Council amenity beaches.

He recalled that mechanical beach cleaning in the Borough had been standard practice until 2018 and linked current problems to a lack of maintenance. His proposal was to reinstate that practice, subject to funding through the rate-setting process. He claimed that the Council had not sought NIEA permission since the regulations had changed, contrary to statements that had been made. He referred to a Ballywalter resident who had complained about large numbers of flies and stated his belief that some of the weeds had no environmental value. He concluded by requesting a recorded vote.

Councillor McKee was supportive of the amendment and saw value in acquiring more information. He expressed disappointment at the Committee's support for allocating funds for machinery despite lacking evidence or having an understanding

in terms of value for money. He expressed concern that biodiversity statutory obligations could be undermined by mechanical cleaning and questioned its effectiveness given an increase in seaweed resulting from climate change. He believed that funding would be better focused on flood mitigation in vulnerable communities rather than mechanical equipment to remove seaweed.

Councillor Wray wanted to reduce the temperature of the debate, noting accusations from both sides of the argument. He felt that the most important aspect was that no final decision was being made at this meeting and referred to Alderman Adair's previous statement regarding an 'in principle' agreement to purchase mobile bio cleaning stations subject to environmental laws. He noted that the Council had used these cleaning methods previously but felt that Alderman Adair's proposal represented progress on the previous methods given that the technology proposed would include a bio station that would clean the machinery to protect the local ecosystems of each beach.

He indicated support for ongoing workshops and information gathering and agreed with the Alliance Party amendment in principle but also viewed it as a slight stalling tactic. He recognised differing public opinion both in terms of environmental concerns and a desire for cleaner beaches and noted that there would be further discussions and workshops before any final decision.

Alderman Graham was supportive of comments made by Alderman Adair and felt that there was a need for balance and suggested that mechanical cleaning could be undertaken in accordance with relevant regulations, preserving biodiversity. He pointed to large portions of the coastline that were inaccessible and remained undisturbed. It was these areas that would be available for biodiversity to thrive, and he felt that cleaning efforts could focus on accessible public beaches to address problems with flies and odours for example. He would therefore be opposing the amendment.

Councillor Edmund spoke against the amendment, referring to the nuisance caused by flies to residents and visitors to these areas. He felt that not every stretch of coastline needed to be cleaned but the comfort of residents and visitors should be considered in the appropriate areas.

Councillor Boyle asked officers what the 'in principle' element meant in terms of Alderman Adair's original proposal at the Committee and the Director of Environmental Services clarified that the action would be subject to the rate setting process and budgetary evaluation.

Continuing, Councillor Boyle queried the timings of further reports and impacts on meeting this year's budget setting process. The Director added that the submission for this item could still potentially be included in the current year's estimates considerations depending on the scope of work required. For that to happen this year, it would need to be added to proposals that had already been submitted. If the

deadline was not met, then it would be added to the following year's rate setting process.

Alderman McRandal initially referred to Councillor Wray's opening comments and felt that any increase in temperature in the debate had come from Alderman Adair in what had otherwise been a level discussion. Supporting the amendment, Alderman McRandal added that he would like to see more information around solutions and costs to enable an informed decision. He had listened to the audio recording of the debate at the Committee meeting and had found Alderman Adair's points to be vague in terms what he wanted, believing that there were inconsistencies regarding the nature of the issues and the objectives and he wondered what it was that Alderman Adair wanted to remove, questioning if it was litter, weeds, seaweed or all three of those, and at what locations.

He added that nobody was arguing that litter should not be cleaned from Council beaches, but this was undertaken by four rangers employed over the summer months. They would still be required to undertake that duty in addition to the deploying of equipment which would have little effect and likely to have significant cost. He noted that at Ballyholme beach for example it was not uncommon for volunteers to lift 20 full bags of litter containing items such as bottles and cans. An appliance which was designed to sift small items from sand was not designed to cope with litter of that type. He was one of the volunteers at regular beach cleans there and recalled that litter was rarely lifted from the sand but mostly from among vegetation, the wall at the top of the beach and from banks of seaweed that accumulated at tide mark.

He added that litter picking machinery required a tractor costing £90,000 and might not be suitable for beach use. This would either require a new purchase or divert resources away from the Parks and Cemeteries service. He noted there would be additional costs for cleaning of machinery, required before and after deployment. He added that NIEA permission would be required for removal of seaweed and that it would likely need to be returned to the sea. He questioned the effectiveness of that procedure, particularly on beaches prone to seaweed accumulation.

Alderman McRandal stressed the need for clarity on objectives before agreeing to any commitment of significant expenditure and warned of spending a six-figure sum of ratepayers' money on something that could become a white elephant. He also noted that much of the Borough's coastline was environmentally protected and should therefore be valued as a natural treasure. Therefore, the underlying issues should be properly examined to allow a fully informed decision on the best way forward.

Speaking against the proposed amendment, Councillor Kerr highlighted frequent complaints from constituents about rats, seaweed and flies, particularly in the Millisle beach area and therefore supported Alderman Adair's position.

The Mayor noted that a recorded vote had been requested.

On being put to the meeting with 14 voting FOR, 22 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINING and 3 ABSENT, the proposal FELL.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (14)	AGAINST (22)	ABSTAINED (1)	ABSENT (3)
Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen	Aldermen
McAlpine	Adair		
McDowell	Armstrong-Cotter		
McRandall	Brooks		
	Cummings		
	Graham		
	Mclveen		
	Smith		
Councillors	Councillor	Councillors	Councillor
Ashe	Blaney	Boyle	Douglas
Brady	Cathcart		Irwin
Harbinson	Chambers		Hollywood
Hennessy	Cochrane		
Kendall	Edmund		
McBurney	Gilmour		
McCollum	Irvine, S		
McCracken	Irvine, W		
McKee	Kennedy		
Moore	Kerr		
Morgan	McClean		
	Newman		
	Smart		
	Thompson		
	Wray		

Summing up on the minutes as Chair of the Committee, Councillor Kendall regretted the Council's decision not to support Councillor Morgan's proposed amendment to ask for further information. She felt it would have been important to have details on public health concerns to ensure interventions would have been proportionate and appropriate.

Councillor Kendall warned of the negative impacts of mechanical beach cleaning, noting that it could destabilise coastlines and biodiversity. She noted the complaints about flies in the area but was aware that a reduction in flies for example was evidence of declining biodiversity which affected food supply and the wider environment.

Councillor Kendall recognised the ongoing volunteer-led beach cleaning efforts and would have welcomed clarity on the impacts of those compared to the impacts of

mechanical cleaning. She also noted that the costs associated with the machinery had not been detailed in previous reports.

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

7.3. Place and Prosperity Committee dated 4 December 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

Item 16 - Kircubbin Harbour Update

Councillor Boyle indicated that he wished to raise a matter under Item 16 that was heard in confidence. This would be heard once the meeting went into committee.

Item 5 – Proposal for the NIE site, Bangor

Councillor Boyle was supportive of the plans for Bangor and Newtownards but understood there had been a previous LEP commitment to consider the abandoned PSNI station in Portaferry for potential office space use. He noted this had not been included in the report and requested an update on the matter, highlighting a large demand for office space in the town.

The Director of Place and Prosperity advised that the LEP Action Plan, featured in a later item within those minutes, set out broad principles rather than specific projects. The Director referred to the Space to Grow – Workspace and Land section of the LEP Action Plan (page 49) which would encompass Portaferry PSNI station if progressed and delivered in time, allowing allocation of funding under that workstream.

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

7.4. Corporate Services Committee dated 9 December 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the minutes of the Corporate Services Committee be approved and adopted.

7.5. Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 10 December 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

Item 12.2 – Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McKee and Councillor Kendall

Alderman McIlveen wished to raise a point of order regarding the above item which concerned a notice of motion by Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee. He noted that an amendment had been brought at the meeting from the Deputy Mayor and Alderman McRandal without advance written notice as required under Standing Order 17.1 12 (b). This stipulated that substantial amendments be submitted at least one working day in advance of the meeting. He noted that the amendment in question amounted to an additional 50 words and proposed an entire course of action to be taken so could not be considered as minor. Referring to the minutes, Alderman McIlveen noted it had not even been requested as a minor amendment at the meeting and was just moved.

He further noted that the amendment was not listed on the agenda and that the Chair had not allowed the original motion's proposer to sum up, instead giving that opportunity to the proposer of the amendment, both of which contravened Standing Orders 20.21. This had been raised on the night but there had been no rectification of that breach.

He explained that Standing Orders were the legal basis for which Council conducted its business and not optional. He believed the correct course of action would be to refer the original motion back to the Committee in order for it to be dealt with properly.

The Deputy Mayor was invited to respond to the comments and argued that the amendment was not substantial and included the addition of a request for consultation and collaboration with the PCSP with no alteration to other aspects of the motion. She also referred to a prior discussion with Councillor Kendall and the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Ashe, regarding her intention to bring the amendment.

The Deputy Mayor also claimed there was a precedent, alleging that Alderman McIlveen had made significant changes through an amendment to her own notice of motion relating to lifelong learning on the night of a Committee meeting.

POINT OF ORDER:

(At 8.23 pm Alderman McIlveen raised a point of order under Standing Order 20.12, relating to a matter of personal explanation. He stated that the above statement from the Deputy Mayor was inaccurate and wished to correct the record. He said that the amendment had been properly notified at the time and referred to correspondence dated 9 October 2023, submitted to Democratic Services and the then Chief

Executive along with the Director of Corporate Services. He asked the record reflect that the accusation from the Deputy Mayor was incorrect. The Mayor advised that this would be noted.)

Councillor Ashe, who had chaired the Committee meeting, explained that she had considered the amendment to be non-substantial and the Deputy Mayor had made her aware of prior contact with Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee regarding her intention to bring the amendment. Councillor Kendall had also confirmed this.

Councillor Ashe added that both Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee had spoken on two occasions and when the Standing Order had been raised by the UUP she then opened the matter up to the floor to ensure that everyone had been given the opportunity to speak. Councillor Ashe was content with both her own and the Director's approach.

The Director agreed that all Members had been given the opportunity to speak during the item at the Committee, but the Council would need to decide if it wished to return the item to the Committee.

Alderman McIlveen proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the item be referred back to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

This was seconded by Councillor Gilmour.

Alderman McIlveen felt that since the item had not come before Members legally, the matter should be referred back to committee. He asserted that the process outlined in the Standing Orders was clear and had not been followed properly. He added that prior notification of an amendment was for the benefit of all Members and not only the proposer and seconder or party colleagues. He felt that direct communication between the proposer and the Member bringing an amendment did not satisfy the requirements of Standing Orders.

Alderman McRandal felt that Standing Orders were not always followed to the letter at committee meetings and felt that the proposed amendment was petty.

Councillor Kendall recalled her and Councillor McKee's frustration during the debate of the motion and noted that its proposer, Councillor McKee, was not in favour of accepting the amendment. She felt that herself and Councillor McKee had secured broad agreement for their motion which was tabled in time, debated and heard. She appreciated the importance of following Standing Orders but on this occasion was not in favour of the motion being returned to the Committee, accepting the consensus of Members on the night.

The seconder, Councillor Gilmour emphasised the importance of Standing Orders, recalling that this Standing Order had been introduced following amendments previously being brought on the night of committee meetings. This had drawn criticism as Members were not adequately prepared.

Councillor Gilmour added that the addition of 50 words could not be considered a minor amendment and warned that setting such a precedent would undermine the rules, which were in place to ensure Members were properly prepared across the chamber, not just those proposing the original motion. She felt that it was appropriate for the motion to return to the Committee to follow the correct procedure.

The Mayor agreed that advanced preparation was essential for all Members and she trusted in the spirit of collaboration.

On being put to the meeting, with 15 voting FOR, 12 voting AGAINST, 10 ABSTAINING and 3 AGAINST, the proposal was CARRIED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Gilmour that Item 12.2 be referred back to Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

Item 13 – Any Other Notified Business - Portaferry Sports Centre Update

Councillor Boyle thanked the Director and all those involved in trying to resolve the heating issues at Portaferry Sports Centre. It had taken four months but he was aware that people were very appreciative of it and looked forward to that being addressed. There was still however the issue of the sports hall floor which had been ongoing for three and a half years. He recalled that one year ago it was established that the responsibility for its repair lay with the Education Authority (EA) and expressed frustration that the EA had failed to respond to ongoing contact from the Council. He called on officers to continue pressing for a solution.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the minutes of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee, as amended, be approved and adopted.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 DfE Public Consultation - A definition of Social Enterprise in Northern Ireland (FILE ED138) (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Growing the Social Economy Sector was a priority for the Department for the Economy and making the sector sustainable was a key feature of DfE's economic vision.

Social enterprises varied in structure and mission and unlike businesses or charities, social enterprise did not currently have a clear definition or a regulator. The

identification of organisations eligible to receive funding was therefore proving challenging for funding bodies.

This consultation from DfE sought feedback from organisations with an interest in social enterprises in Northern Ireland on a proposed definition framework that could be used by government departments in the delivery of funding support to the sector. A new arrangement through which government funding would be facilitated was proposed to be in place from April 2027 and local authorities had been invited to respond to the consultation which closed on 23rd December 2025.

Definition of the Social Enterprise Sector

The Council welcomed the ambition to help the sector to become more sustainable and ensure that funding from government was targeting social enterprises correctly. The development of a Framework to bring a more structured and objective approach to defining a social enterprise was both timely and welcomed. The Council agreed that the lack of an agreed definition to date had created difficulties for funding and support of these organisations. As stated in the paper, the proposals 'do not seek to regulate the use of the term 'social enterprises', but rather, focus on financial decisions the NI Departments may make around support for social enterprises'.

As suggested, due to the challenges of having no clear standard definition, there is a lack of verifiable data on the size or scale of the sector in any area. This is no different in this area. However, through engagement with the local sector, it is apparent that while the Ards and North Down area have a small number of larger social enterprises who are mostly self-sustaining, the local sector is predominantly made up of smaller enterprises with much lower capacity.

These enterprises have been established to address an identified local need and tend to be focussed on a 'community of interest' or a geographical area. They provide employment and much needed support across the Borough and are meeting local needs. The Council was keen that these organisations continued to be able to access support to deliver their services effectively and that they had the resources and capacity to deliver their social objectives and mission.

Scope of the Three Tier Definition Framework

The three levels proposed provided a broad range of options for social enterprises to self-assess. However, due to the diverse number of enterprises across the sector, it would be difficult to confirm whether it would enable all to be included until it was fully operational and tested. The Council suggested the first year should be treated as a 'test' or 'pilot' phase when this was rolled out in practice, making provision to take on board feedback from enterprises or other funding bodies to highlight any emerging issues or potential barriers to accessing funding or support.

The Framework had a strong focus on finances and economic return. The Council agreed that where possible, social enterprises should be encouraged and supported to adopt a more commercial approach to enable them to resource their social

objectives and ensure sustainability. Many social enterprises aimed to be financially sustainable, however, some did rely on government funding as they did not have the ability to trade. One of the core purposes of social enterprise was social value - enhancing the lives of individuals, communities and/or their local environment regardless of the revenue model.

Social value was a fundamental aspect of social enterprises, and the Council therefore welcomed the inclusion of Section 2 of the Framework 'Mission and Impact' and hopes it would encourage the inclusion of those enterprises which might not be at the same level of maturity/capacity or economic strength as larger enterprises.

New Accreditation System

The Council noted that the following the consultation it was intended to develop an accreditation system, removing the need for multiple checks by different funders and requiring an independent assessment body. The development of an independent system to facilitate a consistency of approach from funders was welcomed, however, smaller enterprises lack of capacity could have meant they chose not to engage with an accreditation scheme, particularly if costs were not kept to a minimum.

It was critical that the changes proposed did not become barriers to engagement for smaller social enterprises and result in their lack of participation in the Framework and Accreditation process. While the Council noted the scheme did not feature in this consultation, it was necessary to address these issues now and ensure these were taken into account in planning the new arrangements and, critically, that measures were put in place in the early stages of roll out to monitor the level of engagement and support the sector's participation.

Next Steps

Going forward the Council would suggest the following:

1. The initial roll out of the Framework should be treated as a 'test and learn' phase, with engagement levels monitored and a review undertaken to assess the impact of the Framework (and to also inform the 'new funding arrangement' in March 2027) including liaising with:
 - relevant bodies, funders and key stakeholders to test if the Framework had ensured the funding of the sector was being effectively targeted: and also,
 - a representative cross section of social enterprises to assess the impact of these proposals and identify if further refinement or adjustment was required to ensure there had been no adverse impact, particularly on smaller enterprises
2. Provision of some further detail on how the Framework was intended to 'guide' the funding process i.e. was the intention of the Framework to assist with categorising enterprises into the 3 Levels with funding being scaled and allocated accordingly.

3. The Department (and /or partner bodies) should provide briefing/information workshops on the Accreditation Process (potentially in partnership with Social Enterprise NI) and accompany this with a proactive outreach programme to the sector to inform and guide the sector on the Framework and the steps they should now take to identify which level they should aligned with and ensure compliance with requirements.

To align with this process, the Department should explore putting specific supports in place, potentially in partnership with the 11-Council Enterprise Support Service – Go Succeed – to build the capacity of the sector to optimise their engagement with and enable their buy-in to the new Framework.

4. The Consultation noted that (3.1) '*a new arrangement through which government funding will be facilitated is proposed to be in place from 2027*'. The Council looked forward to learning more from the Department about how that was planned to operate and how the three tier Framework Definition would be used in this process.

Summary

The newly released 2025 Social Enterprise Sector Report delivered evidence of an active social enterprise sector with **£933 million** pouring into Northern Ireland's economy and with over **17,000 jobs** created. This was a median turnover that was **double the UK average**.

The Council viewed the local social enterprise sector as being a key social and economic contributor to the Borough, and therefore it was keen to ensure it received the support required to build its capacity and become more sustainable and had access to the funding and support it needed to achieve this. The Council would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department and other agencies going forward to ensure the sector was supported to continue to deliver its social objectives.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the steps highlighted in this report and submits this to DfE by the closing date of 23 December 2025.

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

9. RESOLUTIONS

9.1 PSNI Firearms online licencing system

(Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- The attached correspondence from Mid Ulster District Council dated 01 December 2025.

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman Graham, that Council note the correspondence.

Councillor Boyle raised objections to simply noting the request from Mid Ulster District Council to support its notice of motion. He felt that the Council should be supportive and highlighted that the issue affected mainly the rural community and advised that applicants were generally older and had a strong preference for paper-based application processes.

Given they had declined to speak at the outset, the proposer and seconder were invited to comment.

Alderman Graham explained that he shared some of Councillor Boyle's concerns about the difficulties that applicants faced in relation to renewing or applying for firearms certificates. While he was supportive of paper-based applications, he noted that assistance with applications from licenced dealers and gun clubs was already available under the current system. He highlighted some ambiguity with the second section and due to that he was unable to support the motion fully.

Councillor Boyle reiterated his disappointment with the proposal to dismiss the request for support to the motion by just noting it and added that firearm users, who were mainly rural residents, relied heavily on paper-based applications and that should not be overlooked.

Councillor Boyle's objection was noted and he would be recorded as against the proposal.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman Graham, that Council note the correspondence.

10. SOCIAL SUPERMARKET UNDERSPEND (FILE CW142)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that there was an identified underspend of £14,362.91 in 2024-25 Social Supermarket funding, officers sought permission from the Department for Communities (DfC), to carry this over into 2025-26. Following the six-monthly return to the department it was identified that the underspend had been agreed by the department, but confirmation had been sent by email to a Council officer that was currently off sick. Officers now sought permission to issue a letter of variance to the two appointed social supermarkets as follows:

Kilcooley Women's Centre (KWC), £7,899.60 – 55% of underspend
Bangor Food and Community Support (BFCS) £6,463.31 – 45% underspend.

The percentage of the split was as previously agreed based on percentage of population that each service covered.

KWC covered Bangor, Holywood and Donaghadee.

BFCS covered Ards, East Ards (Comber, Ballygowan and Killinchy) and Peninsula.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the issue of Letter of Variance to the two Social Supermarkets, KWC £7,899.60 and BFCS £6,463.31.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cathcart welcomed the additional funding for social supermarkets and praised the benefits of their services. He noted the delay in identifying the underspend was caused due to confirmation of this being emailed to a Council officer who had been off sick. He queried the length of the delay and asked why no process was in place to ensure correspondence was picked up by another officer.

He raised further queries, asking if the funding was required to be spent by the end of the existing financial year and if the delay had posed difficulties for the social supermarkets in meeting that deadline.

The Director of Active and Healthy Communities explained that the delay had been significant, amounting to approximately six months. She confirmed that no internal process had been in place so that correspondence from the Department was checked in the absence of the relevant officer. The matter had come to light when the six-month return was submitted to the Department which had then queried why the additional underspend from the previous year had not been utilised. It was then established that the email from the Department had been sent to an officer who had been on sickness absence and not picked up. The Director confirmed that the additional funding was required to be spent by the end of March 2026.

Councillor Cathcart recognised that the Director was new in post, but he was sure that lessons would be learned from the incident to ensure that similar delays would not occur in future.

The seconder Councillor Blaney had found the report to be unclear on how and when the underspend was first identified. He asked for clarification on that, and the Director would establish this with the relevant officers and report back to the Member.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the recommendation be adopted.

11. NOMINATIONS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

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

Following the resignation of Linzi McLaren (Holywood and Clandeboye DEA) from the Council, which had subsequently been filled by Councillor Hollywood, a number of outstanding positions on Working Groups were now required to be filled. Nominations were sought to fill each of the below positions for the remainder of the term as necessary:

1. Body: Elected Member Development Steering Group – 7 Places (4 Year Appointment)
2. Body: North Down Coastal Path Working Group – 15 Places (1 Year Appointment)
3. Body: Somme Heritage Centre Management Committee – 3 Places (1 Year Appointment)

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

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

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

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

	2024/25	2025/26
1	Alderman Graham	Alderman Graham
2	Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Cochrane
3	Councillor McBurney	Councillor McBurney
4	Councillor Harbison	Councillor Harbison
5	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
6	Councillor Irwin	Councillor Irwin
7	Councillor McClean	Councillor McClean
8	Councillor W Irvine	Councillor W Irvine
9	Councillor McCracken	Councillor McCracken

10	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
11	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee
12	Councillor McKimm	Councillor Brady (Chair)
13	Councillor McLaren	Councillor McLaren
14	Alderman McRandal	Alderman McRandal
15	Councillor Hennessy	Councillor Hennessy

Body: Somme Heritage Centre Management Committee – 3 Places (1 Year Appointment)

	2024/25	2025/26
1	Councillor Thompson (<i>Replaced Councillor MacArthur April 2024</i>)	Councillor Thompson
2	Councillor McLaren	Councillor McLaren
3	Councillor S Irvine	Councillor S Irvine
4	Alderman Cummings	Alderman Cummings

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

RECOMMENDED that Council nominate a Member(s) to the bodies as outlined in this report.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Smart, that Councillor Newman be appointed to the following outside bodies:

1. Elected Member Development Steering Group

2. North Down Coastal Path Working Group

3. Somme Heritage Centre Management Committee

(Councillor Kendall and Councillor Brady left the Council Chamber - 8.23 pm)

12. FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH UPDATE – RHYS MCCLENAGHAN

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Acting Director of Corporate Services stating that at the Council meeting in September 2024 it was agreed:-

“That this Council bestows the Freedom of the Borough upon Rhys McClenaghan - European, Commonwealth, World and Olympic Gold Medallist – in recognition of his outstanding achievements in sport.”

Meetings had since taken place between Officers and Mr McClenaghan, who had accepted the honour, to plan the associated events.

The Freedom of the Borough conferral ceremony would be held on Friday 23 January 2026 and a public event would be held on Sunday 25 January 2026.

Friday 23 January 2026

Conferral Event

It was recommended that the conferral event would be held in the Clandeboye Lodge Hotel. It would incorporate the various civic ceremonial protocols that were characteristic of the bestowal of the Freedom of the Borough and a celebratory.

It was envisaged that the event would cater for 100 attendees, with approximately 60 Council guests and the remainder Mr McClenaghan's guests.

The event would include:

- Drinks reception
- Formal proceedings conducted in the Blackwood Suite, with members robed
- Speech of Conferral – The Mayor of Ards and North Down
- Recitation of the resolution – Chief Executive
- Signing of the Honorary Book of Burgesses by the Mayor, Chief Executive and Mr McClenaghan
- Presentation of Illuminated Certificate
- Response from Mr McClenaghan
- Exchange of gifts
- Interview conducted by special guest
- Toasts including the Loyal Toast, The New Freemen of the Borough, the Borough of Ards and North Down and “Our Guests”
- Dinner

It was also recommended that a commemorative brochure be produced to mark the occasion.

Wording for Certificate

It was recommended that the certificate be worded as follows:

To: Rhys McClenaghan BEM

Greetings

Whereas the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors of the Borough of Ards and North Down in the County of Down being sensible of your contribution to the Borough; and in acknowledgment of your inspirational talent and outstanding achievements in sport - European, Commonwealth, World and Olympic Gold Medallist.

Do by these presents confer upon you the Freedom of the Borough of Ards and North Down.

In witness thereof the Common Seal of Ards and North Down Borough Council is affixed hereto this 23rd day of January 2026.

Sunday 25 January 2026

To enable the public to better engage with this Freedom of the Borough, it was proposed to host two hour long performances in Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Curated by Peter Corry Productions and in association with Origin Gymnastics, the performance would tell the story of Rhys' life to date – from young aspiring gymnast to Olympic medallist. It would celebrate the contribution Rhys had made, and continued to make, to sport, wellbeing and his local community. The event was aimed at engaging and inspiring the audience.

As capacity for this event was limited, it would be ticketed. Tickets would be available in January for a small fee. The performance would be aimed at a family audience.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

(Councillor Kerr, attending remotely, left the meeting – 8.24 pm)

(Councillor Gilmour left the Council Chamber – 8.24 pm)

13. SEALING DOCUMENTS

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

- (a) Grants of Rights of Burials – D41163 – D41189
- (b) Acquisition of land for Greenway - Comber to Floodgates
- (c) Operating Agreement relating to Catering Concession Opportunity at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex 05 December 2025 between (1) ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL and (2) PARKLANDS CAFÉ Ltd
- (d) BYC Watersports Centre - Geotechnical Site Investigation Contract Documents
- (e) Section 76 Legal Agreement to accompany planning permission to be granted under reference LA06/2025/0623/F – for a new Lidl store at Skipperstone, Bangor, regarding extinguishment of retail use at existing Lidl store (located at 97 Bloomfield Road, Bangor)

14. TRANSFER OF RIGHTS OF BURIAL

The following transfers were received:

Transfer -

Ken McCullough – Ann McAdam
Movilla Cemetery section 59 grave 165

Transfer -

Ann McAdam – Ken McCullough
Movilla Cemetery section 59 grave 163

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the transfers be agreed.

15. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix VII)

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

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cathcart referred to Notice of Motion 599 which he had brought along with Councillor Gilmour in November 2023 regarding the Community Grants transformation process. He expressed frustration at the slow progress of digitalising the system and that this process was still incomplete after two years.

(Councillor Kendall and Councillor Brady returned to the Council Chamber – 8.27 pm)

He highlighted that the lack of a digitalised system was a concern for many community groups and called for progress. He recognised that significant staffing changes had occurred within the relevant directorate and had contributed to the delays, but he hoped that this would not delay the process further.

Councillor Cathcart noted that the matter would be returned to the Committee in January and he urged Committee members to ensure progress on the matter. He raised wider concerns about digitalisation across other services, noting that it was still not possible to order a new bin online and customers were required to order over the telephone with their payment details.

(Councillor McBurney left the Council Chamber 8.28 pm)

The Mayor, as a member of the Capital Grants Working Group, shared that frustration and expressed agreement that the transformation process had been slow. She noted that this was particularly frustrating for community groups across various DEAs who had been seeking updates which she said were not forthcoming.

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

16. NOTICES OF MOTION

16.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McRandal and Alderman McAlpine

That this Council notes with concern the signs of erosion which have arisen on Station Road, Craigavon in recent years and that this Council recognises that Station Road, Craigavon is an integral section of the North Down coastal path and the Ulster Way.

That this Council reassess whether it has responsibility for maintaining the road and for strengthening the sea wall and sea defences along the North Down coastal path section of Station Road, in view of:

the fact that Council was prepared to assume responsibility for the road and sea defences under the failed Greenway project;
the fact that this is a right of way as asserted by Council.

That a report is brought back to the relevant Committee, to include assessment of who owns or is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the sea wall and sea defences along Station Road.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McAlpine, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Environment Committee.

16.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor Hennessy

That this Council returns a report researching paternity leave provision for Council employees including but not limited to: benchmarking of paternity leave provision against appropriate organisations; options to improve paternity leave policy for council employees; projected costings of these options; and anything else officers deem prudent.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Ashe, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Corporate Services Committee.

(Councillor McBurney returned to the Council Chamber – 8.30 pm)

16.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Smart and Alderman McIlveen

In light of the recent difficulty of West Winds Community Church in accessing council facilities to provide their Christmas Day service of worship, we agree that the Borough community facilities will be made available on Christmas Day, only on the strict proviso that the relevant individual staff choose to work on Christmas Day and cannot be mandated to do so.

A review of this provision would then be included in the current and ongoing policy review relating to council community facilities.

The Mayor drew Members' attention to an email circulated prior to the meeting, confirming that she had agreed to a request from the proposer and seconder for the motion to be heard at this meeting due to the time-sensitive nature of the matter.

Proposed by Councillor Smart, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Smart thanked the Mayor for allowing the Notice of Motion to proceed at this meeting and thanked the seconder, Alderman McIlveen for his collaboration on the issue, noting that he had intended to bring a similar Notice of Motion on the matter. He also thanked Councillor S Irvine for his engagement.

At the outset, Councillor Smart felt it was important to clarify what the Notice of Motion was not proposing.

He explained that this was not an attempt to require community centre staff or supervisors to work on Christmas Day, stressing he would never deny staff the right to enjoy Christmas as they chose. This proposal would simply allow staff who wished to work voluntarily, or who wished to earn overtime, to do so until a wider policy review concluded.

This proposal was not asking to create a permanent policy on Christmas Day operations, noting that a full review of community centre provision was ongoing and that 2026 would present an opportunity to establish a new service model.

The proposal was not limited to church services or worship, and centres would be available to any user, provided staff were willing to work voluntarily.

The proposer provided background to the matter, explaining that the issue had been raised by West Winds Community Church, whose members had greeted councillors with carols earlier in the evening. He described the group as a key part of the West Winds community, providing support across denominations and delivering support for both young people and older residents, facing isolation or cost of living pressures.

He noted that the group regularly used the centre for weekly services and events and regarded it as their local base.

Although it was not Council policy for to permit use of the centres on Christmas Day, the group had been permitted to use the centre last year, paying the full associated costs and had expected the same arrangement to apply this year. He explained that the group had already arranged for their Christmas Day service to take place either inside or outside the centre.

Councillor Smart added that he did not wish the Council to be seen as obstructing groups wishing to use community centres, nor staff who voluntarily wished to work additional hours. He believed that only a very small number of groups would realistically seek to use centres on Christmas Day at such short notice and he suggested that approving the motion would demonstrate flexibility and provide reassurance to the community.

In closing, Councillor Smart urged Members for their support for what he described as a common-sense interim proposal that would support both the community and staff, pending the outcome of the wider policy review.

The seconder, Alderman McIlveen, explained that both himself and Councillor Smart had been working on similar proposals and that he was pleased to be able to second this motion.

He added that the Notice of Motion was a last resort following several weeks of discussion aimed at finding a resolution. He was disappointed that community centre accommodation that had been provided last year could not be offered this year.

Alderman McIlveen stressed that the central principle of both his own draft motion and this one was the voluntary nature of staff participation. No member of staff would be mandated to work on Christmas Day but he was aware that in this particular case, staff had already indicated a willingness to do so.

Confusion had therefore arisen from the fact that there were willing staff and a group willing to meet all additional costs, yet the Council was unable to facilitate the request and work within and around its existing policy. He added that it would be disappointing if the Council could not go the extra mile in these circumstances, particularly given that the arrangement had been permitted the previous year.

Alderman McIlveen concluded by urging Members to support the Notice of Motion, noting that the group had used the facility on many occasions and was a fantastic contributor to the West Winds community. The proposal sought simply to allow the group to fulfil its wish to use the facility on Christmas Day, supported by willing staff.

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Boyle recognised that Christmas was a special time along with Easter in the religious calendar. He referred to other

designated dates when halls were closed throughout the year and recalled a similar issue occurring with a church group which met in Carrowdore. The group regularly used the facility in Carrowdore and wished to use it for a service on the public holiday in July. Although the request was initially rejected, it was ultimately resolved, and use of the hall was permitted. He felt that decision at the time was important and was pleased that the group had been accommodated, having engaged with the pastor and his congregation on the matter.

Councillor Boyle therefore believed it was incredibly important on this occasion, for the Council to support this motion as people were otherwise being prevented from attending their church service on Christmas Day.

He also believed that there were inconsistencies in approaches between the two legacy councils in terms of community halls and felt that the wider policy review would be helpful in that regard. In relation to this request, he felt that if staff were willing to work and arrangements were in place then all that was required was formal approval for the centre to be opened. He felt that Council should 'not be found wanting' on the issue and hoped that Members would support the motion unanimously.

(Councillor Harbison left the Council Chamber – 8.40 pm)

Councillor Brady added his support, provided that staff were willing to work on Christmas Day and being appropriately compensated. He felt that Council should do what it could to foster and support local communities.

Councillor S Irvine rose to support the motion and thanked the proposer and seconder for bringing it forward. He recalled extensive engagement with the Acting Chief Executive, acknowledging that discussions had been firm but ultimately constructive.

He explained that West Winds was his local area and the church was central to that community. It was far more than a place of worship and provided youth groups, senior lunches, 'Forget Me Not' services and wider community support in partnership with West Winds Community Association.

Councillor S Irvine reflected on strong working relationships he had built with the congregation during his time as an elected member and had witnessed positive and inclusive impacts of their work.

He expressed strong feelings and a personal connection to the church, explaining that his late predecessor had been a member of the church and the ministry had conducted his funeral.

He gave his support to the motion noting that no staff would be forced to work on Christmas Day and was aware that a local casual caretaker had volunteered to open

the centre as he had done the previous year. He understood that there were no operational barriers and asked officers to clarify what the policy position was.

The Director of Active and Healthy Communities explained that the current policy required community centres to remain closed on Christmas Day. Under the Council's lone-working policy, if one staff member was on site then a supervisor was also required to work on the day to ensure compliance.

Councillor S Irvine asked for confirmation that a Director was on call 365 days per year suggesting that this could satisfy that requirement of the lone-working policy.

The Director responded that Directors did not have key-holding responsibilities for community centres.

(Councillor Gilmour and Councillor Harbinson returned to the Council Chamber – 8.43 pm)

Councillor S Irvine felt that this was something that the Council needed to review.

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Moore, queried the implications for the Council as a business and an employer, and what factors the Council would need to take into account when considering any future policy on Christmas Day opening. She further queried the wider implications, noting that the discussion of this motion focused on one community centre, but any policy change could have wider implications. She asked what those could be, including any financial, staffing and industrial relations considerations that might arise from permitting Christmas Day opening or altering the existing policy.

The Director referred to several areas of concern in relation to two specific policies. The lone-working policy required both a key holder and a supervisor to be available if a centre was to be open on Christmas Day. Officers were not confident that sufficient staff could be secured if more than one centre was to open, given the number of centres with church users – this was believed to be seven or eight.

The Director highlighted concerns relating to the voluntary nature of the request. Although it was presented as optional, many caretakers were local to their centres and could feel pressured, from Elected Members, managers or service users to agree to work.

She reported that some staff who had been approached informally had indicated that they would 'rather not' work but would do so if they felt obliged which created difficulties from an employer-responsibility perspective.

The Director referred to informal engagement with several trade unions and those had indicated they were not supportive of the proposal due to concerns about staff pressure, the lack of consultation and timing of the request for the current year.

In a further question, the Deputy Mayor asked how many centres would be affected and the Director explained that while there were 12 church groups, some of those shared facilities, which meant that up to eight centres would be affected. She explained that the implications could extend beyond church groups as other organisations might also seek access on Christmas Day though the extent of that interest was unknown.

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Kendall felt it was difficult for a previously permitted arrangement to be withdrawn without any consultation or without giving the group adequate opportunity to make alternative arrangements. She added that centres were community assets and should be recognised as such and regardless of whether individuals were of a particular faith or none, Christmas was a time centred on community.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter added her support, explaining that she had been away when the issue first arose but was pleased that her colleagues had acted promptly. She was aware of the significant importance to the West Winds community and those who attended the church there. She spoke about the personal and communal significance of Christmas, describing it as a time for family, generosity and celebration, reflecting on Christmas morning in her own church.

She felt that given staff were not being pressured to work and that all necessary arrangements appeared to be in place, the proposal seemed straight forward and reasonable. She recognised the Director's concerns but noted that it was clearly an interim measure pending a further policy decision.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter went on to reflect on her own past involvement with West Winds Community Centre where she had taught Sunday school as a teenager and praised the current church for its positive work in an area of social deprivation, noting that it distributed food hampers and delivered wider community support.

Given that the church was able to meet the additional costs and staff were available, she argued that it would be inappropriate for the Council to refuse access. She felt that Council should recognise the importance of Christmas to the community and asked Members to consider the broader context and specific needs of the West Winds community. She concluded by wishing everyone a happy Christmas and asked that the matter be put to a recorded vote.

Councillor W Irvine indicated his support for the motion and noted that the request before Council was a special one, brought forward because no alternative arrangements had been found. Councillor Hennessy noted that previous comments had referenced the centre being opened on Christmas Day last year and he asked for clarity on why use of the centre had not been permitted this year.

The Director explained that the policy set out designated closure days for community centres each year and it was agreed that Christmas Day was always included within those closures. She added that while the centre opened last year on Christmas Day, this had occurred in breach of the agreed policy and without the knowledge of senior management.

In a final comment, Councillor McKee stated that he had intended to ask a similar question, but added his support for the Notice of Motion, describing it as a common-sense approach.

On being put to the meeting, with 35 voting FOR, 0 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINING and 1 ABSENT, the proposal was CARRIED.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (35) Aldermen	AGAINST (0) Aldermen	ABSTAINED (1) Aldermen	ABSENT (4) Aldermen
Adair			
Armstrong-Cotter			
Brooks			
Cummings			
Graham			
McAlpine			
McDowell			
McIlveen			
McRandall			
Smith			
Councillors	Councillor	Councillor	Councillor
Ashe		McCollum	Douglas
Blaney			Hollywood
Boyle			Irwin
Brady			Kerr
Cathcart			
Chambers			
Cochrane			
Edmund			
Gilmour			
Harbinson			
Hennessy			
Irvine, S			
Irvine, W			
Kendall			
Kennedy			
McBurney			
McClean			
McCracken			
McKee			
Moore			

Morgan
Newman
Smart
Thompson
Wray

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

16.4 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Douglas and Alderman Cummings

That this council is deeply concerned regarding the length of time that people battling with Motor Neurone Disease must wait to receive help through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Disabled Facilities Grant.

To write to the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Minister for Communities to ask what the current length of time is for MND sufferers to have home adaptations completed and to ask them to implement a scheme to fast track these vital and much needed home adaptions.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Cummings, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

16.5 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Chambers

Council acknowledges the vital role that our voluntary community groups play across the borough. Through our grants programmes these groups deliver initiatives such as community events, sporting activities, and festivals promoting tourism.

As we rely on these groups to continue this important work across the borough, we must ensure they are supported, and that the management of these grants is easy to navigate.

Advance payments are essential for small organisations who don't have large reserve sums of money in their bank accounts. Another complication for groups is being passed across various council departments during the delivery of their initiative.

In order to improve this process, Officers will bring back a report considering the implications of making the following changes:

- The advance payments available to groups is extended to 80%.

- If a group is successful in a funding application they will be allocated an officer within council who will act as the only point of contact between the group and Council.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

16.6 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum

That this Council notes with concern the increased cost of living and the impact this has upon families and individuals within the Borough; further notes that the absence of a clear Anti-Poverty Strategy makes it challenging to understand and strengthen our role in alleviating poverty and reducing inequality and therefore tasks Officers with bringing forward proposals to enhance the effectiveness of Council's contribution to poverty alleviation, including but not limited to, funding allocated to volunteer led community groups involved in poverty alleviation work. This work should complement, and not duplicate, any borough-wide Anti-Poverty action planning being undertaken by external partners.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McBurney, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Corporate Services Committee.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

RECESS

The meeting went into recess at 8.59 pm and resumed at 9.14 pm.

7.3 Minutes of the Place and Prosperity Committee dated 4 December 2025 (continued)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Item 16 - Kircubbin Harbour Update

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6

EXEMPTION - 3: RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON

This report details the current condition and anticipated repair costs of a privately owned asset in addition to the details of previous negotiations with the landowner and therefore the report must be In Confidence.

17. ACQUISITION OF LAND FOR GREENWAY - COMBER TO FLOODGATES

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6

EXEMPTION 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL OR PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE

Council was asked to consider a request to acquire land for the Greenway from Comber to Floodgates.

The recommendation was that Council acceded to the request.

18. DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE 8 JANUARY 2026 – VARIANCE REQUEST (RDP236)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6

EXEMPTION: 4. EXEMPTION: CONSULTATIONS OR NEGOTIATIONS

This report details ongoing negotiations with the Education Authority and the rationale for potentially having to submit a variance request to DfC should the negotiations fail to resolve the current impasse.

19. PROPOSED NEW LISTING WITHIN ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL AREA

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6

EXEMPTION REASON: 6A. EXEMPTION: STATUTORY PROVISION

This report is presented in confidence to Members under Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014, Exemption 6a – Information which reveals that the council proposes to give under any statutory provision a notice by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

C 2025.12.17 PM

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AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.34pm.

ITEM 7.1

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Audit Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, on Monday, 12 December 2025 at 7.35pm.

PRESENT: -

In the Chair: Councillor Thompson

Alderman: Graham
McAlpine

Councillors: Harbinson (Zoom)
McKee (Zoom)
Morgan
Wray

In Attendance: NIAO – Anu Kane

Deloitte – Camille McDermott
Prachi Jain

Officers: Acting Chief Executive (M Steele), Acting Director of Corporate Services (C Jackson), Head of Finance (S Grieve), Democratic Services Officer (S McCrea)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor Hollywood.

NOTED.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting as well as Deloitte representatives Camile McDermott and Prachi Jain and Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) representative Anu Kane and independent member, Paul Cummings.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were declared. Members were reminded that they could declare an interest at any time throughout the meeting.

NOTED.

Reports for Noting

(a) Audit Committee Minutes from 22 September 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Copy of the above minutes.

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

(b) Follow-Up Actions

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Acting Director of Corporate Services providing an update of follows ups in relation to requests from previous meetings of the Committee.

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

5. EXTERNAL AUDIT

[Note, the following three items were proposed together]

(a) Final Report to those Charged with Governance

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Final Report to those Charged with Governance from the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

Anu Kane explained that a draft report had been presented at the previous Audit Committee meeting. The audit had now reached its conclusion, being finalised on 30 September 2025. The final report was very similar to that which Members had seen at the previous committee meeting with the exception of one additional finding relating to Right of Use assets. Management had accepted all the recommendations made.

Councillor Wray was pleased to see that digitisation of Title Deeds and Public Right of Way records was ongoing. He queried if there was any update in relation to VAT treatment on sports services. The Head of Finance explained that substantial refunds plus statutory interest had been received from HMRC and that only one last claim remained which he hoped would be concluded in the coming weeks.

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

(b) Annual Audit Letter

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Letter from the Northern Ireland Audit Office issued under Regulation 17 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Code of Audit Practice 2021.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

Anu Kane advised that the Annual Audit letter was a statutory requirement which summarised the 2024-25 year.

Alderman McAlpine was pleased to see a decrease in sickness absence and asked how the Council fared in comparison to other local authorities. Anu Kane advised that the Local Government Auditor's Report had been published on 11 December 2025 for the 2023-24 accounts. In that year there was an average of 17.1 days per staff members in local government - a higher number than that recorded for Ards and North Down Borough Council.

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

(c) Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2025/26

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Acting Director of Corporate Services stating that the Local Government Auditor's (LGA) audit and assessment work on the Council's performance improvement arrangements had been concluded. The Audit and Assessment 2025-26 Report to the Council and the Department for Communities under Section 95 of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014 was attached at **Appendix 1** for Members' information.

Summary of the Audit

The LGA had certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. They certified that an improvement audit and improvement assessment had been conducted. The LGA also stated that, as a result, they believed the Council has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties under Section 95 of the Local Government Act 2014, including its assessment of performance for 2024-25 and its 2025-26 improvement plan, and had acted in accordance with the guidance.

In their opinion, the Council had demonstrated a track record of ongoing improvement, and they believed that the Council was likely to comply with Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26.

During the audit and assessment, the LGA identified no issues requiring a formal statutory recommendation under the Act.

The LGA made one proposal for improvement as follows (to be considered when developing Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27):

Thematic area	Issue	Proposal for Improvement
Governance arrangements	In both 2023–24 and 2024–25, we highlighted the need for an internal audit review of Performance Improvement. Our review of the 2025–26 audit plan indicates that this area remains unscheduled. Given that the last internal audit of Performance Improvement was conducted in 2017–18, we consider the gap between reviews to be excessive.	While we recognise that Internal Audit completes individual service reviews, the Audit Committee should formally consider scheduling an internal audit of Performance Improvement, as a whole, as part of the 2026–27 audit plan. This would help ensure appropriate oversight and assurance in a key area of the Council's statutory responsibilities.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the above summary and attached report at Appendix 1.

Anu Kane advised that the report was required under statute and was content that assessments would be delivered as was set out in the 2025-26 plan. There were no statutory recommendations though there was one recommendation for improvement in relation to an internal audit.

Anu Kane thanked the Council Officers involved for their steadfast support during the process to ensure statutory deadlines we met on each of the three reports.

Alderman Graham noted the mention of cyber risks in the Letter from the Audit Office and queried if the Council's insurance would cover any claims in the event of a data leak. The Acting Chief Executive advised that he wasn't sure of all the detail around this but even if he had that information to hand, it would be deemed confidential. He confirmed that he would update members in due course.

On a final note, Anu Kane advised that Colette Kane was retiring as Local Government Auditor, with Brian O'Neill taking over her position. As a result, the NIAO Auditor at the Committee in future would be Tomas Wilkinson.

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

6. INTERNAL AUDIT

(a) Progress Report

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above report from Deloitte.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

The Chairman invited Camille McDermott, Deloitte, to present the report.

Camille McDermott presented a progress update on audit work against the annual Audit Plan, noting that four audit reports had been brought to the Committee and that the remainder of the audit programme was on track to be completed within the financial year, with no matters of concern to report.

Members were advised that Appendix 2 contained issue tracking for outstanding recommendations. This is a quarterly report on progress around the implementation of prior audit recommendations. At the time of the last Audit Committee in September, there were 36 recommendations open, with a further five added through the reports presented at that meeting. Since then, several recommendations had been closed, leaving a total of 31 open, all of which were overdue.

Camille McDermott highlighted that the report was split between recommendations that were 'in progress' and those that had not yet been started, with the latter detailed from page 18 onwards together with management updates. She had highlighted that one priority #1 recommendation remained overdue, with its target completion date updated to September of the following year (2026), while a number of priority #2 recommendations were scheduled for completion during the next calendar year, some of which were expected to be addressed by the end of 2025. She reiterated the importance of timely implementation of recommendations.

Councillor Morgan referred to one recommendation that had been in place from 2019 and others that were overdue from following years. With recommendations existing and not being acted upon for such long periods, she expressed a feeling of little confidence in the process and questioned prioritisation methods, noting that one Head of Service was quoted as stating they had too much other work to focus on. The Head of Finance advised that the priority #1 recommendation from 2019 was 'in process' with significant remedial work being done through the implementation of a new corporate file plan (Electronic Data Records Management System) for the Council. Other delays had been caused by the time taken to introduce a new finance system, which was due to be in place by April 2026. The completion of this significant piece of work would enable a number of recommendations to be closed. He understood and shared the concern at the evident delays detailed in the report and he and the Acting Director of Corporate Services would be focusing on ways to secure further progress in the new year. He highlighted that three years ago the Council had around 100 recommendations and though the current number was high, it was a significant improvement on previous figures.

Councillor Morgan asked for input from Deloitte on their views of the outstanding recommendation total. Camille McDermott advised Deloitte worked with many different clients and that whilst it was true that, in 2019 when their services were engaged by the Council, there had been many more recommendations and progress had been made, this Council would still sit at the higher end of unclosed recommendations. She noted that any action now or plan of action for dealing with the closing of recommendations was welcome and very important.

Paul Cummings shared Councillor Morgan's concerns, suggesting that recommendations should not await actioning for 4-5 years. Though he recognised

progress had been made, what was once an issue of volume now seemed to be an issue of time. This suggested either Council Officers could not be bothered to fix them or they didn't have sufficient resources to do so. He did not believe it was the former so could only assume it was the latter. He raised the potential for significant reputational damage should something untoward occur due to an outstanding recommendation that the Council were aware of but had been unable to act upon. Mr Cummings expressed concern that a Head of Service had been noted as not responding to audit queries – which was unacceptable.

Providing some context, the Acting Chief Executive explained that it was difficult to quantify the very significant amount of work required by some recommendations, compared to others when they were presented in a report as figures. In relation to the Priority 1, a crucial step in its resolution was the introduction of an EDRMS (corporate file plan). This, along with the new finance system, was the most significant project ongoing in the organisation requiring all staff and Members to change how they record and store data. The timescale for implementation of a project of this scale was at least 12-18 months. Many recommendations were not instant fixes and take considerable time to address. Taking time did not mean the management was not taking the recommendations seriously. In relation to the Priority 2 recommendation around Travel and Expenses, which had been delayed by a number of years, it should be noted that it had been assimilated into the list of other priority policies that the Council needed to develop. Management had assessed which policies needed to be progressed first in relation to the risk they posed and as a result Travel and Expenses moved lower on the list.

The Head of Finance added that he would bring back a further report to the next meeting, working with Internal Audit, to provide a more focused update on the priority recommendations. Following a query from Alderman McAlpine it was confirmed that this report would be developed with input from the relevant Heads of Service.

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

(b) Staff Performance Management Review

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above, final draft report from Deloitte.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

The Chairman invited Camille McDermott, Deloitte, to present the report.

Camille McDermott summarised the audit work undertaken on controls relating to staff performance management, including objective setting, appraisals, and reporting. She explained that three priority #2 findings had been raised, resulting in a limited level of assurance. The first finding concerned the completion of staff appraisals, where a sample of 25 staff revealed instances of non-compliance with policy requirements, inconsistencies in the use of forms, and variations in approvals. It was emphasised that the correct forms should be used and that appraisals and mid-year reviews should be completed in a timely manner.

The second finding related to the monitoring and reporting of the appraisal process. In one example, two services reported 0% completion to the relevant committees, although data indicated closer to 50%, meaning the reported figures appeared worse than in reality. She highlighted that there was no consistent reporting of appraisal completion across directorates. She noted that introducing automated or digital forms for all staff, rather than manual alternatives, could help reduce manual calculations and improve accuracy, with KPIs suggested as part of the reporting process.

The final finding concerned policy inconsistencies. Staff in some services used a Jotform for appraisals but this process was undocumented, leading to minor discrepancies between policy and guidance documents. Camille McDermott confirmed that all recommendations had been accepted by management.

Councillor Morgan proposed, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the report be noted.

Councillor Morgan felt this was a significant risk to the Council – workforce issues being the second highest risk to organisations as outlined in the Audit Committee training. She felt that carrying out an effective appraisal should be a core competency of managers. The Acting Director of Corporate Services advised that the Head of Strategic Change had working closely with auditors on this report and welcomed the focus on the area, which management had identified was an area of potential weakness. The team were taking the recommendations very seriously and already working on remedial actions. As outlined in the report actions to address a significant number of the recommendations would be completed by April 2026.

Alderman McAlpine was curious as to whether an employee satisfaction survey had been completed. The Acting Director of Corporate Services explained that no survey had been carried out in relation to appraisals, but that the Council was currently undergoing accreditation for Investors In People (IIP) which offered all staff the opportunity to take part in a survey that addressed a wide range of employee related matter. The results of this survey would be provided to the Council in January 2026 and would be used to inform the Organisational Development Action Plan/ People Plan. Alderman McAlpine noted that inconsistencies in approach around appraisals/ development plans would likely result in negativity in the IIP survey results.

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

(c) Community Plan Implementation Review

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above, final draft report from Deloitte.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

The Chairman invited Camille McDermott, Deloitte to present the report. Camille McDermott explained to Members that the internal audit of controls on monitoring and reporting of the community plan and its implementation, undertaken in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, had raised two priority #2 findings

and provided a satisfactory level of assurance. The first finding related to the definition of measures of success, noting that while nine of the thirteen workstreams had been established to deliver the plan, there were no formally defined action plans or measures of success in place to ensure outcomes were achieved. The second finding concerned the terms of reference for workstreams, with three of the thirteen lacking formal documentation, which made it difficult to assess from meetings how objectives were being delivered. This created a risk that partnerships and groups could drift away from core objectives. All recommendations were accepted by management, and Members were asked to note that management had advised the actions relating to the second priority #2 finding had already been addressed.

Councillor Wray proposed, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the report be noted.

Councillor Wray noted that it was concerning that some workstreams had no action plans. He commented that a community grant would not be given out if the requesting organisation could not provide evidence of how it would achieve and measure success. The Council was a grant funding authority and yet was not following similar guidelines. He believed this could easily and quickly be addressed through a workshop for staff and that the November 2026 implementation date seemed long. The Acting Director of Corporate Services advised that she would get further information from the Community Planning Manager on the implementation plan but that it should be noted that these workstreams involve multiple external partners which often meant it took longer to progress and agree new approaches than when the Council was acting alone.

Councillor Morgan referenced the Big Plan, its creation in 2016 and the 9 out of 13 workstream issues mentioned in the report. She referred to the plan as, “*wishy washy*” and questioned whether it would happen at all. Camille McDermott explained that progress against the community plan was not directly evaluated in this audit. While the absence of action plans did not mean no activity was taking place, clear measures of success were needed to demonstrate impact. Given the plan’s fifteen-year, outcome-based approach, concern was raised that without defined pathways to achieve outcomes, significant work could be undertaken over time without delivering the core goals.

Councillor Morgan observed that the Council often found itself in a position of having to do the heavy lifting to achieve progress. Concerns were raised that without strong commitment from partners, success was unlikely. Councillor Morgan stressed the need to avoid wasting time and to remain practical about what could realistically be achieved especially since the plan’s introduction was back in 2016. The Acting Director of Corporate Services advised that there was no doubt that considerable success has been achieved on some key elements of the Community Plan – as had been highlighted at a milestone event held for partners earlier in the year. She undertook to collate some further information from the Community Planning Manager in this regard.

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

(d) Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) Review

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above, final draft report from Deloitte.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

The Chairman invited Camille McDermott, Deloitte to present the report.

Camille McDermot explained that the annual review of the PCSP, required by funders, focused on processes for grant giving, tendering, and direct delivery contracts. The review, which was conducted each year, resulted in one priority #2 finding and provided a satisfactory level of assurance. The finding related to documentation, specifically the retention of Conflict-of-Interest forms and records of tendering completed in 2022, which were not on file. It was also noted that tenders completed in 2022 had been extended for three months during the financial year to ensure continuity of services while new contracts were put in place. A similar extension had occurred in 2019, which had been approved by Council, but the PCSP had not received reports of the associated increased costs. The recommendation was that such costs should be reported and that Conflict of Interest forms should be consistently retained during tendering.

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

(e) Use of Agency Workers Policies and Processes Review

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above, final draft report from Deloitte.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

The Chairman invited Camille McDermott, Deloitte to present the report.

Camille McDermott reported on the audit of agency workers and confirmed that two priority #2 and three priority #3 findings had been raised, resulting in a limited level of assurance. The first priority #2 finding related to recruitment, where in a sample of 22 agency staff, the agency worker policy had not been consistently followed, with issues such as missing purchase orders, lack of evidence of approval, and one case where documentation could not be obtained. It was recommended that all staff adhere to the policy and retain documentation accordingly.

The second priority #2 finding concerned agency staff costs, noting that while Council engaged three to four agencies and received updates such as hourly rates, this information was not collated or reported to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). It was recommended that such reporting be introduced to provide oversight of agency use and associated costs.

The priority #3 findings included the process for checking workers' right to work, where agencies provided confirmation, but Council's own sample checks were not documented, and it was recommended that this be recorded for assurance. Another finding related to declarations of interest, with the existing policy not explicitly

covering agency use. An example was proffered of managers employing agency workers who could be relations and as such, it was recommended that the policy be updated. The final finding concerned monitoring staff end dates, where temporary staff could remain in post without clear review. It was recommended that a process be introduced to document and monitor this, with the new electronic purchase order system highlighted as a useful control. Camille McDermott confirmed that all recommendations had been accepted by management.

Councillor McKee asked if this audit review had been undertaken due to a previous in-confidence discussion related to whistleblowing. The Acting Chief Executive advised that this review had been identified in the four-year audit plan but was brought forward for the reason Councillor McKee had mentioned. Councillor McKee believed it was fortunate that the issue had been raised by a former staff member and that the subsequent review would help ensure accountability.

Alderman McAlpine believed that if the overall strategy for recruitment, succession planning and general staff matters (Workforce Plan) was progressed it would greatly help with this issue and reduce risk to the Council.

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

7. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

(a) Summary of Statements of Assurance – 1 April-30 September 2025

(File ref: SOA1)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Acting Director of Corporate Services stating that, in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Strategy, Heads of Service were required to provide Statements of Assurance. Assurance Statements comprised four main sections to be completed by each Head of Service following consultation with each of their Service Units. The period of this report was 1 April - 30 September 2025.

As a result of the Council's corporate restructure (Phase 1), some service areas had been amalgamated or moved into different a directorate since 30 September 2025. As such, the assurance statements for this period were the last that would be completed relating to the previous corporate structure.

Findings

General – Identification of Risk, Monitoring and Control Measures

No key issues had been declared as not having appropriate internal controls in place. All Services had confirmed that any risks identified had appropriate internal controls and/ or appropriate further actions to adequately mitigate or resolve the risk.

The Corporate Risk Register was reviewed by the Heads of Service Team and Corporate Leadership Team, assigning owners for each of the risks listed.

Section 1 – Strategic and Operational Risk Management

Services reported appropriate controls were currently in place and/or that they had identified satisfactory actions to review, monitor, control, mitigate and resolve issues, where appropriate.

The Parks and Cemeteries Service had reported some issues around Legionella control at a corporate and service level. Training had been organised for staff to address this on the service level and discussions were ongoing at a corporate level.

Regeneration had reported that a recently established forum of 11 Councils and the Department for Communities (DfC) had proven useful for Officers to discuss key elements including risk, project design and delivery via partnerships. They had also reported the successful establishment of the Small Settlements Programme and the Urban Regeneration Programme 2024-2026 with DfC.

The Planning Service had reported that a risk to the ability of the Independent Examiner of the Planning Appeals Commission to run hearings for plans had been identified and raised with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). Separately the Service had been advised by DfI of an Executive agreement to ringfence £3m up to the end of the 2028-29 financial year for the appointment of Independent Inspectors.

The Economic Development Service had reported that they were awaiting a letter of offer in relation to the Local Economic Partnership from the Department for the Economy which would be issued once they had reviewed the Terms of Reference. Until it was received, the Council was working at risk under the basis of a memorandum of understanding.

The Community Planning Service was reviewing risk assessments, service plans and its risk register to reflect new responsibilities for Climate Change from 1 July 2025.

The Administration Service had reported that the filing rationalisation project was almost complete. The Record of Processing Activities that was found to be required in the Data Protection Audit had a target date for completion of 30/09/2026. A valuer had been appointed for obtaining reinstatement valuations.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Service had reported that a Talent Continuity Policy was adopted from 1 May 2025 to assist staff with their development and help future proof the Council's workforce.

Section 2 – Internal Control

Generally, there were no key issues arising to cause significant concern or requiring immediate action.

The Communications and Marketing service had launched a programme of internal communications to ensure staff awareness of key issues including the new Corporate File Plan and Financial Management System.

Leisure Services had identified that work was needed to better ensure staff training records were up to standard. They had also reported that staffing levels remained a 'live issue' with an over-reliance on casual and seasonal staff and challenges to maintain minimum levels of staffing.

The Finance Service had successfully implemented the new purchase order monitoring system and has recorded it as a new control measure.

The Regeneration Service had reported 2025/26 as its first year with a dedicated capital budget. A Post Project Evaluation exercise was planned for early 2026/27 to establish if controls were sufficient and if any lessons can be learned.

Economic Development had reported an issue with outstanding debtors. This was being followed up on with the Finance service.

Community Planning had reported the establishment of a Strategic Net Zero board that would assist the Council in meeting its targets and obligations in this area.

The Administration Service had reported the development of a Policy Register, through which the most up-to-date version of all policies could be found and all policies could easily be tracked to ensure reviews took place at the appropriate time. The Service had also reported on audit findings, the most significant of which was the ROPA (Record of Processing Activities) referenced in above. Other actions related to budget reports being a standing item at monthly team meetings and ensuring comprehensive commentary for all significant variances each month.

The Facebook page relating to the market in Bangor which was outside of Council control had been closed.

Section 3 – Governance

The Finance Service had tightened the process for new suppliers. The Team had continued to report on the implications of the interaction of holiday and overtime pay, aiming to complete payment of outstanding entitlements to affected staff by the end of the year.

The Environmental Health, Protection and Development Service had reported that an appeal had been lodged against the Council for failing to revoke caravan site licence conditions for campervans using Council car parks for overnight stays. The review of measures to prevent overnight stays or provision of a compliant facility were ongoing. Separately, the service had also reported two potential data breaches – both have been reported to the Data Protection Officer. Due to the circumstances of one breach, there had been a change in the way Elected Member requests were recorded on Council systems.

The Planning Service were meeting with the Council's legal services providers to seek recommendations on future enforcement action. In addition, the Planning Committee agreed in March 2025 to proceed with a court injunction, the Service was awaiting next steps from their legal advisers.

The Economic Development Service had undertaken a procurement exercise to appoint an operator for Bangor Harbour and Marina and was performing due diligence on the proposed appointment. It had received a request from DfC to pay the final Stage 4 payment for the Academy for People with Disabilities on completion rather than on receipt of the final report (6 months after close). This was processed with a claw back clause that the amount would be retrieved if the programme was not concluded in a satisfactory manner.

Regulatory services continued to seek training in dog handling in response to new demands upon them by the XL Bully regulations.

Deviations from procurement

- Direct award of data migration services in connection with moving to the current financial management system (Finance).
- MOU re refugee funding (Community and Culture)
- Single supplier direct award - beacons for cultural expressions festivals (Community and Culture)
- Single supplier direct award - 'For everyone' initiative (Parks and Cemeteries)
- Extension of contract – web hosting (Communications and Marketing)
- Celebrity Chef Anna Haugh, Comber Earlies and Tide and Turf (Tourism)
- Park and Ride, Translink, Armed Forces Day (Tourism)
- Red Arrows, Armed Forces Day (Tourism)
- Atlas Communications, WiFi for Armed Forces Day (Tourism)
- Extension of the insurance brokerage contract for one year to allow for regional review by SOLACE (Administration)
- Venue hire (Community Planning)

Section 4 – Miscellaneous

The Finance Service had reported that a failure to implement a corporate information management strategy and system was inhibiting service efficiencies and hybrid working.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Councillor Wray proposed, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that report be noted.

Councillor Wray, in reference to the report's mentioning of dog handling training, recalled how the issue had been discussed on previous occasions and through a Notice of Motion and was curious what the barrier to that training was. The Head of Finance advised that XL Bully training was in the budget recommendations for 2026-27 and that a trainer had been identified. This would be progressed in the next financial year, subject to Committee approval of the estimates.

Councillor Morgan felt that there should be mention in Section 3 of the report of outstanding actions from internal audit and whether delivery was delayed due to a lack of available resources. The Head of Finance advised that he would take her suggestion under consideration for the next Audit Committee.

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

Reports for Approval

8. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that there were no items of notified business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/ PRESS

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

Reports for Noting

9. FORMER ARDS LEISURE CENTRE SITE, WILLIAM STREET, NEWTOWNARDS - VESTING – UPDATE

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

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

Council was given an update delayed payment of compensation by the Department for Infrastructure in respect of the lands vested at the old Ards Leisure Centre site. The recommendation was to note the report.

10. SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS UPDATE REPORT FOR QUARTER 3 2025-26
(File ref: 231329)

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

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

Council was asked to note the fact that there have been no Single Tender Actions brought to the attention of the Procurement Service Unit since the last report.

11. FRAUD, WHISTLEBLOWING AND DATA PROTECTION MATTERS

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6:3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDNG THAT INFORMATION)

Members were advised of any new incidences of fraud, whistleblowing and data protection.

12. MEETING WITH NI AUDIT OFFICE AND INTERNAL AUDIT OFFICE IN THE ABSENCE OF MANAGEMENT

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6:3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDNG THAT INFORMATION)

A meeting was held in the absence of management.

The Acting Chief Executive, Acting Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance, Democratic Services Officer and Multi-media Technician withdrew from the meeting during the discussion of the item at 20:25 and returned to the Chamber at 20:30

NOTED.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor Morgan that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 20:31.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting of the Environment Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, and via Zoom, on Wednesday 7 January 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Kendall

Aldermen: Adair Cummings
Armstrong-Cotter McAlpine

Councillors: Ashe (Zoom) Douglas
Boyle Edmund
Blaney Harbinson
Brady Newman
Cathcart Wray

Officers in Attendance: Director of Environmental Services (G Bannister), Head of Parks and Cemeteries (S Daye), Head of Waste and Cleansing (K Patterson), and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau).

1. APOLOGIES

The Chair sought apologies and those were noted from Councillor Irwin.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest and none were noted.

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION – STRANGFORD LOUGH AND LECALE PARTNERSHIP

The Chair invited Darren Rice, AONB and Geopark Manager, Newry Mourne and Down District Council, and Mathieu Lundy, Head of Marine Recovery, Ulster Wildlife, to make a Deputation to the Environment Committee.

The Committee was informed of the work of the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership and how it co-operated with a wide range of other statutory bodies besides the Council. It was highlighted that for every £1 invested by Ards and North Down Borough Council in the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership, there had been a £6 return in environmental and community benefits. That compared extremely favourably when compared with the neighbouring Newry Mourne and

Down District Council area and Members were made aware that the Council's relatively small investment had enabled access to a multi-disciplinary team.

It was explained that an aspirational project for the area was being developed and would be submitted to the National Lottery Fund. The proposed ten-year project would include interventions to protect, enhance and restore the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and would extend to both sides of the Peninsula. The local population would be encouraged to participate in those interventions and community clusters would be formed empowering local residents to seek funding and have a say in how their area was shaped for the future.

Members were invited to ask questions. Councillor Boyle had appreciated the presentation and thought it timely since the Council was not always sure of the value for money the Partnership had been providing. The return had been excellent with £6 delivered for every £1 invested and he asked how confident the Partnership was of achieving the desired additional funding from the National Lottery Fund. The Committee was informed that the proposal was a very strong application and there was confidence that the funding would be provided with the outcome of the process being clear by the Spring. The Councillor wished the Partnership every success for the application and looked forward to a positive decision.

Alderman Cummings had enjoyed hearing of the work of the Partnership and referred to community clusters and how they would be promoted within the Borough. It was explained that while the clusters had not yet been formed that would be done at the development phase of the project through engagement within the community. Councillor Wray praised the Partnership as being good value for money and also liked the idea of work being done within community clusters. It was explained that there would be a cluster manager who would assist and provide grants so that people would be involved in making decisions that affected their land.

Alderman Adair had been encouraged by the Deputation because up to that point there had been some concern and disengagement by his constituents mixed with a feeling that Newry Mourne and Down was receiving unequal investment in its geographical area. He referred to the work that had been undertaken recently at the sand dunes in Portavogie and he felt those had been neglected at the expense of those at Tyrella. It was explained that Portavogie was outside the boundary area of the Partnership but was now being included as part of the work.

The Chair, Councillor Kendall, explained that she had a longstanding interest in hedgerow restoration and wondered how that project, as an example, could be promoted. It was explained that hedgerow restoration was very specific to this area and different areas of Northern Ireland had different priorities. The clusters would provide opportunities for people who were outside the traditional agricultural environment.

The Chair advised that the time limit had been reached and Members were asked to raise further questions by email to the Director who would pass those on to the Partnership.

NOTED.

4. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL WASTE WORKING GROUP UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that since June 2020, the Department of Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs (DAERA) had engaged with stakeholders, including through public consultations, on policies, guidance and resources to support increases in the quality and quantity of recycling in Northern Ireland.

As part of the Council's drive for continuous improvement and, in anticipation of changes to policy and regulation in this area, Ards and North Down Borough Council established a cross-party task and finish Member working group to explore collection options. The group last met in November 2024 to consider the outcomes of a review of the kerbside collections service model.

It was intended to reconvene the group in March 2026 to revisit the previous work and to update Members on the status of Northern Ireland waste and recycling policy.

Policy development, consultation and engagement

The Waste (Circular Economy) Amendment Regulations (NI) 2020 committed Northern Ireland to recycling 65% of municipal waste by 2035. In addition, the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 set a waste sector recycling target of 70% by 2030. Meeting those targets would require significant improvements in both household and non-household recycling performance.

Current waste policy was largely limited to tonnage-based targets for recycling of household waste. There was limited additional policy or regulation to guide councils in the design of waste and recycling services, and few requirements placed on non-household organisations.

Northern Ireland's household recycling rate had plateaued at just above 50% since 2019/20. To catalyse a stepped change in recycling, DAERA had issued two public consultations to gauge feedback on proposals for guidance, support, policies, and regulations. DAERA had additionally engaged with Northern Ireland's councils to discuss proposals on how there might be greater consistency in the way waste and recycling services were delivered. The Departmental response to its most recent 'Rethinking our Resources' consultation was currently with the Northern Ireland Executive for consideration.

With support from officers and the DAERA-funded Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), Ards and North Down Borough Council's members' cross-party 'Kerbside Working Group' had been considering how the performance of its kerbside services might be improved. The group had considered a wide range of factors which were proven to influence recycling. Those included the range of materials targeted at the kerbside, containers, frequency of collection, waste policies, and communications and engagement.

Cross-Party Waste Working Group

It was proposed to reconvene the members' cross-party working group at 6pm on Tuesday 24 March 2026. In response to the anticipated scope of waste and

recycling policy change, it was recommended that the scope of work be extended beyond the consideration of kerbside collection services. It was proposed that the group be renamed the 'Waste Working Group'.

It was further proposed that the reconvened Waste Working Group remit be extended to include:

- Kerbside waste and recycling service model
- Core materials, consistent with future Common Collections Guidance
- Additional targeted materials, for example, plastic bags and wrapping, plastic tubes
- Household policies, communications and engagement
- Household Recycling Centre estate, services, and performance
- Non-household recycling policies and service delivery

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees the change of scope and related name change for the Working Group.

Proposed by Councillor Harbinson, seconded by Councillor Cathcart, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Harbinson welcomed the progress made so far and felt that intensifying efforts, along with revising the project's scope and name, was a sensible approach. As seconder, Councillor Cathcart expressed his disappointment that DAERA had still not provided a response, noting that its input was essential for moving ahead. He hoped that a response would arrive soon and agreed that the broader scope to the Councils working group remit was beneficial.

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

5. NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL AUTHORITY COLLECTED MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STATISTICS REPORT 2024-2025
(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) had published a report on the finalised and validated information on local authority collected municipal waste managed during the 2024/25 financial year. That report combined provisional information previously published in four quarterly reports for the year.

Municipal Waste

Municipal waste was all waste and recycling collected under arrangements made by the Council. That included all household waste and similar waste collected by the Council from non-household businesses and organisations.

In 2024-25, the Council collected 83,605 tonnes of municipal waste. Of that, 47,214 tonnes (56.5%) was prepared for reuse and sent for composting or recycling. An

additional 12,276 tonnes (14.7%) was sent for energy recovery, and 23,915 tonnes (28%) was sent to landfill.

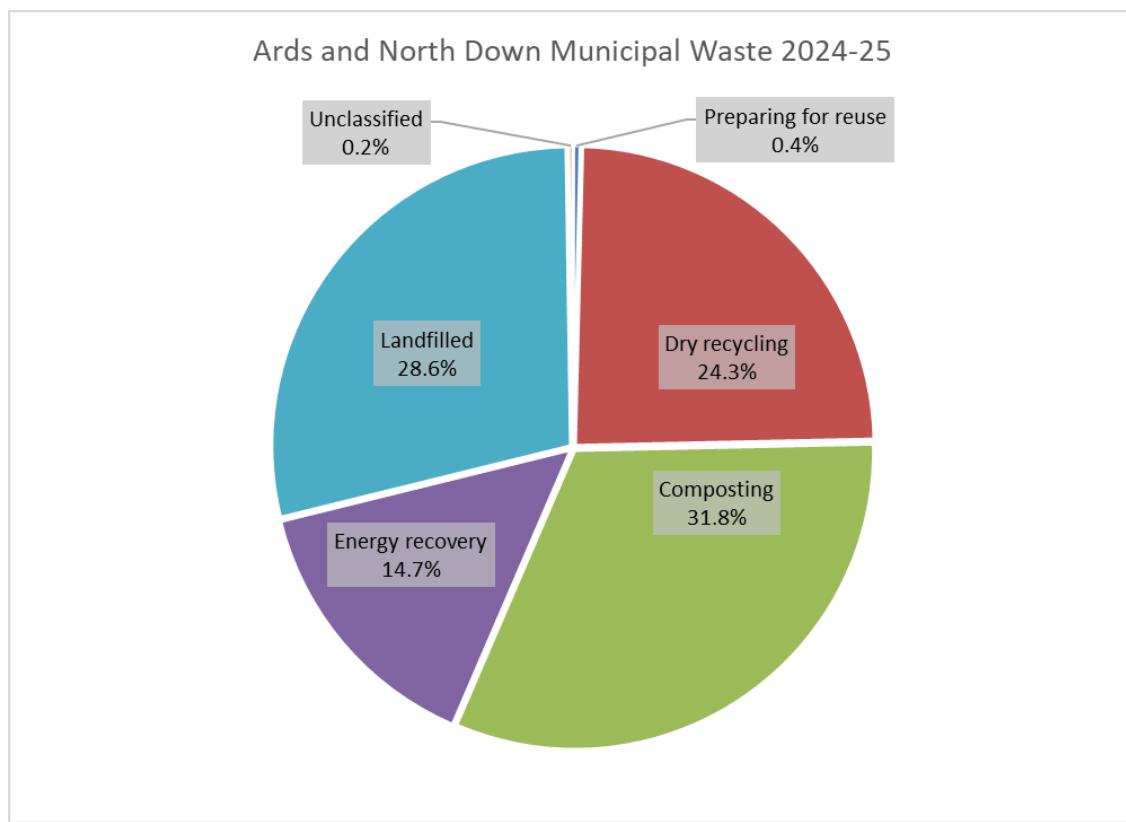


Figure 1, Ards and North Down Municipal Waste, 2024-25

Household Waste Arisings

Household waste included materials collected from households through kerbside collections, HRCs and bring sites. It did not include soil, rubble, or plasterboard.

Northern Ireland households produced 877,988 tonnes of waste during 2024/25, an average of 1.1 tonnes per household. Over the same period, households in Ards and North Down produced 78,230 tonnes of waste, an average of 1.09 tonnes per household, and similar to the Northern Ireland average.

	Household waste (tonnes)	Household waste per household (tonnes)	Household waste per capita (kg)
Northern Ireland	877,988	1.11	455
AND BC	78,230	1.09	473

Table 1, Household waste arisings

Recycling Performance

KPI(a2) Household waste preparing for reuse, dry recycling and composting rate (%)

During 2024/25, households in Northern Ireland separated 447,965 tonnes of household waste for recycling through kerbside, HRC and bring site recycling. The Northern Ireland household recycling rate was 51% for the period.

Householders in Ards and North Down produced 78,230 tonnes of household waste, and separated 43,871 tonnes of household waste for reuse, dry recycling, and composting through the Council's services. That included kerbside collections, HRC and bring site recycling. The household waste recycling rate was 56.1% for the period – more than 6% above the Northern Ireland average for the year. Ards and North Down was the third highest performing council for this KPI at that time.

Household preparing for reuse	Household dry recycling	Household composting	Total household waste recycled KPI(a2)	Household landfill rate KPI(b)
324 tonnes	17,292 tonnes	26,256 tonnes	43,871 tonnes	22,672 tonnes
0.4%	22.1%	33.6%	56.1%	29%

Table 2, Household waste sent for recycling, composting and landfill, 2024-25

Since the formation of the Council in 2015, the household recycling rate had increased from 40.2% to 56.1% in 2024-25.

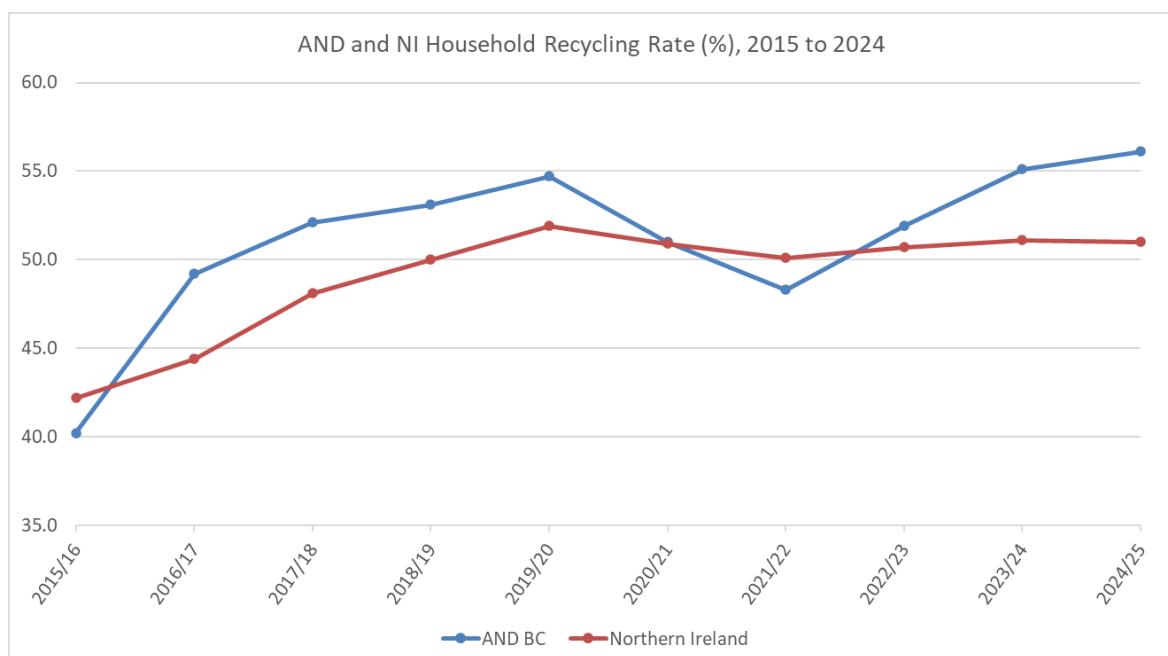


Figure 2, AND BC and NI Household Recycling Rate (%), 2015-16 to 2024-25

Waste from households recycling rate (%)

The report also published a 'Waste from households' recycling rate for each Council and for Northern Ireland. That recycling rate was calculated consistently across all UK nations to provide a comparable indicator of performance.

In 2024/25, Ards and North Down achieved 55.9% recycling compared to a Northern Ireland average of 50%. Ards and North Down was the second highest performing council in Northern Ireland for that performance measure.

Energy Recovery and Landfill

During 2024/25, Ards and North Down was still sending some residual waste to landfill. In 2024/25, the Council sent 22,672 tonnes of household residual waste to

landfill. Since January 2025, the Council had been sending residual waste for additional treatment where some recyclable materials were recovered, before the remainder was sent for energy recovery.

References

Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics 2024-25 published on 11 December 2025 (attached) / [Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics 2024-25 | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#).

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Councillor Cathcart proposed that the Council notes the report and brings back a further report on the costs associated with the Council's energy recovery of waste. That was seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter.

Councillor Cathcart welcomed the wider report and the progress outlined. He noted quite a considerable change of policy for the Council since January 2025 and did not remember it having been discussed at the Committee prior to that. However, in theory it was good and he welcomed the reduced tonnage to landfill. He asked for a cost benefit analysis to the Council stating that landfill costs had gone up considerably and he welcomed the figures being scrutinised.

As seconder Alderman Armstrong-Cotter reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Brady asked if the report coming back would also consider referring to the pollution produced with the energy recovery. It was indicated that this could be included for information.

Councillor Blaney liked viewing information on charts and particularly of how this Council area compared against other Councils in Northern Ireland in terms of its recycling rate and how other areas were dealing with waste.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter asked officers for further clarification on the information, it was clear that there were benefits in the new way of working so she hoped for a deeper report showing how that had come about and how effective it had been so far. Previously the Environment Committee had been provided with quarterly reports on progress and she hoped that would continue. The Head of Waste and Cleansing confirmed that it was an additional report before Members and all other reports would continue.

Alderman Adair thought that it was a good time to put on record the Committee's thanks to the Council's waste operators who had been out collecting bins at all times over the Christmas season and in the icy conditions. It was pleasing to note that not a single bin collection had been missed. The Chair was in agreement that the work had been stellar.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the report be noted and the Council

brings back a report on the costs associated with the Council's energy recovery of waste.

6. HALF YEARLY 1 – SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORTS

6.1 ESTATES SERVICES

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

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

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

Reporting Approach

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

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

The report for April to September 2025 was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to three outcomes as follows.

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Numerous Energy Saving Initiatives Complete (see quarterly update report for further info)

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Planned Maintenance of public areas completed at Portavogie Promenade, Kircubbin Promenade, Comber Square, and Holywood Seapark
- Hibernia St and Holborn Avenue car park refurbishments complete.

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy.

Key achievements:

Play area replacements completed at:

- Ward Park
- Sea Park
- Londonderry Park

Emerging issues:

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

- The works to implement the “Roadmap to Green Fleet” were progressing albeit more slowly than was originally hoped. Several new charge points installed at the depot and officers were currently investigating Lease/Purchase options for small vans. Update report tabled before the end of the financial year.
- Maintenance budgets were under pressure, as reported last month.
- The staff transformation was almost complete, with only one remaining change to implement.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

Councillor Wray thanked officers for the report and the outcomes that had been highlighted asking if there was a timeframe related to the emerging issue with implementation of the green fleet strategy. In response the Director replied that a further report would be brought back to the Committee in March and the Member looked forward to receiving that.

Councillor Blaney liked the coloured traffic light system and referred to the overspend of 8% and hoped further information could be provided on that.

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

6.2 PARKS AND CEMETERIES SERVICES

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
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- Service Plan – developed annually (approved annually in March)

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

Reporting Approach

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

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

The H1 report for Parks and Cemeteries was below.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

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

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

List Key Achievements for Outcome 1 in Period April to September 2025:

- Ards and North Down in Bloom Community Competitions took place over the summer with categories for local people, groups and businesses. A Community Awards event would be delivered on 23 October 2025.
- In Bloom funding released with 19 successful applicants receiving over £22,000 to make their communities' greenspaces more attractive.
- A new Dementia Friendly Sensory Garden and Play Park opened in Ward Park achieved through securing of £246,000 of external funding. Design for the Garden agreed through collaboration with Dementia NI, Alzheimer's Society, Making Connections, and SE-HSCT Dementia Friendly Partnership.
- New play park delivered at Seapark with £250,000 external funding.
- Children consultation events for Moss Road Ballygowan (older children provision), Northfield – Donaghadee, Islandview – Greyabbey and Groomsport Seafront (plays parks) involved 180 children across 3 schools.
- Construction had started on the new play park at Groomsport Seafront.

- Construction had started on the delivery of a Multi-Use Games Area at Moss Road, Ballygowan.
- Our Service worked with Community Planning Sustainable Tourism group – continue to be on this group.
- Ongoing engagement with the Friends of Bryansburn Allotments. A series of autumn and winter events was planned.
- Multiple 'Friends of' events and activities undertaken assisting in the recruitment of new volunteers and strengthening local engagement, and support.
- Play Strategy review underway with children at summer schemes and schools engaged and consulted.
- Construction was underway on the delivery of a Greenway between Newtownards and Bangor with completion in early 2026.
- Multiple play events held across the Borough, including a celebration of International Play Day in August. Reported to Environment in November 2025.
- Multiple walking and cycling events held across the Borough, including events to celebrate National Walking Week and National Cycling Week.
- Monthly Park Pedal events had been established in multiple venues in the Borough. Reported to Environment in November 2025.

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

List Key Achievements for Outcome 2 in Period April to September 2025:

- Vigorous removal of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed.
- Successful tender completion for new, more efficient machinery that emphasised modern technology with environmental efficiencies achieved.
- Derek McClure, volunteer in The Walled Garden, shortlisted for National Volunteer of the Year Award. Results confirmed on 20 November 2025.
- Community Tree Nursery applications advertised with Orchardville awarded.
- Working with a Queens University Student through the summer to develop the Growing Strategy – define a baseline, identify new land for growing, skills sharing event.
- Agreement reached with DFI on installation of Urban Street trees when project timescales allowed. First trees were going into Frances Street in November when Tree Planting season began again.

Outcome 3: A thriving and sustainable economy

List Key Achievements for Outcome 3 in Period April to September 2025:

- Over 91 events held to increase skills and knowledge for local people.
- Successful events at Bangor Castle Walled Garden including Chilli Festival (5,000 people attending) and Awake the Garden (3,000 attending).
- Northern Ireland Green Flag Awards were held in Bangor Walled Garden with 150 people attending.
- Open House continued to use the Walled Garden to host its annual Open House Festival and at Ward Park for the Picnics in the Park.
- Renewal of Hot Drink and Ice Cream Vendor Contracts.

- Appointment of Borough's first Mobile Sauna Provision Contract.

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

List Key Achievements for Outcome 4 in Period April to September 2025:

- Floodgates Park progressing towards planning application.
- Greenway (Newtownards to Green Road) Project underway with pedestrian bridge now in place.
- Whitespots Country Park – team working through RIBA Stage 2 with further environmental surveys being prioritised to inform the concept design.
- Continue to work on the Castle Park redevelopment – draft plan was complete
- A Bioblitz at North Down Coastal Path was undertaken in June.

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

List Key Achievements for Outcome 5 in Period April to September 2025:

- Forestry School events undertaken between April and June with many young people.
- Events and volunteering activities with Orchardville had led to the establishment of a community tree nursery, developed in partnership with Orchardville to support environmental education, skills development, and local biodiversity enhancement.
- Shared Education programme with St Columbas Portaferry and Strangford College, Carrowdore, including school sessions and a Citizen Science event at Cloughhey Beach with 80 children attending.
- Love Parks Empowering Women events to encourage participation of women and girls in activities within our own parks and outdoor spaces.
- Love Parks events focused on families at Linear park, Kiltonga, pop up plays, biodiversity walks. 18 events across 10 days attracting a total of 400 people.
- Opportunities to learn through workshops on navigation, biodiversity, tree and plant identification, dawn chorus, bird watching, swift and bat walks and cooking with seaweed attracted 100 people across a series of events and workshops.
- Summer of Play series saw pop up play in some of our play parks and open spaces. That attracted over 700 visitors across 8 events, specific events held at Bangor Sportsplex with Inclusive Bikes.
- Supported visits with STRIDES a Young Adult Support Group.

Outcome 6: Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

List Key Achievements for Outcome 6 in Period April to September 2025

- Play Park improvements planned for Island View, Greyabbey, Northfield, Donaghadee and Shorefront, Groomsport.
- New Multi Use Games area delivery was underway at Moss Road, Ballygowan.
- Mindfulness in the Walled Garden – 8 sessions June and July.
- Events held in May for International Dawn Chorus Day.

- In June eight mindfulness sessions in Bangor Castle Walled Garden allowed for 160 people to enjoy some relaxation in the peaceful surroundings of the Walled Garden.
- Ongoing opportunities for group walking – celebrated Walking Week, Tree tours, History and Heritage Walks and Our Siren Song celebrating art and walking together.
- Various cycling (Park Pedal), BMX, skateboard and scooter (Teens on Wheels) sessions to target families, increase cycling skills and awareness and engage with more teenagers and young people had nearly 100 attending.
- A variety of activities and events in Bike Week (June) had almost 200 in attendance.
- Mobile Easter trail at six locations aimed at getting young children and families engaged at some of our smaller locations – attracting nearly 1500 visitors.

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

List Key Achievements for Outcome 7 in Period April to September 2025:

- Green Flag Awards were retained for Castle Park, Londonderry Park, Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Linear Park and Ballymenoch Park, Clandeboye Cemetery and Cairn Wood.
- Success at the NI Amenity Council 'Best Kept Awards' with the Borough receiving awards for: Groomsport (Best Kept Large Village) and Donaghadee (Best Kept Small Town); plus Runner-Up awards for Bangor (City Category), Holywood (Medium Town) and Finalist for Newtownards in Large Town Category.
- At the Ulster in Bloom Awards Donaghadee was awarded first place in the Town Category and Crawfordsburn achieved a second place in the Village Category.
- At the (RHS) Britain in Bloom Awards Donaghadee was awarded a 'Gold Award' in the Town Category.
- National Green Flag Awards – Best of the Best Volunteer of the Year.
- Staff Business Planning Day being organised for 28 November with all Parks and Cemeteries staff attending to influence the Service Plan for 2026/7 and ensure the Council continued to meet and exceed its KPIs.

Emerging issues:

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

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
% Staff attendance (94% Target)	Although staff absence rates have improved, it remains challenging. With	Service management team continues to meet regularly with HR,	Head of Parks and Cemeteries	January 2026

	92.89% achieved in this period.	vigorously implementing procedures and changes made to reporting sickness, has improved rates.		
Reduce the amount of herbicide used (litres) in council land	Increased usage of herbicides on pitches and control of invasive species.	Improved training, alternative products continue to be identified including use of stem injection for invasive species.	Head of Parks and Cemeteries	January 2026

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

Alderman Adair said the report was very good and the Council was seeing improvement on the ground. The work at the cemeteries and sports pitches particularly was greatly appreciated by constituents. He praised the Head of Parks and Cemeteries for that and also the Bereavement Services Officer who had provided vital support to many people.

Councillor Edmund agreed and offered his thanks to the Head of Parks and Cemeteries and to the team.

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

6.3 WASTE AND CLEANSING SERVICES

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

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

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

Reporting Approach

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

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Half Year (H1)	April – September	January
Half Year (H2)	October – March	July

The report for April to September 2025 was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to 3 key corporate outcomes as followed:

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Increased household recycling rate to 62.07%
- Increased HRC reuse and recycling to 78.12%
- No waste sent directly to landfill during the first half of this financial year.
 - From the beginning of 2025, Ards and North Down sent its residual waste for further processing and treatment. During the first half of the financial year, it produced 15,440.1 tonnes of household residual waste. A two-stage process first recovered 1597.8 tonnes (10.4%) of recyclable material before sending 13,842.7 tonnes (89.6%) for energy recovery in the form the Refuse-Derived Fuel
 - A small quantity of non-target material collected for recycling was rejected by the contractors. That material continued to go to landfill.

NB. Those waste data were drawn from NIEA's Q1 waste data report and Q2 information from the Council's contractors. The data was considered provisional and subject to change until final and validated waste data was published by NIEA in November 2026.

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Achieved success in the Loo of the Year Awards (2025), receiving four platinum awards and one diamond award.
- Success in the Best Kept Awards 2025:
 - Best Kept Small Town – Donaghadee

- Best Kept Large Village – Groomsport
- Runner up, City – Bangor
- Runner up, Medium Town – Holywood
- Finalist, Large Town – Newtownards.

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Services delivered within agreed budgets.

Emerging issues:

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

- Achieve or exceed Northern Ireland average Cleanliness Index Score of 75%
- Work with arc21 Councils to agree a timeline for the addition of plastic tubes to the kerbside dry recycling service.

Action to be taken:

- Identify and implement regular and independent surveys of Borough cleanliness as a measure of performance against the NI average Cleanliness Index Score.
- arc21 Councils had agreed that it was contractually possible that plastic tubes could be accepted in the kerbside dry recycling bin. Officers would work with arc21, Bryson Recycling, and partner councils to agree a coordinated timeline for their acceptance and communication of the change.

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Cleanliness Index	Independent surveys not able to be completed by service provider.	Engage with potential providers of independent cleanliness surveys to reintroduce measurement against the KPI for the 2026/27 Service Plan.	Head of Service	Q4 2025/26

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cathcart praised the work of the cleansing staff and as part of his Mayoral term he had met the teams. He said a measure of their success was receiving few complaints from his constituents. He raised a query concerning the amount of waste

being sent to landfill. It was confirmed that the Council no longer sent any waste to landfill directly but at times if contamination waste was removed from recycling or composting streams by the contractor some of that would be sent by them to landfill. Councillor Harbinson was in agreement that most of the report was extremely positive.

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

7. SCHOOLS GROWING CLUBS UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of the report was to provide an update on the Schools Growing Clubs project for the period 2025/2026. School's Growing Clubs was an initiative aimed at enhancing the educational experience, health, and well-being of children in the Borough through growing, gardening and community engagement.

The purpose of the report was to inform the Council about the recent developments in the programme, including the selection process, its potential contributions to the curriculum and the positive impact it would have on students' growth.

Selection Process and Participants

All schools across the Borough were contacted and offered the opportunity to apply to join the initiative. The programme was also promoted across the Council's social media platforms. The Council received a total of ten applications from various schools that expressed interest in becoming a Growing Club. As per the agreed process, a selection panel comprised of Parks and Cemeteries officers evaluated the applications and choose the most suitable schools to participate. After thorough review and consideration, the panel selected five schools to be part of the programme.

The selection criteria included factors such as the school's commitment to sustainability and environmental education, the availability of space and existing infrastructure for gardening activities, the engagement level of teachers, PTA and the potential for community involvement. The panel's objective assessment ensured a fair and transparent selection process, resulting in the choice of schools that were best aligned with the goals of the Growing Club initiative.

The five new schools selected through the process were:

- Portavogie Primary School, Portavogie
- Castle Gardens Primary School, Newtownards
- Bloomfield Primary School, Bangor
- Lakewood School, Bangor
- Sullivan Upper School, Holywood

For 2025/2026, Parks and Cemeteries Officers would pilot the programme with one secondary school, extending the Schools Growing Clubs to an older age group for

the first time. This year, Sullivan Upper School in Holywood had been selected to take part.

Parks and Cemetery Officers would continue to support schools from the previous year's cohort as below.

- Kircubbin Integrated Primary School
- Alexander Dixon Primary School, Ballygowan
- Killard Primary School, Donaghadee
- St Patricks Primary School, Holywood

Contributions to Curriculum and Development

The School's Growing Club had immense potential to enrich children's learning experiences and holistic development. By integrating gardening and horticultural activities into the curriculum, students would gain hands-on knowledge about plant life cycles, nutrition, ecology, and sustainability.

Furthermore, the Growing Club offered an avenue for interdisciplinary learning, connecting subjects such as science, mathematics, and even art. Students would be encouraged to observe, measure, and analyse various aspects of plant growth, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In addition, the Club would promote teamwork, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment as students worked together to tend to the garden and observe the fruits of their labour.

Health and Well-being Impact

Engaging in gardening activities had been proven to have positive effects on mental and physical well-being. The act of nurturing plants and being in nature could reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance concentration. The students would have the opportunity to disconnect from screens and engage in a more active and hands-on form of recreation, fostering a healthier lifestyle. Children would also have the chance to learn where their food came from and appreciate the process of growing one's own food and how that could contribute to sustainable food production in their communities for the future.

Community Engagement and Education

The Growing Club would not only benefit the students directly involved but would also extend its impact to the broader community. As the garden flourished, it could serve as a hub for workshops, events, and educational sessions, involving parents, community members, and other schools. That would promote a sense of unity and shared responsibility for environmental stewardship, further strengthening the ties between the school and the community.

In conclusion, the School's Growing Club was a valuable addition to the educational offering, with the potential to enhance the curriculum and promote health and well-being. There was excitement about the positive impact the initiative would have on the children and the community at large. Members continued support was instrumental in ensuring the success of the endeavour.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Councillor Edmund was delighted to see the spread of schools across the Borough and was glad that the Council could facilitate the scheme and Councillor Douglas was happy to second noting the gains made.

Members rose to support viewing it as positive that some of the secondary schools were involved and connecting people with food production was welcomed. Members also believed that children from urban areas became more aware of farming and growing food and it connected them to the wider local agricultural industry.

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

8. NOTICE OF MOTION 619 – GREYABBEY TENNIS COURTS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in May 2024 the following decision was agreed by the Council as a result of a Notice of Motion:

“That this Council notes with concern the temporary closure of Groomsport tennis courts due to issues around the safety of the playing surface. Further to this Council tasks Officers to bring back a report on Tennis Court maintenance throughout the Borough and will commit to ensuring all our tennis facilities are properly maintained and are fully accessible to all. Council will also promote the use of tennis facilities in the Borough as we approach the spring/summer season.”

A subsequent update report was brought to the Council by the Head of Leisure in January 2025 outlining the costs and anticipated works required for each tennis court across the Borough and the following was agreed:

“That the Council agree the recommendation of the Committee but further tasks officers to explore the feasibility of incorporating a MUGA as part of the redevelopment of Greyabbey Tennis Courts including engagement with current users, sports clubs and community groups to ensure use for all sports and maximum investment and sport participation for the community of Greyabbey.”

Furthermore, Rosemount Rec Junior Football Club then brought a Deputation to the May 2025 Community and Wellbeing Committee and expressed its desire for a Sports Hub consisting of a 3G synthetic surface MUGA which would incorporate football, tennis and basketball and it was agreed that the Deputation would be considered as part of the follow up report.

Current Position

At present under the Leisure Strategy Implementation Plan agreed by Council earlier in 2025, Council, as part of the Leisure Strategy Implementation Group, would be carrying out a facilities need audit which would inform what level of need there was for pitches and tennis courts and other facilities across the Borough. Until that had been completed it could not yet be determined how many tennis courts it would

recommend were required in Greyabbey and if a MUGA pitch for sporting purposes was required. Local consultation would be required as part of that process. Furthermore, the extant play strategy recommended an older children's play facility in the area as well, which may be a MUGA, wheel park or similar, depending on local consultation around that already identified need.

The site was quite confined in terms of space and therefore it may be difficult to accommodate all facility requests within the current site. Additional land acquisition may be required in the future dependant on the outcomes of the facilities need audit. Currently there were two tennis courts and a community orchard to the rear. A new path and picnic area with some natural forest school features was also in the process of being installed.

Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) were designed for informal use by teenagers as part of the older children provision as outlined in the Play Strategy and included provision for football and basketball although other informal uses such as skating, scooting and younger children riding their bikes in them had also been observed in places. They were predominantly surfaced in tarmac and had surrounding fencing and they were open and free to use at all times.

MUGAs of that nature were not designed to be used as formal sports pitches for matches or training purposes that would require the development of a synthetic surface pitch. Tennis could not normally be facilitated on a MUGA due to the need to remove nets and posts etc.

In the Play Strategy (currently under review) it identified Greyabbey as a location for older children provision; it also outlined that a public consultation was required. Previously such consultations had been undertaken at Holywood, Kircubbin, and Ballygowan as well as consultations with local schools, to allow people to decide what type of older children facility they preferred: MUGA, Parkour, Skate Park or Pump Track. The preferred facility type would then be delivered. However in the case of Greyabbey, that process could not occur until the leisure facilities audit had been completed determining what level of facility provision was required.

The Play Strategy also outlined a settlement hierarchy approach to older children provision delivery. The remaining locations for older children facilities as identified in the Play Strategy in hierarchical order were:

- Bangor (76,403 population, 2021 census) (Bangor Cycle Park being delivered as part of Peace Plus and another facility to be delivered as part of the Bangor Waterfront Scheme)
- Holywood (10,757) (Seapark, consultation completed MUGA proposed, currently under consideration by Planning)
- Donaghadee (7,325) (Pump Track being delivered as part of Peace Plus)
- Portaferry (2,372)
- Ballywalter (2,008)
- Cloughey (1,347)
- Groomsport (1,224)
- Greyabbey (879)

Therefore, a number of other locations needed to be delivered first before any older children facilities would be delivered in Greyabbey as it was the smallest settlement.

RECOMMENDED that the Council await the outcome of the Leisure Facilities Audit and the further delivery of other older children provision locations as outlined in the Play Strategy in order to accurately determine the level of facility provision required across the Borough, as well as Greyabbey, and the priority areas to be delivered in accordance with available budgets provided through the rates and grants that would be sought.

Alderman Adair proposed seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the development of Greyabbey MUGA Project be delivered as a joint Village Renewal and Parks Project with progress report coming to Council.

Alderman Adair explained that the matter had first arisen after it was proposed to update the tennis courts at Greyabbey when it was suggested that a MUGA also be developed and that was given unanimous support from the Council. If the Village Plan was being upgraded he thought that this would be an ideal time to progress with that. He explained that the need was great in Greyabbey since there was nowhere for young people to train and the Peninsula Councillors were united in wanting to see this done.

The Alderman went on to state that in his opinion the priority projects for the Council on the Peninsula were Greyabbey MUGA, the Portavogie 3G pitch and the upgrade to the Portaferry MUGA. The development of a MUGA at Greyabbey would enable more sports to be played and he felt that the Council should exhaust all opportunities to bring that about for the village.

Councillor Edmund agreed believing that a MUGA was a very important project for the village of Greyabbey and he expressed his disappointment on the progress to date. While Councillor Wray appreciated the reports that had been brought he shared some concerns similar to those already expressed. He felt the main point was that the community had been consulted and this was what they wanted so he did not feel the need to delay the process any further and could support the amendment.

While Alderman McAlpine shared some of the same concern she was not sure that a head count was the way to proceed. She had noted that in the report it had stated that a MUGA may not be the most suitable option and questioned if it would really do all that the public wanted it to do. She accepted that the villages on the Peninsula often felt left out of development but she wondered where this fitted on the Council's Play Strategy. It was noted that the facility available in Greyabbey was quite tight and it had mentioned in the report that extra land would be required to develop it.

The Alderman considered that there might be a difference of opinion on what was actually meant by having a MUGA at Greyabbey. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries clarified that it would not be large enough for formal sports training and tennis could not be played because of the need for nets. A booking system would be necessary and that could also bring complications. MUGAs for young people could only accommodate small informal play and it was made known that what was

available could not accommodate the existing football team. While Councillor Boyle was sympathetic to the desire for a MUGA at Greyabbey he said he also believed in doing the right thing and he was fearful of pushing for something that would not do what it was supposed to. He thought it best to accept the officers' recommendation which would allow the process to continue.

Councillor Harbinson agreed with Alderman McAlpine and Councillor Boyle and expressed some concern that if the Council started tinkering with the process there was no point in having one in the first place. He was happy for more data and discussion with consideration being given to older children's provision before a decision would be made.

Alderman Armstrong Cotter stated that the amendment would let the residents of Greyabbey know that their needs were being taken seriously and she thought it was important to fight the case to deliver benefits on the Peninsula. She said that the people of Greyabbey had been told there was money set aside for the village and it was important that was progressed.

The Chair asked about the Play Strategy budget and where the Council would be positioned if the amended recommendation be adopted. The Director explained that what would be proposed in the Play Strategy as a potential play MUGA would be different from a MUGA for sports and those were two different facilities which could not co-exist in the same space so the proposal would need to be explored further.

Concluding Alderman Adair said he was disappointed but not surprised by some of the negativity he had heard to his recommendation. He said simply noting a report would ensure that nothing would be done but that he wanted a positive result and asked Members to raise their voices in support.

The Chair read the amendment and a vote was taken.

On the amendment being put to the meeting with 9 voting For, 4 voting Against, 2 Abstained and 1 Absent it was declared CARRIED.

FOR (9)	AGAINST (4)	ABSTAINING (2)	ABSENT (1)
Aldermen	Alderman	Councillors	Councillor
Adair	McAlpine	Brady	Irwin
Armstrong-Cotter	Councillors	Kendall	
Cummings	Ashe		
Councillors	Boyle		
Blaney	Harbinson		
Cathcart			
Douglas			
Edmund			
Newman			
Wray			

AGREED TO RECOMMEND on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the Development of Greyabbey MUGA Project be

delivered as a joint Village Renewal and Parks Project with a progress report coming to the Council.

9. NOTICES OF MOTION

9.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Smith and Councillor Chambers

This Council notes the Ulster Farmers' Union's unprecedented motion of no confidence in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), which reflects deep and widespread frustration within the farming community.

This Council recognises the unrelenting pressures faced by family farmers across Northern Ireland, including:

- the unresolved and escalating crisis surrounding Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB);
- uncertainty regarding future Inheritance Tax arrangements for farm succession;
- continued planning paralysis affecting essential agricultural development; and
- increasing policy and regulatory pressures, with little meaningful assurance, progress, or action from DAERA to address these challenges.

This Council further acknowledges that family farmers are the backbone of Northern Ireland's agri-food sector, sustaining rural communities, underpinning the regional economy, and serving as essential custodians of our environment and biodiversity. This Council therefore calls on the Minister for DAERA to move beyond an "open door" approach and to actively engage, listen, and deliver tangible action in partnership with the Ulster Farmers' Union. Family farmers must be treated as key stakeholders in shaping policy that secures the future of the agri-food industry, protects our environment, and sustains rural livelihoods.

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

Councillor Wray explained that the Notice of Motion had been submitted by Alderman Smith, although he was unable to attend this evening's meeting. He was delighted to bring the Motion forward and it was something that he and his Party felt strongly about.

The Ulster Farmers Union Executive Committee had unanimously passed a vote of no confidence in DEARA at its meeting in October 2025. This Motion was submitted in November but had been pushed by officers to the January Environment Committee hence the delay. The issue was still pertinent and the vote reflected mounting frustration from farmers about how the Department was handling a range of issues affecting the industry. The vote of no confidence was unprecedented and reflected the deep frustration and anger within the farming community.

Farmers felt that the multiple issues that were impacting the industry were not being dealt with effectively and that farming was becoming a scapegoat for wider societal

issues like the pollution to Lough Neagh. The Member explained that he lived in a rural community surrounded by farms and farming families and he heard those concerns every day.

For context, Councillor Wray said it must be remembered that agri-food was Northern Ireland's biggest industry. The region had over 26,000 farms and employed 53,000 people farming over 1 million hectares of land and more than 75% of those were small farms. Overall, the food industry in Northern Ireland generated over £7 billion in income and its produce fed 10 million people across the United Kingdom and beyond.

The Motion was not an attack on a political party or a personal attack on the Minister, but instead it was a call for him to change his approach for the benefit of the farming community, and in turn all citizens of Northern Ireland who benefitted from the fruits of their labour.

The bottom line was that the Minister was seen as emphasising the Environment element of his portfolio above Agriculture. Farmers were the custodians of most of the land within Northern Ireland and were willing to play a constructive and key part in the protection and improvement of the environment, but it needed to be a fair balance, and he said that currently farmers felt abandoned, ignored and betrayed.

Councillor Wray said that he understood that this was not just about DEARA, the national government in London had played its part in cruelly hammering farmers. The Chancellor's announcement on Inheritance Tax (IHT) was a disaster for farmers across the United Kingdom. The nationwide campaign in opposition to the policy had forced the Labour Government into a U turn to increase the threshold to £2.5M. However, that would still impact many family farms and he felt pressure needed to continue on the Government to raise the threshold much higher.

The remaining issues as detailed in the Motion fell squarely at the feet of the Department for Environment, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and Minister Muir. The failure to tackle Bovine TB, the deeply flawed Nutrients Action Programme (NAP), and planning issues had all played their part in reaching a crisis point in the industry.

Bovine TB remained unresolved and the Minister must push on with policies that would make a real and positive change in tackling the disease. The cross-border control pilot project would just postpone action which was needed now and must include a wildlife intervention programme.

The Nutrients Action Programme's original proposals needed to be rescinded. The industry was willing to engage and change, but in a way that allowed them to retain the sustainability of their businesses.

Under Planning the failure to facilitate policy-compliant planning applications due to a risk adverse attitude to ammonia emissions had paralysed progress and investment across the agri-food sector.

Councillor Wray went on to state that the challenge for the Department and Minister was to restore trust and re-build relationships with the sector. The Minister had said

that he had an 'open door' policy which was welcome, but there needed to be a real partnership between the Department and the industry and, most of all, outputs that could improve farmers morale and grow confidence within this most important sector of the economy.

Ards and North Down, like most of Northern Ireland, was reliant on its farmers and the agri-food sector as the backbone of its economy and farmers were the foundation of many communities across the Borough. It was for that reason he thought that it was crucially important that the Council sent out a clear message that it heard their fears and concerns and would add its voice to calling for action from the Minister and Department to achieve a proper balance between protecting the environment and securing the future of the agri-food industry.

He thanked Members for listening and hoped they would support the Motion.

Councillor Blaney reserved his right to speak at this point.

Alderman Adair rose to support the Motion on behalf of the DUP and thought it was good to see the various political parties working together and speaking out for the farmers. He regretted that part of the problem was that the Department was headed up by a Minister who exalted the environment and had lost the confidence of the agricultural community. He thought that politicians were not listening to science and that the Minister needed to be a champion for that community and change course.

Councillor Douglas rose in support and described how mentally and physically hard farming was. She thought that the Council needed to continue to support farmers who contributed much to the economy and were custodians of the countryside. Councillor Edmund was in agreement pointing to the fact that there were more dairy farmers and vegetable growers in this part of Northern Ireland than anywhere else.

Alderman McAlpine said that she had a reasonable amount of academic knowledge around this and the biology around Bovine TB. She referred to the intensification of farming and the use of nitrogen and phosphorus, and she thought that was damaging the environment. She thought that the inheritance part of the Motion had already been addressed but the remainder of the Motion was out of date and that everyone needed to seriously consider the environment and how it could be sustainable for the future.

Councillor Boyle supported the Motion and acknowledged that the agricultural sector was facing widespread and mounting challenges which were creating deep frustration within the farming community. Those pressures extended beyond any single issue, including the ecological crisis at Lough Neagh and the growing impacts of climate change on farm businesses and rural communities. He said that change was necessary to protect the environment and secure the long-term viability of the agri-food sector, and meet future regulatory and market expectations.

He also acknowledged that this was a period of significant regulatory transition, and that delivering necessary change was not easy for an industry already under considerable pressure. Clarity, certainty, and consistent communication from the

government was necessary to help farmers navigate the new environmental and regulatory requirements.

Councillor Brady understood the vital role farming played in supporting communities but he did not think that the wording of the Motion reflected the current reality. He thought Alderman McAlpine was correct and he challenged how spraying phosphate was contributing toward being a responsible custodian of the environment. If that action changed he would also be happy to change his stance. He also agreed that DAERA should work closely with farmers to implement the necessary changes which the public wanted. He accepted that the farmers formed a strong interest group but did not feel that the Council should pander to it for that.

RECESS 8.58 pm
RECOMMENCED 9.10 pm

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter defended the wording of the Motion and did not blame Minister Muir for the Inheritance Tax changes. She thought that farmers should be encouraged to farm well and be paid well whilst being custodians of the land. She would prefer the region's products came from its own land rather than Russia, China or Saudi Arabia for example. She did not think that farming was a comfortable life and she did not think it should be blamed for all the country's environmental problems.

Councillor Blaney explained that he had always worked within the agri food industry and that farmers had shown an ability to work with the Department but they had been placed in a desperate position which the Minister needed to take on board. To secure the future of the agri food industry it was important to work well with farmers rather than strangle the industry.

In conclusion Councillor Wray thanked Members for their support for his Motion.

There was no agreement so when put to the meeting with a show of hands 10 were in FAVOUR, 4 were AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED and 1 ABSENT the Notice of Motion was CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

9.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McRandal and Alderman McAlpine

That this Council notes with concern the signs of erosion which have arisen on Station Road, Craigavon in recent years and that this Council recognises that Station Road, Craigavon is an integral section of the North Down coastal path and the Ulster Way.

That this Council reassess whether it has responsibility for maintaining the road and for strengthening the sea wall and sea defences along the North Down coastal path section of Station Road, in view of:

the fact that Council was prepared to assume responsibility for the road and sea defences under the failed Greenway project;

the fact that this is a right of way as asserted by Council.

That a report is brought back to the relevant Committee, to include assessment of who owns or is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the sea wall and sea defences along Station Road.

Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McAlpine, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Alderman McRandal began by explaining that Station Road was a largely private road that ran from the A2 down to the coastline at Craigavon. The bottom section of approximately 300 metres was adjacent to the coast and was protected by a sea wall. That section formed part of the Ulster Way and the North Down Coastal Path. It was a Right of Way, as asserted by the Council.

The section formed a little headland and was prone to erosion, indeed, over time cracks and fissures had formed in the sea wall. Through wave action the foundations of the road had been compromised, resulting in sinkholes appearing on the road.

There was a lengthy history, going back decades, of dispute between the authorities and residents over who was responsible for the upkeep of the area and it was worth mentioning that, as a Councillor, Gordon Dunne was very active on the matter.

Works on improving sea defences had last taken place in 1991 and at that time the Department of Environment, Council and the residents had all contributed to the cost. Over time the Council had assisted the residents with maintenance of the road, both through financial assistance and in other ways, for example, providing appropriate signage and health and safety advice where sinkholes had developed.

Under the Greenway project there had been an agreement between the Council and residents that it would assume responsibility for managing the road. That was not proceeded with once the Greenway plans were scrapped.

The coastal section of Station Road had been resurfaced about a year ago with the cost borne completely by residents.

Alderman McRandal believed there were two separate considerations here, namely maintaining the road and maintaining the sea defences.

With regard to the road he thought it was fair to say that the Council's position was that the landowners, who were the residents, were responsible for the upkeep and maintenance. In terms of legal liability that would appear to be the situation. However, it was an unusual situation in that the Council promoted and encouraged the use of the coastal path, so it was certainly in the wider public interest and in the interest of the Council that the path, including that section of it, was safe and well

maintained. The Council had the power to assume responsibility but had chosen not to do so.

The seawall defences were an entirely separate issue. The residents maintained that they did not own and were not responsible for anything beyond the road and it was unclear who had responsibility for maintaining the sea defences. He and others had been invited along recently to inspect the sea defences which had been last strengthened in 1991. In parts the toe beam had disappeared and the sea defences were overdue repair and strengthening.

Seconding the Motion Alderman McAlpine agreed that this was a murky issue in respect of the legality. She represented a Peninsula DEA and there was a coastal erosion group there which was similarly battling for answers and may need to be taken as far as OFDFM to reach some clarity. The path under discussion was beautiful and was one of the crowning glories of the area and the public should be able to enjoy it safely.

Councillor Cathcart welcomed the mention of the late Gordon Dunne who had fought endlessly on the issue. He was happy for it to be looked at so that it could be maintained responsibly. Alderman Adair was in agreement and reported that many similar issues had arisen on the Ards Peninsula.

Councillor Blaney and Councillor Brady were also in agreement and called for the road to be repaired if that was necessary for this and other roads threatened by erosion.

Alderman McRandal thanked Members for their supportive comments and restated that the residents had accepted the Council's position in terms of the road and responsibility for repair was theirs, their concern was the sea defences and they saw no point repairing a road if the waves would continue to damage it. The residents did not expect sea defence to be the Council's responsibility but it was suggested that the Council sought clarity by taking legal advice.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McAlpine, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

10. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

11. TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF MINOR EXTERNAL WORKS

****IN CONFIDENCE****

****ITEM DELEGATED FOR APPROVAL****

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Council officers had sought tenders for the Provision of Minor External Works within the Borough of Ards and North Down Council.

RECOMMENDED that the Council awards the contract for the Provision of Minor External Works.

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

12. EXTENSION OF TENDER FOR PLUMBING WORK AT VARIOUS COUNCIL PROPERTIES

****IN CONFIDENCE****

****ITEM DELEGATED FOR APPROVAL****

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Council officers had previously reported on a tender exercise for Plumbing Work at Various Council Properties, expiring on 15 April 2026 with an option to extend for a final one year.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees the contract for Plumbing Works be extended for a final year for the contractor.

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

13. WARD PARK REDEVELOPMENT – APPOINTMENT OF INTEGRATED SUPPLY TEAM

****IN CONFIDENCE****

****ITEM DELEGATED FOR APPROVAL****

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of the report was to recommend the appointment of a suitability qualified contractor to implement the Environmental Improvement Scheme for Ward Park.

RECOMMENDED that the Council:

- Agrees the total capital project budget
- Proceeds with the Most Economically Advantageous Tender

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

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.42 pm.

ITEM 7.3

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Thursday 8 January 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor McCracken

Aldermen: Adair
Armstrong-Cotter
McDowell

Councillors:	Blaney	Kennedy
	Brady	McCollum
	Edmund	Morgan
	Gilmour	Newman
	Hennessy (7.02pm)	Smart
	Hollywood	Thompson

Officers in Attendance: Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Head of Tourism (S Mahaffy), Interim Head of Regeneration (A Cozzo) Capital Project Manager (S Ferguson) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster).

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

At this stage the Chairman (Councillor McCracken) welcomed Councillor Newman to the Committee.

NOTED.

(Councillor Hennessy entered the Chamber at this stage – 7.02pm)

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman sought apologies at this stage and none were received.

NOTED.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that Item 9 - Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity Committee 8 January 2026 – Variance Request - Ballywalter Pathway - Small Settlements Programme Update and Recommendation, was considered Out of Committee.

The Chairman acknowledged the Education Authority had already brought this into the public domain and as such he was content to accept the proposal.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that Item 9 - Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity Committee 8 January 2026 – Variance Request - Ballywalter Pathway - Small Settlements Programme Update and Recommendation, was considered Out of Committee.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest at this stage and none were declared.

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION – DONAGHADEE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The Chairman advised that the Deputation had been postponed to the February 2026 meeting of the Committee and invited the Director to provide further details around that.

The Director reminded members that he along with the Head of Tourism had met with representatives of the Association before Christmas and since then it had been in negotiations with the Ulster Scots Agency. As such under those circumstances they felt it was best to have those discussions concluded before bringing the matter to Council and were keen to attend in February 2026.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the matter is deferred to the February 2026 meeting of the Committee.

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

4. EVENT PROPOSALS AUGUST 2026 – FLEADH BELFAST AND RSPBANI ULSTER PIPE BAND CHAMPIONSHIP (FILE TO/EV139) (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Belfast would host Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture, from Sunday 2 August 2026 to Sunday 9 August 2026. Qualifying competitors from all over the world will showcase the very best of traditional music, song, dance and language in All-Ireland competitions. With a minimum of 700,000 visitors from across the world, it was anticipated to be the biggest cultural event held in Belfast. It was reported by Belfast City Council that 20% out of state were visitors to the Wexford event in 2025. It was anticipated that this figure would be higher for Fleadh Belfast as participants/attendees would be visiting from the Republic of Ireland.

It was reported that The Fleadh in Wexford generated an estimated €60 million into the local economy, attracting over 800,000 visitors and Tourism NI estimated the 2026 Fleadh would bring £60 million into the Northern Ireland economy.

Ards CCÉ was the host branch for Fleadh Belfast (bid partner with Belfast City Council). Formed in 1976 it promoted traditional music, song and dance throughout Belfast and the North Down and Ards area and 2026 would mark their 50th anniversary. Due to the local connection, Belfast City Council colleagues had been in contact with the Chief Executive to inform on planning stages of the event and to highlight the opportunities that would be afforded to the Borough due to the proximity of the event. As set out in the Borough Events Strategic Direction (2021-2028), international bid events bringing participants and spend, was an area which the Borough should maximise.

On 8 August 2025 Belfast City Council hosted a familiarisation trip for interested parties to attend the Fleadh Cheoil in Wexford on one of its competition days. Three officers attended to review event delivery and logistics, visitor servicing and marketing. Key learnings from the trip included:

- The 2025 Fleadh Cheoil in Wexford was a highly successful and well-managed event, balancing organised programming with an informal, organic atmosphere.
- The pedestrianisation of Wexford's town centre enabled excellent visitor flow and provided a safe, vibrant platform for both formal performances and ad hoc sessions.
- Visitor servicing in a central location provided a necessary source of information and support for participant/visitor orientation.
- Accommodation stock was booked well in advance and additional facilities such as camp sites were a requirement with attendees willing/having to travel beyond the immediate competition area.
- Budget friendly accommodation was attractive for larger groups and family participants and attendees.
- There were clear opportunities to enhance and promote Fringe programming across the wider Belfast City Region. This had strong potential to extend visitor dwell time, showcase local attractions, and distribute economic benefits more widely.
- Visit Belfast ran a pop-up Welcome Centre prominently located in Wexford town centre and confirmed high levels of early interest in accommodation bookings and broader visitor enquiries. This visitor servicing presence in Wexford already ensured that AND was front of mind to Fleadh 2025 attendees and those planning their Belfast 2026 visit with AND literature and digital information distributed throughout the event. VB was a vital partner to Belfast City Council in supporting visitor servicing, marketing and early bookings.
- Broader learnings, applicable to other or future Council large scale events not specifically related to this event, included traffic management measures, pedestrianised zones, orientation signage, communications and hospitality delivery.

Visit Belfast (VB) had been appointed as Belfast City Council's lead partner and key promotional agency for Fleadh Belfast 2026. VB's responsibilities included providing visitor information and services through their welcome centre, as well as at key venues and points of entry. In addition, VB also managed a dedicated event website on behalf of Belfast City Council, which included information about the Borough and links to the Council's Visit Ards and North Down website. Visit Belfast had been a long-standing strategic partner of the Council through the Regional Tourism Partnership (RTP) since 2015, through which the Borough was prominently positioned for the Fleadh's visitor audience.

The Opportunity

As previously stated, Fleadh Belfast presented a significant opportunity for Belfast City, with potential benefits for the wider Belfast City Region, particularly in terms of family-friendly accommodation and attractions. It was expected that particularly AND based self-catering accommodation sector will benefit. Officers had met with Ards CCÉ representatives to explore the development and timing of any potential programming in AND that may complement the core Fleadh programme, and/or fit into any Fleadh Fringe activity. Based on those discussions, a Fleadh Fringe event in the Holborn Square car park, Bangor was proposed on Saturday 1 August 1.00pm-9.00pm. This area had recently been refurbished with a view to this being a potential event site with kerbs removed etc. It also had the advantage of being central within Bangor and had two well established bars having beer gardens backing onto the site, alongside additional hospitality businesses on High Street and nearby Main and Abbey Streets. In the Event Manager's view this concept would be very similar to a popular and well attended element of the Wexford event that officers experienced (it should be noted that officers attended the main competition site on a competition day in Wexford but Ards CCÉ representatives were confident that participants would be arriving pre competition days and would wish to enjoy activity locally). It was also anticipated that this would be complementary to the Fringe programme being delivered pre and during the event in Belfast. A budget of up to £40,000 was estimated to deliver the event with c.10% allocated to marketing. A procurement exercise would be undertaken to appoint suitably qualified professionals to organise and manage the delivery of the event, as the Council wider events team would be supporting the Pipe Band event on the same date.

A requirement in the brief would be to include a performance by Ards CCÉ, other local artists, and that programming would be done in discussion/agreement with the Council and Ards CCÉ representatives to ensure quality of performance. The vision was for an event area with a stage, seating and a range of local food options to complement those in nearby streets. The event would be free to attend and it was hoped that it could achieve visitor numbers of up to c.4-5,000 throughout the course of the day/evening. The aim of the event was to maximise on the opportunity to attract the many visitors to Belfast to also spend time in and attract additional spend to the city.

Local hospitality providers would be encouraged to stage similarly themed entertainment to attract visitors to their premises once the event in Holborn Square

had finished at 9.00pm and maintain spend within the city centre. A working group had been set up by Bangor Chamber to identify opportunities for this.

As stated earlier in the report and previously reported to Place and Prosperity Committee, the Council had been offered the opportunity to host the 73rd Ulster Championships of the Pipe Bands by the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association NI (RSPBANI) on the same date, Saturday 1 August 2025. The date for this event was significant as bands were preparing for the World Championships being held in mid-August.

The event attracted approximately 50 bands. Recent site visits, including Council officers and officials from the RSPBANI, had indicated that in line with the current rotational system that the Pipe Band event was due to be held in Bangor, Ward Park was the most suitable site to fully accommodate band gazebos, tuning spaces along with coach parking.

The financial contribution requested from the Council to host the event by the RSPBANI Branch was £20,000. This amount was within the 2026 projected event budget at £36,700, which also covered other Council direct costs such as traffic management, stewarding, park and ride and infrastructure. Costs were based on previous similar events of this type at this location.

Officers had asked that as part of this event that there would be a parade element throughout the city centre. Exact route was to be confirmed and subject to further planning.

As the 2026 All Ireland Championships would be held in ROI in 2026, the Ulster Championship would probably be the largest contest being held in North Ireland. The RSPBANI would be inviting attendees from RSPBA HQ, Irish Pipe Band Association and Ulster-Scots Agency, along with their Honorary Members, with the intention of hosting a small dinner afterwards in the local area to thank the Stewards and Committee on the day.

The combination of both events offered the opportunity for the city to present a day of traditional musical excellence, which was hoped would be attractive to visitors to both the Fleadh event, the Ulster Championships of the Pipe Bands and more broadly.

Additional Activity

Officers would work with the local Chamber to create sympathetic consumer activity to attract visitors to eat, drink and spend in our local shops. This could be an extension of the current successful passport scheme, window dressing or hospitality deals, maps etc.

Further exploratory work with Translink to enable good traffic management and sustainability access, which may include park and ride options to the events, would start early 2026.

The annual Creative Peninsula Festival programmed by the Arts Service would be taking place as normal from 1-9 August 2026. The annual event showcased the

wealth of artists and makers living and working in the Borough. Though predominantly art and craft based, officers would endeavour to incorporate the theme of the Fleadh where appropriate, for example in the addition of traditional live music at the popular Creative Peninsula in the Square event on Friday 7 August. Officers were also investigating the inclusion of locally made musical instruments in demonstrations at the Heritage Craft Day at North Down Museum. An existing budget of £2,000 could be dedicated to weaving the theme of the Fleadh into existing Creative Peninsula events. The suggested inclusions would be subject to the availability of artists and musicians during this period.

Local accommodation providers would be promoted to prospective participants and attendees through Visit Belfast visitor servicing and channels. The proposed local Fringe event and Fleadh Belfast event activity would be promoted via Belfast City Council's dedicated Fleadh promotional channels which were managed on their behalf by Visit Belfast.

The following programme attached at the Appendix was proposed as an opportunity to animate the Borough in and around the Fleadh Belfast period to maximise opportunities for additional visits and spend.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the outline programme as presented in the report including:

1. the proposed Fringe Fleadh event at a budget of £40,000 subject to the Rates Setting process and a successful procurement exercise;
2. the hosting of the Ulster Championship Pipe Band event at Ward Park, Bangor with the existing projected 2026 event budgets and
3. other related activity where partners and performers can be secured.

The Head of Tourism referred to a recent article published by the Newsletter on the planned Fleadh Fringe and Ulster Pipe Band Championships, both scheduled for 1 August 2026 in Bangor. She commented that its tone and framing were not reflective of the Council's intentions or the balanced context provided in the official papers. The Council report presented a neutral, strategic, and opportunity focused assessment of both events, while the article instead emphasised conflict, prioritisation, and political context, none of which were present in the report.

In respect of the references in the article regarding the budget, members were advised as detailed below:

- Fleadh Fringe: Estimated delivery budget of up to £40,000, subject to Rates Setting and successful procurement of an event company to support the delivery.
- Ulster Pipe Band Championships: Projected total budget of £36,700, within existing projected 2026/27 budgets.

Continuing the Head of Tourism advised that the Council viewed the simultaneous hosting of both events as a significant opportunity, which was expected to:

- Attract substantial visitor numbers – around 700,000 as reported by Belfast City Council and projected £60 million in spend
- Drive footfall and economic impact
- Showcase Bangor's cultural vibrancy which also aligned with the Council's Borough's Strategic Direction for Events

Further to this, members were advised that the Council's partners, Ards CCE and the Pipe Band Association had been very supportive of the dual event approach and indeed today, Council was in receipt of a letter from the Chairman of the Pipe Band Association outlining its support, the opportunities it could bring to showcase musical traditions and positively bring a wider audience to the City. The events she added would bring something for everyone and bring people together in celebration.

The Head of Tourism added that while the tone of the News Letter coverage was disappointing, the Council remained focused on maximising the benefits these events would bring to Bangor and the wider Borough. It was noted that further detail on the event concept was within the report for member's consideration.

Councillor Gilmour noted that funding requirements for the Pipe Band event had been based upon previous events held there and as such she asked for clarity around how the budget of £40,000 had been calculated for the Fringe Fleadh event. Continuing she also asked if any consideration had been given to having the Fringe Fleadh event on another date in order to prevent a clash with the Pipe Band event, particularly given the extra costs involved to run the Fleadh event. Another area of concern for her was the matter of car parking which would be in demand on the day given the anticipated number of visitors.

In respect of the budget for the Fringe Fleadh event, the Head of Tourism informed members that a scoping exercise had been undertaken by the Events Manager for this. She confirmed that the budget for the Pipe Band event had been based upon previous events held in Ward Park, Bangor. In respect of the proposed date for the Fringe Fleadh event the Head of Tourism advised that following discussions with Ards CCÉ it was their belief that would be the most appropriate date to hold the event. Car Parking would be considered as part of the overall Traffic Management Plan in due course and would include collaboration with Translink around the provision of Park and Ride facilities on the day.

Continuing Councillor Gilmour referred to Donaghadee Community Association which was endeavouring to deliver events with the assistance of the Ulster Scots Agency, which she noted was heavily involved with the Pipe Band association. She questioned how a budget of £40,000 had seemingly come out of nowhere for an event which no one had heard of and yet no such funding was made available for associations such as Donaghadee Community Association to hold events. As such she believed what was being proposed would not sit well with some within the community.

At this stage the Director commented that regardless of whether or not it had been proposed to hold the Fringe Fleadh event on the Friday or Sunday the Council's Events team did not have the capacity to accommodate that. He added that other Groups within the Borough did apply for and successfully received funding to enable

them to hold events. The Director stated that what was being proposed in the report before members would be a major draw for the city of Bangor.

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

The proposer, Councillor McCollum, stated that she was thrilled that the Fringe Fleadh event would be coming to fruition, adding that it had not just come out of nowhere. She commended the Council's Events Team and Ards CCÉ for all of the work which had been undertaken to make this a reality, adding that it was an enormous achievement. Councillor McCollum stated that the Fringe Fleadh event would bring many people into the Borough which would essentially be the gateway for the main Belfast Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. She noted the beautiful, shared traditions of both the Pipe Bands Championship and Ards CCÉ, a taste of which had been provided at the recent launch event held in Belfast at which she had attended with the Council's Head of Tourism. Considering proposed visitor numbers to the Fringe Fleadh event, Councillor McCollum noted that those were anticipated around 700,000 to 1,000,000. She also acknowledged the shared positivity for both events from the Pipe Band Association and traders in the City, noting that a Working Group had already been set up to look how this could successfully be taken forward.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor Blaney expressed his delight for what was essentially a premier tourism event for the Borough. He too shared Councillor Gilmour's concerns around potential car parking issues on the day and asked if any other venues had been considered, particularly as Holborn Square car park could be hard to find. He asked if it could be well signposted for those visiting the City.

In response to a query from Councillor Edmund, it was noted that the Borough had approximately 2,500 bed spaces. Acknowledging the projected visitor numbers over the weekend, Councillor Edmund stated that those travelling Pipe Bands would require accommodation and he asked if that would be able to be supported. The Head of Tourism advised that Belfast City Council along with the Belfast Fleadh were aware of this and considering it further. Continuing Councillor Edmund asked if campervans brought by the Pipe Bands would be able to be accommodated on a site within the Borough. The Head of Tourism acknowledged that would be part of the Pipe Band event but was also mindful of current legislation around campervans and as such she indicated that further scoping would need to be undertaken.

At this stage the Chairman suggested to Councillor Edmund that officers would take his points made on board and report back with an update in due course.

Councillor Kennedy noted how in recent years officers had advised the Council about reductions in the amount of money available for events and that many Groups had sought funding to hold events. Now all of a sudden the sum of £40,000 had been found to host this Fringe Fleadh event, for which he acknowledged much scoping work had been undertaken. His question was why members had not been made aware of those ongoing scoping works for this event adding that he was disappointed how this matter had effectively been bounced upon members.

The Director commented that nothing was being bounced upon members and instead the matter had been brought by the Chief Executive to officers. Once the appropriate information was available that was being reported to members now and the Director reminded the Committee that the budget of £40,000 would be considered as part of the Council's rate setting process. As such the matter was very much in the hands of elected members as to whether or not they wished to proceed with this.

Rising in support of the proposal, Councillor Brady welcomed the sharing of cultures within the Borough adding that he had recently enjoyed some Trad sessions in Bangor Court House supporting many of the city's talented musicians.

Also rising in support Councillor Hennessy commented that he did not believe the matter had been bounced upon members as suggested. He believed this provided a fantastic opportunity for the city of Bangor which would be hugely beneficial for the local hospitality industry and he thanked officers for their endeavours.

By way of summing up the proposer, Councillor McCollum, thanked members for their supportive comments. She acknowledged that £40,000 was a lot of money but when considering the anticipated visitor numbers and economic benefits, she believed those would outweigh that initial outlay. This she believed was too good an opportunity to miss out on and she reiterated her thanks to the Head of Tourism for her endeavours in respect of this.

As there was dissent in the Chamber a vote was taken by a show of hands.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Blaney, with 13 voting For, 1 voting Against and 2 Abstentions, that the recommendation be adopted.

REPORTS FOR NOTING

5. TASTE AND – FOOD AND DRINK DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT 2025 (FILE TOTD/182)

(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that this year had once again been successful for network members and AND businesses at both national and international awards. Although the cost of living was still an issue for business, the general picture for the local industry was reported as more settled, with more stable economic conditions, coupled with a more constant energy market benefitting the sector. Issues that remained challenging included staffing due to previous budget implications and a continued lack of skilled labour. It was not yet known, how the recent budget statement on the increase in minimum wage would exacerbate this further. Concerns around food and drink education had been identified recently as a major national concern at a Food NI workshop focusing on DAERA's Food Strategy Framework. The food, drink and hospitality sector continued to innovate, appealing where possible to new customers, increasing collaboration, and diversifying outside of the 'day-to-day' business - for example delivery of tourism experiences.

Taste AND Food and Drink Destination Development Plan (FDDDP) 2023-2027

The following highlighted the activity and key achievements year to date.

1. Food and Drink Network

Following the introduction of amended criteria in 2024, to better structure membership, the Network currently sat at 75 members. The membership fee was £35 for 2025.

2. Business Training Programme

Throughout 2025, training sessions facilitated for businesses have ranged from basic first aid to trade show presentation skills and social media to photography sessions. Early 2026 would see menu master class sessions for hospitality businesses taking place. Working with colleagues in Economic Development, December marked the beginning of Council's 'Food and Drink Business Support Programme'. Ten local businesses who responded to an Expression of Interest would complete a series of workshops focusing on Marketing and Sales, Branding, Packaging and Labelling, Staff Retention and Recruitment, Implementation and Getting Things Done, alongside a learning journey which would roll out over the next four months. Those were further complemented with one-to-one business mentoring sessions.

3. Hospitality Careers Day

An annual focus of the plan was to deliver a food and drink careers engagement event signposting careers in the sector to local school children. On 25 February 2025, working with industry specialists Springboard, Tourism Officers delivered a "*Hospitality and Tourism Take Over Day*" at the Culloden Hotel and Spa. SERC Culinary Arts, Tourism NI and local hospitality representatives joined to play a key role in delivery. 70* students from five schools attended (all secondary schools in the Borough were invited to attend). Feedback from students included 98% stating they knew more about roles in the industry and 100% saying they would attend a similar event. All teachers stated they believed their students were more aware of the opportunities in hospitality and would return with another cohort.

**Numbers registered were 96 but unfortunately one school cancelled at the last minute.*

4. Trade Shows

In 2025, there had been a total of 22 partially or fully subsidised spaces for industry at trade shows and events outside the Borough.

- March: Love Your Food Show, Ekon Centre, Lisburn (12 businesses)
- June: Garden Show Ireland, Antrim (2 businesses)
- October: Dingle Food Fest / Eat Ireland in a Day Showcase (4 businesses)
- November: Samhain Festival of Food and Culture, Kells (4 businesses)

The first trade show of 2026 would be the Love Your Food Show, due to be held in early spring.

5. Ulster Fry Championship (part of the Donaghadee Ulster-Scots Festival)

Tourism Officers provided advice, organisational input, equipment and staff attendance into this annual event run by Donaghadee Community Development

Association (DCDA). The competition itself attracted competitors from across Ulster with four local businesses. Several Taste Ards and North Down businesses also traded at this event with stalls across the weekend. It was reported 3,400* in attendance at activity over the weekend.

*Figure provided by DCDA.

6. Taste Summer in Ards and North Down

A total of 18 food and drink shoulder experiences and activities were delivered by third party local businesses, across the period of the festival within seven towns, villages and Bangor city. All reported healthy business from involvement in the wider festival and a desire to participate in the Autumn festival shoulder programme.

At the Comber Earlies Food Festival, the Food and Drink Officer along with Event colleagues managed the 'Taste AND Meet the Maker' session featuring various Taste AND members. The shoulder food activities specific to the Comber event featured activities at such as McBride's on the Square "The Big Food (Charity) Quiz". The festival period culminated with a Slow Food showcase weekend at No 14 The Georgian House, hosted by celebrity chef Paula McIntyre and guests Anthony O'Toole and Sally Barnes, alongside Jim Mulholland from No 14. The showcase highlighted the Slow Food movement utilising local and national produce. Free events during the day were well supported with the evening showcase dinner selling out.

7. Taste Autumn in Ards and North Down

Shoulder activity included 17 experiences and activities taking place across 10 of the Borough's towns, villages and Bangor city. Unfortunately, the annual Chilli Festival, delivered by Parks and Cemeteries, with support from food and drink/tourism development staff, was cancelled on both days due to the first of the season's storms.

Part funded by DAERA's NI Regional Food Programme Taste AND @ The Castle 27-28 September, was the last event of the Taste Autumn programme. Located at Clandeboye Estate in 2024, the event moved to Bangor city centre to alleviate issues experienced at that site, such as parking and transport and infrastructure. The event showcased Ards and North Down Borough Council food and drink businesses to a local market – meeting a key objective within the FDDDP. Almost 40 businesses participated in the artisan market, with local chefs taking part in kitchen theatre demos compered by SERC. Whilst the first day was subject to another storm, with constant heavy wind and rain, footfall exceeded 1,000 through the marquee stalls and on day two, with fair weather, over 4,500 visited the event, equating to the footfall experienced at Clandeboye and demonstrating the site's suitability to draw a crowd of this demographic to Bangor city. The trader survey showed significant support for the change in venue. 35% of total sales sold over £1,000 produce and 65% sold over £500. 100% of traders reported selling over 70% of their stock with nearly a quarter selling over 90%. A number reported selling out early on day two (sample size 30). Of those consumers surveyed, 30% were out of Borough and over 40% noted a spend of over £30 per person with 25% reported more than £50.

8. Good Food Ireland (GFI)

In 2025, the Council became a member of Good Food Ireland® and was the first Council in Northern Ireland to join. Good Food Ireland® had been dedicated to showcasing Ireland's rich culinary heritage since 2006, connecting people with the best sustainable food and drink experiences across the island. To date, the relationship had been an effective one with the Council able to avail of its captive marketing reach within the Republic of Ireland to promote Ards and North Down food and drink and benefitting from its presence at international trade shows where they represent all members of GFI. GFI had also played an instrumental role in developing the officer relationship with Tourism Ireland (TIL) in 2025, including a familiarisation visit by representatives to the Council in late September. This relationship had continued to grow with Council officers and TIL now in regular contact and a further two subsequent visits having taken place since September.

Seven members of the Taste AND network had since taken out individual membership and there were several others discussing 2026 membership. The recent GFI annual awards in November were a pleasant surprise for those new members of Taste AND. Underground Dining, Bangor, won the Food Lovers Choice Award (NI), in a category that entirely consisted of members from the Borough. Indie Fude, Comber, were finalists in "Best Shop" (all Island) and No 14, Comber, finalists in "Best Restaurant" (all Ireland). All highlighting the strength of Ards and North Down on a national scene. An officer was invited to attend the event at short notice free of charge, to experience the event. Seating arrangements at a top table alongside representatives from TIL afforded further discussion and secured more visits to Ards and North Down in the incoming year.

9. Award Winners 2025

As mentioned, and further detailed in the attached Appendix, the year had been successful for Ards and North Down businesses. The 'gold standard' food and drink awards in Produce was the UK's "Great Taste Awards" which were announced in August and Ireland's "Blas na hEireann Awards" in September. For the alcoholic drink's producers, the 'gold standard' class of awards are the "International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC)", the "World Gin Awards" and the "World Whiskey Awards". Other notable awards for food are the "Irish Quality Food Awards" and the "British Quality Food Awards".

Looking forward to 2026

Taste Ards and North Down Local Food Heroes Awards

To highlight the achievements of local businesses the 'Local Food Heroes' Honours Reception with the Mayor would be held in early March 2026 at Bangor Castle. The fifth Lady Dufferin Award for producer of the year and the third edition of the 'Local Food and Drink Champion' would be awarded.

Food and Drink Development Plan (FDDDP) 2027-2031

The second four-year Food and Drink plan would complete shortly. It was intended that Council would commission a new plan to set out goals for the years 2027-2031.

A procurement exercise would be undertaken, subject to budget, to secure an independent facilitator to work with officers and stakeholders.

The Council continued to support the sector across a variety of mechanisms as reported above, and officers looked forward to the development of the next Food and Drink Development Plan in shaping the next four years of support.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Councillor Blaney proposed, seconded by Councillor Brady, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor Blaney, stated that the report was fantastic particularly as the Council had stepped up in respect of this sector. He acknowledged that generally Agri Food businesses remained in situ where they had originally setup and that was to be welcomed particularly as they often brought in contractors from outside the Borough who would then stay in hotels. Continuing Councillor Blaney commented that he would welcome further LEP Funding invested in this sector which would lead to an increase in the non-domestic rate. Overall, he was delighted with what was being proposed and was therefore happy to support.

The seconder Councillor Brady indicated that he had nothing further to add.

Councillor McCollum noted within the report reference to Good Food Ireland (GFI) and how the Council had been the first Council in Northern Ireland to join. She had had the pleasure of meeting representatives from GFI at the Taste AND event held at Bangor Castle in the Autumn and welcomed that the Council's relationship with GFI was being used as a best practice model. She congratulated the Head of Tourism and her team for their work undertaken in respect of this.

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

6. ARTS AND HERITAGE PANEL MINUTES – SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER 2025 (FILE ART 01 09/11 25) (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the Arts and Heritage Panel was an advisory body comprising five Elected Members and 12 voluntary specialists from the arts and heritage sector. The elected members on the Panel were nominated annually at the Council AGM and by public advertisement/application process for the voluntary specialists whose term of office ran concurrent to the four-year term of Council (2023-2027).

The Panel met five times per annum in February, April, June (familiarisation visit), September (AGM) and November. Officers present reports on recent activity that had taken place across the Arts and Heritage Service and discussed topics relevant to the service.

Minutes of the Annual General meeting (AGM) that took place on Monday 1 September could be found at the Appendix and minutes of the meeting that took place on Monday 3 November could also be found attached within the Appendix.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the AGM minutes and the November minutes of the Arts and Heritage Panel meetings.

Councillor Smart proposed, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor Smart, indicated that he was very happy to propose the recommendation and took the opportunity to express his thanks to Catherine Charley for her role as Chairperson. One aspect which he felt was necessary to draw to the attention of the Committee was the fact that currently North Down Museum did not have a Collections Manager in post. He believed the Collections could potentially be at risk due to the conditions in which they were kept at Bangor Castle, which in turn could lead to issues with the Museum retaining its accreditation. It was noted that there were also issues around ownership of some of the collection pieces. As such Councillor Smart commented that he would welcome any confirmation that funds were being set aside for this as part of the ongoing rate setting process.

In response the Director suggested that members looked closely at the forthcoming rates pack once circulated as a resolution to those issues may be included within it.

Concurring with the comments made by Councillor Smart, the seconder Councillor Thompson remarked that the work carried out by the Panel was very focused on the offering to visitors. Arts and Heritage were a big draw for tourism and as such he thanked the Panel for their efforts undertaken to date.

Councillor McCollum took the opportunity to also express her thanks to the Panel.

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

7. BANGOR WATERFRONT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT UPDATE (FILE RDP22/RDP56)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity updating members on upcoming public engagement activity for the Pickie Fun Park and Ballyholme Yacht Club (BYC) Watersports Centre projects within the Bangor Waterfront programme under the Belfast Region City Deal, and to note related queries from residents.

Background

Informal Public Information Sessions (outside the formal planning process) were held for:

- **Pickie Fun Park** on 27 September 2025 at Carnegie Library, with concept design boards presented by the Integrated Consultancy Team (McAdam) and Council officers. Feedback was largely positive.

- **BYC Watersports Centre** on 10 October 2025, with concept proposals presented by WH Stephens/Kennedy Fitzgerald Architects and Council officers. Feedback was largely positive.

Both projects had since progressed into the formal planning process (PAN/PACC).

Ongoing Communications

Regular updates would continue via the Bangor Waterfront ezine and the Council's engagement platform GoVocal, providing transparent, accessible information and opportunities for feedback across the programme.

Member Update – Public Queries

Following the initial public information sessions, several queries were received and responded to by officers in relation to Pickie Fun Park. Some queries had subsequently been raised with the Minister (DfC) by residents. Officers would continue to engage constructively and provide factual responses through the appropriate channels.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

The proposer, Councillor Morgan, thanked officers for the report but expressed disappointment around the lack of detail around the numbers which had attended the information sessions. She stated that it would have been helpful to have that information included in the report

The Capital Project Manager indicated that details of the numbers which had attended the information sessions could be provided to members.

Commenting as seconder, Councillor McCollum agreed that it would be useful if the report could come back with those further details and include a breakdown of the positive and negative feedback.

The Director confirmed that a more detailed report could be brought back for members to consider and apologised for the lack of detail in the report which had been presented to them.

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

8. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

REPORTS WITH DELEGATED AUTHORITY FOR APPROVAL

9. DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO PLACE AND PROSPERITY COMMITTEE 8 JANUARY 2026 – VARIANCE REQUEST – BALLYWALTER PATHWAY – SMALL SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATION (FILE RDP 236)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that as members would be aware a report was presented to October's Place and Prosperity Committee in relation to the Ballywalter School Path Improvement Project. The project was to be funded under the Small Settlements Programme and aimed to address flooding in this key connectivity route.

It was agreed to defer the decision by one month to enable an Elected Member and Michelle McIlveen MLA to engage with the Education Authority to attempt to overcome the concerns around the Education Authority's position on the liability issue of the path if the project was to be completed.

A meeting was arranged and hosted by Michelle McIlveen MLA and took place on Thursday 27 November 2025 and included representatives from the Education Authority (EA), Alderman Robert Adair and Council officers. Following the meeting, EA representatives had continued engagement with Ms McIlveen and had confirmed that improvement works to the pathway would be completed by the EA, which would include resurfacing. This was welcome news and a positive outcome, emphasising collaboration to address the flooding issue effectively.

It was suggested that the proposed works to be completed by the EA may be complemented by the Council carrying out drainage works to the boundary of the football pitch that connected to the pathway. This could be completed internally using existing service budgets.

In light of this, it was now proposed to reallocate the Small Settlements budget to new projects, which would enable the Council to address other opportunities within the village and as detailed in the Village Plan.

Members would recall alternative projects where detailed in the October report and included the following:

1. Seating – specifically the restoration of seating along the promenade harbour and at the bottom of Stump Road where this had been removed or destroyed in adverse weather conditions.
2. Bus Shelter – a new and improved bus shelter on the Main Street to encourage more people to use public transport, making their journey more appealing and accessible.
3. Wayfinding Signage – providing clear and accessible signage that encouraged pedestrians and cyclists to explore the village.

It was proposed that officers met with the Ballywalter Community Action Group to discuss the proposed projects and to agree which to take forward, ensuring collaborative decision-making and alignment.

It should be noted that any new project(s) must align with the objectives of the Small Settlements Programme to obtain the relevant approvals.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees to remove the path project from the Small Settlements Programme as the Education Authority has given a commitment to take this forward. Also, that it tasks officers to proceed to engage the Ballywalter Community Group on suitable projects to take forward and then submit a variance request to the Department for the relevant approvals.

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

The proposer, Alderman Adair stated that this was a very positive outcome to what had been a long-standing issue for the village of Ballywalter, having initially been brought forward as a Notice of Motion back in 2020. Alderman Adair expressed his thanks to the Director and officer team, the principal of Ballywalter Primary School and Michelle McIlveen MLA for all of their help in getting this matter to a successful conclusion. Members were advised that EA had now agreed to carry out the required works enabling the funding to be redirected to other projects in Ballywalter village. Alderman Adair reiterated his thanks to Michelle McIlveen MLA for her invaluable assistance adding that it had demonstrated what working together could achieve.

Also thanking the Director and the officer team, the seconder, Councillor Edmund, agreed that it had been a long time in coming to fruition. He too acknowledged the invaluable assistance provided by Michelle McIlveen MLA and thanked Alderman Adair for his perseverance in respect of this matter.

Councillor Hennessy agreed that it was a great outcome but expressed disappointment and frustration with the EA particularly as it had taken the intervention of the former Education Minister Michelle McIlveen MLA to bring the matter to a successful conclusion.

Concurring with all of the previous comments Councillor Smart also expressed his thanks to Michelle McIlveen MLA, Alderman Adair and Council officers for their perseverance. He welcomed that the funding could now be redirected to make a number of improvements in and around the village. One point he wished to make was that as the EA was in debt of up to £300M he could not understand why it had not wished to proceed with the Council's initial proposal for it to provide the funding to carry out the improvement works.

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

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

10. INNOVATION HUB SITE (FILE DEV23) (Appendix IV)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

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

SUMMARY

This report is recommending that the site for the proposed Holywood Screen Industries innovation hub is located on the site currently occupying the Queens Community Centre.

11. EXTENSION OF TOURISM EVENT CONTRACTS 2026-27 (FILE TO/PRO81)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

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

SUMMARY

This report is recommending that following satisfactory annual reviews the four existing Events Contracts are extended for a further one year 1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.25pm.

Unclassified

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ITEM 7.3.1**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	28 January 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	15 January 2026
File Reference	RDP43
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Delegated Authority to Place and Prosperity Committee 05 February 2026 – Variance Request Urban Regeneration Programme
Attachments	

Background

As Members will be aware that officers continue to work with DfC officials to deliver the Urban Regeneration Programme. This is a programme of three distinct strands of regeneration initiatives focused on animation, placemaking and connectivity.

Changes to projects have resulted in an identified underspend. Officers are working closely with DfC to review options for alternative projects. Any changes must align with the programme objectives and achievable within the programme timescale.

Timeframes within this funding period, 31st March 2026, are now extremely close, particularly given the time required by officers to suitably inform a variance request and for DfC to accept such and complete the relevant processes.

Not Applicable

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council gives delegated authority to the Place and Prosperity Committee on 5 February 2026 to agree any revised projects and to make the variance request to DfC.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via zoom) meeting of the Corporate Services Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, and via Zoom, on Tuesday 13 January 2026 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Cochrane

Aldermen: Brooks
Graham
McIlveen (Zoom)
McRandal
Smith

Councillors: Irvine, S McBurney (Zoom)
Irvine, W McCracken
Kennedy (19:01) Moore

Officers in Attendance: Acting Director of Corporate Services (C Jackson), Head of Administration (A Curtis), Head of Finance (S Grieve), and Democratic Services Officer (S McCrea)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Chambers, Gilmour and Irwin.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were notified.

Reports for Approval

3. NOTICE OF MOTION UPDATE – UDR MEMORIAL

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that in June 2025 Council agreed, on the proposal of Councillor S Irvine, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the following Notice of Motion be adopted:

“Notes with deep respect the tragic loss of four Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) soldiers — John Bradley (25), John Birch (28), Steven Smart (23), and Michael Adams (23) — who were murdered in a 1,000lb IRA landmine attack on April 9, 1990, on the Ballydugan Road near Downpatrick.

Recognises the pain and sacrifice felt by their families, comrades, and the wider community, and acknowledges the bravery of these young men who served their country during a difficult period in our history.

Proposes that this Council supports the installation of a fitting and permanent tribute at the Newtownards cenotaph — either through an upgrade to the existing memorial or the addition of a dedicated memorial bench — in memory of these four brave young men.

Requests that this Council engage with the families of the fallen, veteran organisations, and local stakeholders to develop appropriate wording and design for the memorial addition, and to ensure the tribute is carried out with the dignity and sensitivity it deserves — and asks Officers to bring a report back with options and costings.”

Update

Following a site visit it was agreed that the existing memorial was in good condition and did not require replacement, however it was suggested that it be cleaned and that flowers in the surrounding flowerbed were replaced with the UDR rose/ peace rose. At the time of writing, the memorial contained the UDR crest and an inscription on the front.

Family and friends had fundraised and offered to gift a bench to the Council, however there was already a bench facing this memorial that provided a setting for quiet contemplation and commemoration. The gifting of the bench did not meet the Council's memorial bench policy, and it was instead being located at Ards Bowling Club (agreed by the board). Appendix 1 showed the current bench location, rose and inscription.

Officers engaged with the families of the fallen and local stakeholders on 28 November 2025. This was an opportunity to discuss ideas and to start to develop appropriate wording and design for a panel/plaques that would deliver a dignified and sensitive tribute. Final wording/ design would be agreed with the families' representatives.

Proposal

It was agreed that Officers bring the following options to Council for approval:

- Clean the existing memorial and repair any faded lettering (if required)
- Replant the existing flowerbed with UDR rose
- Add plaques to existing bench facing the memorial
- Add a panel of further explanation, with a QR code for further information
- Unveil the new memorial - it is proposed that this would take place around the 9 April anniversary and include a short ceremony following by refreshments at Ards Bowling Club.

Costs

The estimated costs for this proposal were:

Memorial clean	Rosebed	Plaques	Panel	Refreshments	Total (est)
£200	£650	£100	£500	£100	£1550

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the request.

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

Councillor S Irvine gave thanks to the Head of Administration for delivery of this piece of work and for organising a meeting in November 2025. Councillor W Irvine shared his colleague's sentiment on what he described as a sensitive matter.

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

4. NI CENSUS USER NEEDS CONSULTATION

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services which informed Members about the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) consultation on the next Census and to outline Ards and North Down Borough Council's proposed response.

NISRA had launched a User Needs Consultation to help shape the content and approach for Census 2031. This consultation sought views on how data from Census 2021 had been used, what topics were to be included in the next Census, and whether alternative data sources could be used to reduce the burden on respondents.

The final decision on the content of Census 2031 would rest with the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Information

Census data was a vital resource for local government in Northern Ireland. It provided the most accurate and comprehensive picture of our population and households every ten years, which was essential for planning and delivering council services such as waste management, leisure facilities, community development and local infrastructure. It also informed strategic planning, supported evidence-based policy development and helped ensure compliance with statutory duties, including equality monitoring.

For Ards and North Down Borough Council, census data underpinned community planning, local development plans, and strategic decision-making. It helped identify demographic trends, such as the ageing population within the Borough, which influenced service priorities and investment decisions.

The Council was responding to this consultation to ensure that local needs and priorities were reflected in the design of Census 2031. By contributing to the consultation, the Council can advocate for data that supports strategic planning and service delivery, highlight gaps experienced in previous censuses, and influence the inclusion of emerging topics relevant to the area, such as housing affordability, digital connectivity, and health and wellbeing. In the proposed response, specific reference had been made to the need for data on travel to work and place of study, as well as income.

The closing date for responses was 4 February 2026.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the proposed response.

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

Alderman Smith referred to Item 6 within the consultation response and its categorisation, asking if an education/qualification based approach may have been a better approach. The Acting Director of Corporate Services advised that the Community Planning Officer who worked on the very detailed report was not present at the meeting. Information would be sought and returned to Alderman Smith.

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

5. BLAIR MAYNE BURSARY SUB COMMITTEE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services which explained that the Blair Mayne Bursary Fund was administered by a sub-committee of the Corporate Services Committee. Four awards of £1,000 were made annually to successful applicants under predetermined criteria.

The categories were:

- Sport
- Academic Study
- Adventure Training
- Disability Award.

A meeting of the subcommittee was held, in person, on Wednesday 3 December 2025 to establish the timetable for the forthcoming year and to review the Terms of reference and application process. The minutes had been attached at Appendix 1 and reviewed Terms of Reference at Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the minutes and Terms of Reference.

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

Councillor Moore spoke of the pleasure it had been to sit on the committee and see such positive outcomes as opportunities were broadened for young people, some of whom she described as both incredible and exemplary.

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

6. MINOR UPDATES TO LEARNING, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2025-2028

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services which detailed how the Council's Learning and Development Policy 2025 /2028 had been amended with two minor updates, as set out below and highlighted in the attached draft new version of the policy.

In line with the Policy Development Procedure, the suggested edits had been approved by Corporate Leadership Team and Heads of Service Team, and consultation had taken place via both the Local Trade Union Forum and Staff Consultative Committee.

1. Page 3 Suggested Edit

Replace current paragraph:

'For part-time study qualifications with no requirement for direct financial assistance e.g. Greenmount, employees must have passed the probationary stage.'

With new paragraph:

For part-time study qualifications with no requirement for direct financial assistance permanent employees must have passed the probationary stage and temporary employees must have at least 1 year's capacity in a temporary role.

2. Page 10 suggested additional paragraph

If an employee leaves the Council on continuous service to another local government organisation (as per Schedule 1 of The Redundancy Payments (Continuity of Employment in Local Government (Modification) Order (Northern Ireland) 1999), they are required to refund 50% of each of the figures in 1 to 3 above.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the 2 minor updates to the Learning, Training and Development Policy.

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

7. PETITION – FUTURE USE OF BANGOR CASTLE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that a petition had been received from the Chairman of North Down Traditional Unionist Voice.

The premise of the petition was as follows:

We, the undersigned, call upon Ards and North Down Borough Council to retain Bangor Castle in public ownership as its civic headquarters and to preserve its role as a municipal building for the people of Bangor and North Down.

Our request:

- 1) *Retain Bangor Castle as the civic headquarters of Ards and North Down Borough Council.*
- 2) *Safeguard its civic uses – including council meetings, receptions, weddings and access to the grounds and museum*
- 3) *Reject any proposals to convert Bangor Castle into a private hotel or commercial venue.*

The petition has been signed by 1,289 individuals – 623 via signed paper copies and 666 via online collection.

The full petition can be viewed by contacting the Acting Director of Corporate Services.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report which is circulated for information.

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

Councillor W Irvine welcomed the petition and great interest from local residents in the future of Bangor Castle. He was aware a consultation had been carried out and was curious if some brief feedback could be provided as well as if there would be any ongoing engagement.

The Acting Director of Corporate Services outlined that there had been a public engagement event in September 2025. Several hundred people had attended and many questions and concerns were addressed. A number of those who attended were keen to see the building maintained 'as is' and, as the petition suggested, to keep Bangor Castle for civic purposes. Other responses indicated an understanding of the challenges for Council in maintaining the building and the need for other ideas to be considered. There were also a number of queries about the wider regeneration of Bangor. She further advised that at this stage the Council had agreed in principle to look in more detail at the feasibility of the hotel option. The OBC (Outline Business Case) process was currently being worked through, and it was expected this would return to the Council meeting within the next few months for further consideration.

Alderman Smith acknowledged the concerns of local residents and commented that it was positive that the Council was committed to retaining ownership of the Castle and Castle Park grounds in any future scenario. Using the game, 'kerplunk,' to illustrate, he highlighted concern that there were many moving parts to regeneration plans and their future success(es) were predicated upon each other, such that if one were to fail, so too may all others.

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

8. NOTICE OF MOTION

8a. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor Hennessy

That this Council returns a report researching paternity leave provision for Council employees including but not limited to: benchmarking of paternity leave provision against appropriate organisations; options to improve paternity leave policy for council employees; projected costings of these options; and anything else officers deem prudent.

The Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Ashe and Councillor Hennessy was deferred to a future meeting.

8b. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum

That this Council notes with concern the increased cost of living and the impact this has upon families and individuals within the Borough; further notes that the absence of a clear Anti-Poverty Strategy makes it challenging to understand and strengthen our role in alleviating poverty and reducing inequality and therefore tasks Officers with bringing forward proposals to enhance the effectiveness of Council's contribution to poverty alleviation, including but not limited to, funding allocated to volunteer led community groups involved in poverty alleviation work. This work should complement, and not duplicate, any borough-wide Anti-Poverty action planning being undertaken by external partners.

Proposed by Councillor McBurney, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

[Councillor Moore initially seconded the Notice of Motion in Councillor McCollum's absence, however, was content to retract upon Councillor McCollum's arrival.]

Councillor McBurney spoke to a matter she considered of deep and growing concern for the Borough; the cost of living and the impact it was having on families, individuals, and communities across Ards and North Down. Inflation, rising energy bills, increasing housing costs and day-to-day essentials had been placing an unprecedented strain on household budgets. For too many constituents, this was a daily lived reality. Councillor McBurney wished to provide some evidence-based foundations to the Notice of Motion for members' awareness.

While Ards and North Down was often perceived as relatively affluent, the latest available data from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation showed that around 18% of people in the Borough were living in relative poverty, broadly in line with the Northern Ireland average. That meant nearly one in five residents were struggling to meet basic living costs. Child poverty remained a significant concern, and a growing number of people in work were finding wages simply did not stretch far enough in the face of rising food, energy and housing costs. Labour market pressures compounded

these challenges. Recent data showed that in Ards and North Down, nearly 30% of workers received less than a Real Living Wage, highlighting that paid work alone did not guarantee financial security for too many families.

She stressed that poverty in the Borough was multidimensional and often hidden, intersecting with health, housing and access to services. While the Council already funded a range of initiatives including social supermarkets, advice services, foodbanks and hardship schemes, these efforts were spread across different departments and funding streams, making it difficult to assess whether support was reaching those most in need. She noted declining funding for community groups despite rising demand and warned that the end of hardship funding from the Department for Communities created a serious gap.

Councillor McBurney advised the Committee that none of this suggested a lack of goodwill or effort, but it did demonstrate fragmentation. She argued that the current approach was fragmented and that the absence of a clear Anti-Poverty Strategy limited the Council's ability to act strategically. A strategy was needed to understand need, avoid duplication, support volunteer-led organisations effectively and ensure resources were used to maximum impact. The Notice of Motion sought to address this by asking officers to bring forward proposals to strengthen coordination and improve how the Council contributed to poverty alleviation. She emphasised that this was not about creating bureaucracy or seeking additional funding, but about clarity, accountability and ensuring the Council did everything within its remit to support residents. Poverty, she said, affected every community and required a thoughtful, evidence-led and collaborative response. She concluded by urging Members to support the Motion so the Council could play its full part in reducing poverty and inequality across the Borough.

As seconder, Councillor McCollum expressed her thanks to colleagues Connie Egan and Councillor McBurney for the significant work they had undertaken on this matter. She stressed the urgency of addressing poverty in a Borough often perceived as affluent. She highlighted significant levels of hidden deprivation, citing high rates of fuel poverty, food insecurity and low pay, as well as stark inequalities within Ards and North Down that were masked by outdated data. There were wider impacts of poverty, including poor health outcomes and rising drug related and suicide deaths, and emphasised the need for a long-term, preventative strategy.

Drawing on examples from local charities, Councillor McCollum described families struggling to meet basic needs and stressed that community and voluntary groups were under increasing pressure. She referenced the stigma associated with poverty that often prevented people from asking for help. The Council had an opportunity to lead a strengthened anti-poverty strategy based on robust local data, codesign with partners, reduced bureaucracy- and targeted support for those most in need. Councillor McCollum concluded that temporary measures were insufficient and that an ambitious, evidence led approach was required- to deliver lasting change.

Alderman McIlveen believed that a coordinated approach to poverty was essential and noted that, despite the Community Plan outlining various initiatives, the Council's efforts could appear fragmented without a unified strategy. He highlighted existing support such as social supermarkets and Poverty Forum engagement but

questioned whether baseline data from NISRA was still being received and whether it could be consolidated to strengthen the evidence base. He warned that without clear data, the Council risked criticism that its approach lacked foundation.

The Acting Director of Corporate Services advised that significant anti-poverty work was already under way across the Borough and that the Community Planning Manager was supportive of undertaking a scoping exercise that would give Members a better overview and understanding of the initiatives in place. This would take some time to collate as a number of services would need to provide insights but this effort would demonstrate the extent of current work, which could then inform next steps.

Alderman McIlveen welcomed this approach and acknowledged the substantial contribution of community groups and other external organisations. He raised no objections but stressed the need to avoid any perception that additional funding was being sought. He noted that other Councils' strategies focused on coordination and ensuring resources reached those most in need. He supported the proposal and agreed that bringing existing work together would be valuable.

Councillor McCracken welcomed the Notice of Motion and highlighted the high number of local workers not receiving the Living Wage, noting that the Borough's affluence often concealed significant in-work poverty. He suggested that the Council work with local businesses to promote the Living Wage and praised the voluntary and advisory sectors for their support to residents. Councillor McCracken had concerns about unclaimed benefits and encouraged exploring ways to quantify this gap. He also referenced the Preston Council Model as an example of how local procurement could help build community wealth and believed more spending could be retained within the Borough. He emphasised that the Notice of Motion was not about seeking extra funding but about strengthening collaboration to maximise local economic benefit, and he thanked those who had brought it forward.

Alderman Smith welcomed the Notice of Motion and agreed that coordinating existing anti-poverty work would be useful, but stressed that any strategy must be realistic and reflect the Council's limited resources. He highlighted the importance of growing the local economy to reduce poverty and said future reports should distinguish clearly between absolute and relative poverty. He noted that rates pressures affected households and that poverty was not solely financial, citing sub-area data showing hidden issues such as low educational outcomes. He concluded that while further action was possible, it must remain feasible and within the Council's remit.

Alderman Graham said Members were united in their concern for those facing poverty and stressed the importance of the Community Plan and partnership working. He highlighted rising private rents and increasing energy costs as major pressures, noting that wider housing demand and net zero policies had contributed to these challenges. While recognising the value of energy- efficiency initiatives, he observed- that bills continued to rise and that a clearer picture of household incomes and outgoings was needed, though he questioned whether the Council had the capacity to undertake such analysis. He confirmed his support for the Notice of Motion.

Councillor McBurney thanked Members for their constructive contributions and noted the shared emphasis on the need for a coordinated approach to poverty alleviation. She stated that the Council was already undertaking a range of relevant work and that it was important to review this collectively to understand its impact. Councillor McBurney had consulted the Community Planning Manager, who supported the Motion given that poverty alleviation was a core outcome of the Community Plan. She also highlighted Councillor McCollum's point about the stigma surrounding poverty, stressing that the aim was to ensure support reached those most in need, including those who did not seek help.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McBurney, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the Notice of Motion be noted.

9. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

10. EXTENSION OF CONTRACT FOR PROVISION OF CORPORATE UNIFORM, CASUAL UNIFORM, LEISURE UNIFORM AND PROTECTIVE WORKGEAR

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

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

The Council was asked to approve to extend the contract with the firms detailed below for all Lots within the Provision of Corporate Uniform, Casual Uniform, Leisure Uniform and Protective Workwear tender for a further one-year period from 4 February 2026 to 3 February 2027.

LOT		Supplier
1.	Protective Uniform	Banner
2.	Casual Uniform	PJD Safety Supplies
3.	Corporate Uniform	Healthy Bean
4.	Leisure Uniform	Healthy Bean

The recommendation was AGREED.

11. EXTENSION OF LEGAL SERVICES CONTRACT

IN CONFIDENCE

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

The Council was asked to approve to extend the Legal Services contract for the Lots detailed below with the named firms below, for a further one-year period from 1 February 2026 to 31 January 2027.

LOT	1 st Place	2 nd Place	3 rd Place
1	Cleaver Fulton Rankin	Carson McDowell	N/A
2	Moore McKay English	Cleaver Fulton Rankin	N/A
3	Cleaver Fulton Rankin	Lewis Silken (N.I.)	N/A
4	Moore McKay English	Cleaver Fulton Rankin	N/A
5	Cleaver Fulton Rankin	Arthur Cox	N/A
7	Napier & Sons	Carson McDowell	Arthur Cox

The recommendation was AGREED.

12. REQUEST FOR AN EASEMENT AT THE SQUARE, BALLYWALTER

IN CONFIDENCE

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

The Council was asked to consider the updated request from a property developer for an easement over Council Land at The Square, Ballywalter.

The recommendation was that Council agreed to the updated request for an easement.

The recommendation was AGREED.

13. REQUEST FROM NIE FOR A WAYLEAVE OVER COUNCIL LAND AT BALLYHALBERT WAR MEMORIAL, BALLYHALBERT

IN CONFIDENCE

5. Exemption: a claim to legal professional privilege

The Council was asked to consider a request from NIE for Wayleave over Council land at Ballyhalbert War Memorial, Ballyhalbert.

The recommendation was that Council accede to the request, subject to the terms and conditions outlined.

14. BALLYHOLME YACHT CLUB PROPOSALS – IMPACT ON ADJACENT COUNCIL LAND

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

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

The Council was asked to agree to a request that no future built development be permitted within an area of land adjacent to the proposed development of the new BYC complex.

The recommendation was that the request be acceded to and that consideration be given to registering this as a burden on the title of the subject land.

15. REQUEST FROM MARKET PLACE EUROPE LIMITED TO HOLD AN INTERNATIONAL MARKET AT CONWAY SQUARE, MAY 2026

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

The Council was asked to consider a request from Market Place Europe Limited to hold an International Market on Conway Square in May 2026.

The recommendation was that Council accede to the request, subject to the terms and conditions outlined.

16. ESTIMATES UPDATE

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

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

The Council was asked to consider the final update regarding setting budgets and district rates for the 2026/27 financial year.

The recommendation was that the Council notes the report.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 20:29.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) meeting of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, and via Zoom, on Wednesday 14 January 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Ashe

Alderman: Brooks
Cummings

McRandall:

Councillors: Boyle Kerr (Zoom)
Cochrane McBurney (Zoom)
Hollywood (Zoom) McClean
Irvine, S McKee (Zoom)
Irvine, W Moore

Other Elected Members in attendance: Councillor Kendall (Zoom) and Councillor Wray

Officers in Attendance: Director of Active and Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Head of Community and Culture (N Dorrian), Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services (G Kinnear), Head of Leisure (A Cozzo) and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

Other Officers in Attendance: Mr Chris Kelly (NCLT) via Zoom

1. APOLOGIES AND CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chair took the opportunity to congratulate the Head of Leisure and the Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services following their recent appointments.

Apologies had been received from Councillor Chambers and Councillor Douglas.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest and the following were notified:

Councillor W Irvine – Item 4 - Ards and North Down Borough Council Leisure Pricing Policy For 2026/27.

NOTED.

3. **RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 671 - RESPONSIBLE DOG WALKING IN PUBLIC PLACES (FILE NOM 671)**

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that a Notice of Motion relating to Responsible Dog Walking in Public Spaces was agreed by Council in September 2025. It stated that the Council, as a Dog Friendly Borough, recognised the need to balance animal welfare, public safety, and shared use of parks and footpaths. It raised concerns about individuals walking multiple dogs, the rise of unlicensed professional dog walkers without insurance, and the associated risks to people and pets. It noted that other councils, including Belfast City Council, had introduced limits on the number of dogs walked at one time and suggested similar measures be considered.

More specifically, the Notice of Motion proposed that the Council resolves to:

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

Point 1 - Costs and Steps Required for Introduction of DCO

In response to point 1, Section 40 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environments Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 empowered district councils to make Dog Control Orders (DCO) applying to land within their district that is open to the air and accessible to the public (with or without payment). These orders created offences relating to the control of dogs, as specified in regulations made by the Department (DAERA).

The offences that might be included in such orders were:

- Failing to remove dog faeces;
- Not keeping a dog on a lead;
- Permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded;
- Taking more than a specified number of dogs onto land.

Orders had to clearly identify the land to which they applied and could include provisions on times or periods of operation and compliance with directions given by authorised officers.

The steps for making a Dog Control Order (DCO) were set out in the Dog Control Orders (Procedures) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. Before issuing or amending a DCO, the Council had to carry out a public consultation by publishing a notice both in a local newspaper serving the area and on the Council's website.

The consultation notice was required to:-

- Clearly identify the land to which the proposed order applied.
- Provide a summary of the order's provisions.
- Indicate where any referenced map may be inspected, free of charge, during normal hours.
- Invite representations from the public regarding the proposal.
- Specify a closing date for submissions, which must be at least 28 days from the first publication of the notice.

As the Nom had identified both the lands included and the provisions of the proposed DCO, the next significant step in the process would be to carry out the consultation exercise. This would be carried out by the Council's Communications Team, who would also arrange for the publishing of the notice in the press. It was proposed that the notice be advertised twice during the 28-day submission period. The Communications Team had estimated that the cost of running the exercise was unlikely to exceed £2,000.

If there was a significant response to the public consultation, additional administrative support may be required in the Neighbourhood Environment Team for a short period to process the data received. There is unlikely to be a significant cost, as support will also be available from the Property Data Collection Officer in Environmental Health and Regulatory Services. It is not possible to predict the scale of the response to the public consultation; however, it is likely that there will be opposition from professional dog walkers.

Following completion of the consultation exercise, the findings would be reported to Council to seek Members' opinion on whether they wished to proceed with making the DCO. If the DCO was agreed, the Order should be made by virtue of receiving the Council's official seal, although the date of it becoming enacted was required to be at least 14 days following this step.

In deciding whether to implement the DCO, Members were asked to consider the following additional costs: -

- Although the DCO would apply to all open public space in the Borough, there would be a requirement to place new signs at Council owned sites that were frequented by dog walkers and where 'Dogs on Leads' Orders were already in place. It was estimated that the cost of new signage would be approximately £50K.
- At present there were 12 'Dogs on Leads' Orders in the Borough, covering the following locations: -

- Ballyholme Promenade
- Bangor Seafront Promenade and Piers
- Bangor Seafront Gardens
- Bangor Sportsplex
- Marine Gardens, Bangor
- Pickie Fun Park
- Seapark Recreational Grounds
- Walled Garden, Castle Park
- Ward Park
- Wetlands Park, Balloo
- Station Road
- Londonderry Park, Newtownards

Implementing a Borough-wide DCO would substantially increase the area subject to added restrictions. Members should therefore consider whether additional enforcement resources would be required to increase compliance. While most residents were unlikely to walk more than four dogs at once, professional dog walkers would likely be affected. Evidence suggested that some businesses from Belfast currently used parks within this Borough due to restrictions in their own area. Initial enforcement efforts should therefore focus on locations near the Belfast boundary to promote awareness and compliance.

If Members decided to approve the employment of additional Neighbourhood Environment Team staff to support enforcement and compliance, the following cost implications should be taken into account. These figures were based on one full time officer. However, given the scale of the proposed DCO, the Service may have required up to three additional officers to ensure adequate coverage of the Borough.

	Cost Year 1	Cost Year 2
Salary	£38K	£38.6K
IT	£5K	£2K
Vehicle Provision	£36K	
Vehicle Running Costs	£7K	£8K
Total	£86K	£48.6

Point 2 - Mandating Restrictions for Professional Dog Walkers

In response to Point 2 in the NoM, under existing legislation, the Council did not have the authority to impose restrictions solely on professional dog walkers. At present, DCOs only permitted local authorities to introduce measures that applied to *any person* in public spaces. Therefore, any requirement targeting professional dog walkers specifically would require new primary legislation or the creation of a dedicated byelaw. The introduction of new primary legislation would be the most effective and sustainable approach; however, this process was significantly longer and lay beyond the Council's direct control.

Point 3 - Public Education Campaign

With regard to Point 3, the estimated cost of a complementary education campaign was £5,000 in Year 1 and £1,000 in Year 2. The campaign would include press and billboard advertisements across the Borough. Additionally, information on any new

DCO and guidance on responsible dog ownership would be provided with each new dog licence and in the first renewal letters during the initial year of implementation.

Point 4 - Letter to DAERA Minister

A draft letter had been included as Appendix 1. The letter requested that the DAERA Minister introduced a mandatory registration system for professional dog walkers. It highlighted the need for this measure to ensure high standards of animal welfare, appropriate training and experience, adequate insurance, and improved public safety in shared spaces. The letter also sought financial support from DAERA to enable councils to effectively enforce these requirements.

Costs Summary

The table overleaf provided a summary of the estimated costs that would be incurred in implementing the full proposals contained in NoM 671. Stage 1 covered the public consultation exercise only. Should Members have agreed to proceeding to Stage 1, a further report would be brought to Council upon completion of the consultation. At that point, approval would be sought on the implementation of Stage 2 and the allocation of additional enforcement resources, should Members have decided this was appropriate.

Proposed Costs Summary

Item	Year 1 costs	Year 2 costs	Total cost	Notes
Stage 1				
Public Consultation Exercise	£2,000	-	£2,000	Includes press notices
Stage 2 – Should Council approve following consultation				
Signage for Council sites	£50,000	-	£50,000	New signs at locations frequented by dog walkers
Additional Enforcement Officer (Salary)	£38,000	£38,600	£76,600 (and continuing)	Per full time officer
IT Provision for Enforcement Officer	£5,000	£2,000	£7,000	Initial setup and ongoing costs
Vehicle Provision	£36,000	-	£36,000	Purchase cost
Vehicle Running Costs	£7,000	£8,000	£15,000	Fuel, maintenance
Public Education Campaign	£5,000	£1,000	£6,000	Press and billboard ads
Total (1 officer)	£143,000	£49,600	£192,600	Approximate combined costs
Total (3 officers)	£315,000	£146,800	£461,800	

RECOMMENDED that Council approves:

- the undertaking of a public consultation exercise on the proposed Dog Control Order; and

- that the draft letter, attached as Appendix 1, is sent to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs of Northern Ireland.

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that a further report be brought back to the Committee to outline the proposed wording and content of the proposed public consultation. That would include, but not be limited to, options with regards to maximum number of dogs and geographical area/scope against which any restriction might apply.

That the draft letter, attached in Appendix 1, is sent to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs of Northern Ireland.

Speaking to his proposal, Councillor McKee thanked officers for putting together the report, noting that it had given Members plenty to think about when considering potential steps to respond to the issue. He felt that a consultation was not only something the Council must do, but the right thing to do before making any potential changes. Although the report proposed the minimum required for such a consultation, he believed the Council should set a higher bar and provide the public with options, encouraging informative engagement on specifics such as the number of dogs to be restricted and whether the whole borough or only Council land should be included in the order.

He said that the Council had the opportunity to provide a quality consultation and gather valuable information and insight by offering options and sampling the views of all those affected by potential changes to the Dog Control Order. While acknowledging that Members did not want to delay decision-making, he felt the Committee could be better informed on the potential options to be included in a consultation, ensuring the approach was right before seeking the public's views.

The proposer explained that he and Councillor Kendall had brought the Notice of Motion because they believed the Council should be committed to ensuring a 'Dog Friendly Borough' - a place where animal welfare, public safety, and the enjoyment of shared spaces were respected and protected. He emphasised the need to keep public spaces safe and accessible for all, including families, joggers, cyclists, and those uneasy around animals.

He noted that dog ownership had evolved, with professional dog-walking services increasing to meet modern demands. While many were responsible, he said the lack of regulation posed risks to public safety and animal welfare, and therefore writing to the Minister was something that should not be delayed.

Turning to the associated costed option in the report, he highlighted that Belfast City Council did not have signage informing the public of restrictions, and there was no imperative for this Council to do so. He acknowledged that other restrictions were already detailed on existing signage but suggested that if changes to the control order were implemented in future, the Council could proceed without additional signage or introduce it only when signage required replacement.

Councillor McKee added that although additional officers to support dog control would be welcome, there was nothing compelling the Council to increase staffing

because of any changes. He stated that nothing prevented the Council from promoting behavioural change in a way that did not incur significant cost.

The seconder Councillor Cochrane felt that the proposal was sensible and agreed that it was important to have an effective consultation. He felt fair points had been made around the geographical locations and the number of dogs and he was keen to see that explored further with a follow up report before it went to the Minister for consideration. He also referred to public concern on the issue of dog control and felt that further Council action was warranted.

Councillor W Irvine added his support, welcoming the opportunity for increased scrutiny and he noted concerns from professional dog walkers about being excluded from the decision-making process. He urged for full engagement with the affected groups throughout this process.

Alderman McRandal expressed concern about the significant costs reported and recalled only ever receiving a single complaint in his own DEA in relation to Redburn Country Park, this was despite concerns of professional dog walkers coming from other Council areas where restrictions were already in place. He therefore questioned whether the level of the issue warranted such significant costs and resource implications. He was happy to support the proposal however but was not optimistic about funding from other Departments.

Councillor McClean, whilst supportive of the proposal, expressed similar concerns particularly about salary costs which he estimated to be in the region of £700,000 over the length of a Council term if the reported costs excluded employer contributions.

He recalled previous concerns he had raised over the latest enforcement figures which showed a reduced number of fines that Council was issuing for littering and dog fouling issues. Historically those figures had been much higher and he wanted to see Council achieve those levels again before committing to further staffing costs in relation to this proposal.

He agreed that it was important to refine the phrasing of the consultation but sought clarification that the consultation was not a commitment to that expenditure or any further action.

The Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services referred to the advertising cost for the consultation and clarified there was no further financial commitment beyond that. A report highlighting the findings of the consultation would be returned to the Committee before any further action.

Councillor McClean was content with that approach but, referring to previous concerns, he felt there was a wider discussion to be had on where the main issues of dog control laid generally.

The Chair sought clarity on the projected salary costs and if those included all employer contributions and the officer confirmed that all costs were included in the figures provided.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that a further report be brought back to the Committee to outline the proposed wording and content of the proposed public consultation. This will include, but not be limited to, options with regards to maximum number of dogs and geographical area/scope against which any restriction might apply.

That the draft letter, attached in Appendix 1, is sent to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs of Northern Ireland.

(Councillor W Irvine withdrew from the meeting due to a declaration of interest in Item 4 – 7.13 pm)

4. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL LEISURE PRICING POLICY FOR 2026/27 (FILE LEI26)

(Appendix II – VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members would recall Council agreed that annual price increases in line with or below inflation were brought to Committee for awareness and that only in the event of significant increase above this level was Council authorisation required.

This report brought to Members attention the price increase that would be applied by both Leisure Ards and North Down (LARDS) (Appendix 1 and 2) and Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT) and Serco (Appendix 4, 5 and 6) for the coming year 2026/27.

Appendix 1 and 2 detailed the prices that would be applied to customers across the service for our directly managed sites at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC), Comber Leisure Centre (CLC), Portaferry Sports Centre (PSC). Details of the price increase for Sports Development were also included. These prices detailed an approximate 3.8% increase to reflect that officers believed activity pricing was close to the maximum that the market would take, rounded to a more workable figure in terms of cash handling and /or facility subdivision, i.e., if a hall was divided into courts etc.

The pricing proposal for LARDS detailed new commercial rates for facilities which previously never charged this rate. This would permit LARDS centres to be more commercially focused on their operations. Appendix 3 covered the facilities with the new price.

Appendix 3 also covered the price increase for hiring 2 courts in the Dome at CLC. The current price being charged for historical bookings was less than the standard price. It was proposed to bring the historical price in line with the standard price over a three-year period. This equated to a 33% increase each year over the three-year period commencing from 1st April 2026.

Appendix 4, 5 and 6 detailed the prices NCLT/Serco would be charging its customers from 1st January 2026. This was for information only as Elected Members would be aware that Council had no authority to set prices as per the current contract with NCLT/Serco. However, most of the prices from Serco were in line with Council directly managed sites.

Appendix 7 showed the pricing differences and comparable prices managed by NCLT and LARDS.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the pricing proposal for Leisure Ards and North Down effective from 1st April 2026 and furthermore notes the prices being applied by the Northern Community Leisure Trust effective from 1st January 2026.

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

Councillor Boyle felt that most people would recognise the necessity for slight price increases occasionally, but he felt there was disparity between the two pricing models within the Borough, expressing strong personal preference to having a single in-house delivery model. He noted that the in-house model covering leisure services in Ards provided 70% of services cheaper than NCLT/Serco services in the North Down area. He praised the in-house delivery team for managing the Ards price increases responsibly.

The seconder, Alderman McRandal, felt that the increases were responsible and fair, in the context that only a minority of residents used leisure services. He was content that there was parity in the price comparisons, but for transparency he was pleased to see that the pricing structures for each delivery model had been presented alongside each other, a format he had requested previously. He sought clarification around the Council's authority to set the pricing of NCLT delivered services and the Head of Leisure advised that NCLT was solely responsible for setting its pricing although Council officers did meet with NCLT to discuss pricing on an annual basis. The Director explained that it would be difficult for Council to control NCLT's pricing mid-contract, noting that Council had not taken up that option from the start. She added that Council could consider including such a stipulation in any future contract, however.

Councillor Cochrane referred to contact from an individual regarding Active Ageing and pricing equality in racket sports between tennis, pickle ball, table tennis and badminton. He was pleased to see that tennis had been included in Active Ageing but asked for confirmation that there was pricing equality for racket sports right across the Borough. Responding, the officer understood that was the case and referred Members to items highlighted in yellow which showed price parity.

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

(Councillor W Irvine returned to the meeting – 7.23 pm)

5. DRAFT EVAWG FUNDING APPLICATION 2026-2028 (FILE PCSP1)

(Appendix IX – X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework 2024-31 was launched by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on the 16th of September 2024, following a Ministerial Statement to the Assembly. The Strategy included a first Delivery Plan (2024-26) which would support those organisations working to prevent and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and culture that could lead to violence against women and girls.

ANDBC received a letter dated 24 November 2025 (Appendix 1) asking ANDBC to submit a new 2-year plan from April 2026-March 2028 subject to funding. The plan should include both the grants scheme and momentum activities for that period. Date of submission for the 2-year plan was 8th December 2025.

Appendix 2 was the draft action plan submitted to TEO subject to council approval for 2026-2028. The draft action plan continued to build awareness and momentum in communities, and supported awards for EVAWG funding through the 3 tiers:

Award available	2026	2027
Tier 1- £1k - £5k	£30,000	£30,000
Tier 2- £5k - £15k	£60,000	£60,000
Tier 3- £15k - £20k	£100,000	£100,000
Total		

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the draft application form for EVAWG funding 2026-2028.

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

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Moore, welcomed the report and praised how active the Council had been in this area.

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

6. GOOD RELATIONS ACTION PLAN 2026-2027 (FILE GREL415)

(Appendix XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that funding for the Council's Good Relations Programme was provided by The Executive Office (75%) and match funded by the Council (25%). The award is made based on an assessment of an annual Action Plan which reflected the needs and priorities of the Borough, detailed in the Council's approved Good Relations Strategy (2025-28).

The Executive Office (TEO) required the Council's annual Action Plan (2026-2027) to be submitted for consideration in January 2026, therefore the attached Action Plan had been submitted to TEO in draft format, subject to Council approval. The Plan had been submitted on the basis that 100% budget would be available.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the 2026-27 Good Relations Action Plan.

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

Councillor Boyle reflected on the value of the Good Relations Action Plan and challenges that were faced throughout the year in terms of community relations but stated that it was important for Council to keep going with it.

Councillor W Irvine welcomed the Action Plan and the ongoing work to improve community relations. He noted that school trips to the Somme battlefields were no longer part of the programme and expressed disappointment at the loss of the educational benefit this had provided in the past.

The Head of Community and Culture explained that the Covid-19 Pandemic and reduced funding had led to a shift towards a locally based programme involving a visit to the Somme Centre in Conlig. This revised programme was able to accommodate a higher number of schools and therefore engage more participants. A return to the previous model could not be ruled out however if further funding became available.

Councillor W Irvine queried the loss of the sporting element of the programme and the officer explained that much of that delivery had been picked up under the PEACEPLUS programme. Again, should Good Relations funding be increased, the officer explained that those elements could return to the programme.

Alderman Cummings queried external funding continuity issues due to the late release of funding from the NI Executive which impacted programme delivery. He asked if officers could establish a pattern of continuity and the officer acknowledged the difficulties caused by a drip-feeding approach throughout the year and advised that 100% of funding had been requested as early as possible into the new financial year, which had been the case historically.

Alderman Cummings felt that approach had been much more effective and highlighted the importance of officers continuing to put that message across when making returns to the relevant Departments.

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

7. UPDATE ON BATHING WATERS IN ANDBC - NOMINATION OF ADDITIONAL BEACHES (FILE PCA100)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Environmental Health and Regulatory Services collaborated with DAERA in relation to designated bathing waters in the Borough.

The formal bathing season in Northern Ireland operated between 1st June and 15th September each year. During this period, DAERA regularly monitored water quality at designated sites. The Council acted as bathing water operator for several beaches in the Borough, which required us to display and communicate water quality information to the public, including rapidly responding to any poor results.

At the Community and Wellbeing Committee meeting in May 2025, Members were informed that Donaghadee and Brompton Bay beaches had been formally identified as designated bathing waters, bringing the total in the Borough to 9. At the meeting, Members requested that the Council liaise with DAERA to assess the suitability of Portavogie (Anchor Park Beach) and Ballyhalbert (Burr Point) for designation as official bathing waters under the Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008.

Officers therefore wrote to DAERA, requesting that they consider the additional sites. The initial response stated that they were undertaking a review of the process for nominating beaches, and that they would provide an update later in 2025.

In late November, DAERA advised that a formal consultation exercise will commence in Spring 2026. They have requested that we submit our nominations during this consultation period, by which time updated criteria for the designation of bathing waters will have been established.

A further update will be provided when information relating to the public consultation and criteria for nomination are published by DAERA.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

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

Alderman Brooks welcomed the new designations for Brompton and Donaghadee beaches and queried eligibility for existing funding at those locations. The Head of Community and Culture advised that the relevant funding avenues were now closed but she confirmed that, as designated locations, both could now be considered for future funding opportunities.

Councillor McKee welcomed the designations and the potential for more, recognising the size of the Borough's coastline. He felt it was important for the Council to reach out to communities and support and encourage people to enjoy the benefits.

The Director added that a further report would follow when the Department was next seeking nominations for designations and this would provide opportunities for further suggestions.

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

8. UPDATE ON QUARTER 1 & 2 FOR EVAWG FUNDING (FILE PCSP1)

(Appendix XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework 2024-31 was launched by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on the 16th of September 2024, following a Ministerial Statement to the Assembly. The Strategy included a first Delivery Plan (2024-26) which would support those organisations working to prevent and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and culture that could lead to violence against women and girls.

ANDBC welcomed initial Momentum funding of £60,000 to be used by 31st March 2025 with Local Change Fund of £120,000 in April 2025. Momentum funding was used to deliver:

- Events to raise awareness of the Executive Office Change fund 2025-2026,
- Provide training to the local Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) on EVAWG to build their capacity to apply for Change fund,
- Provide staff training
- Establish a Council EVAWG media campaign before March 2025.

The Local Change Fund was currently supporting 11 successful grants across 3 Tiers.

Award available	Number of successful grants	Total Amount Awarded	Number of Unsuccessful Grants
Tier 1- £1k - £5k	5	£20,161	4
Tier 2- £5k - £15k	3	£34,202.08	1
Tier 3- £15k - £20k	3	£65,643.60	6
Total	11	£120,006.08	11

Appendix 1a detailed how the Successful EVAWG grants were progressing over Quarters 1 and 2.

Additional funding had been awarded to council for EVAWG during 2025-26. Updates on this would be brought back to council.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the update on the EVAWG grants for Quarters 1 and 2.

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

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Moore, welcomed the Council's proactive approach on such projects.

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

9. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

9.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Douglas and Alderman Cummings

That this council is deeply concerned regarding the length of time that people battling with Motor Neurone Disease must wait to receive help through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Disabled Facilities Grant.

To write to the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Minister for Communities to ask what the current length of time is for MND sufferers to have home adaptations completed and to ask them to implement a scheme to fast track these vital and much needed home adaptions.

The Chair advised that she had received a request from the proposer to defer to the Notice of Motion to the next meeting. Members indicated agreement to this.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the Notice of Motion be deferred to the February meeting of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

9.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Chambers

Council acknowledges the vital role that our voluntary community groups play across the borough. Through our grants programmes these groups deliver initiatives such as community events, sporting activities, and festivals promoting tourism.

As we rely on these groups to continue this important work across the borough, we must ensure they are supported, and that the management of these grants is easy to navigate.

Advance payments are essential for small organisations who don't have large reserve sums of money in their bank accounts. Another complication for groups is being passed across various council departments during the delivery of their initiative.

In order to improve this process, Officers will bring back a report considering the implications of making the following changes:

- The advance payments available to groups is extended to 80%.
- If a group is successful in a funding application they will be allocated an officer within council who will act as the only point of contact between the group and Council.

(Councillor Wray was invited forward from the public gallery to propose the above Notice of Motion – 7.32 pm)

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

Councillor Wray explained that he was bringing the Notice of Motion following his own observations and after being contacted by many smaller community groups across the Borough, including the Ards Peninsula, North Down, Ards, and Comber.

Sport, the arts, community development, community relations, community festivals, and the promotion of tourism were all very important - both to the people of the Borough and in meeting the Council's objectives. He noted that these initiatives were detailed in the Council's 'Big Plan', which aimed to create a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe, and prosperous community by 2032. These objectives could be met through direct delivery and through partnership working with statutory bodies, citizens, and community organisations.

Continuing, Councillor Wray highlighted that the Notice of Motion acknowledged the vital role of voluntary community groups. He referred to Christmas festivals held the previous month in Portaferry, Portavogie, Millisle, Ballywalter, and Greyabbey, all funded by the Council. These events brought communities together and, during a cost-of-living crisis, provided families with opportunities for joy and celebration at no cost. He emphasised the hard work undertaken by volunteers behind the scenes - people giving up their own time for the sake of their community.

He noted that hundreds of people in Ards and North Down volunteered with local sporting groups, coaching youth teams in all weather and encouraging participation in sport, which benefitted physical health, mental health, and personal development.

The proposer highlighted that over 200 young people took part in football through Portavogie Youth Club alone, and that without local clubs and volunteers this simply would not happen.

He praised the Tourism Team for their work on four major annual events - Comber Earlies, Tide and Turf, Sea Bangor, and May Day - and for managing grants that enabled community groups to deliver events attracting visitors, stimulating the local economy, and showcasing the Borough. He referenced the Kite Festival delivered by the Ards Peninsula Village Partnership, which attracted thousands of attendees from across Northern Ireland and beyond.

Councillor Wray added that volunteers also enabled people to experience the arts and participate in good relations programmes. The Council would be 'absolutely lost' without these groups, who contributed significantly to meeting Council objectives. He therefore believed the process of accessing and managing grants needed to be as easy, convenient, and stress-free as possible, which he felt it currently was not.

Turning to advance payments, he described 'In Bloom' as a fantastic initiative that improved the aesthetic of communities and fostered civic pride. He noted that for

grants up to £1,250, only a 50% advance could be given on request, meaning groups needed £650 in reserves to apply. Some groups did not have this and volunteers sometimes used their own money or did not apply at all, which he felt should never happen.

For the Kite Festival, under current policy, grants between £3,000 and £10,000 allowed only a 30% advance. With a grant of £6,745, the group had needed £4,721 in reserves. He stressed that these were volunteers, not businesses, and this was not their job.

The current policy discouraged groups from community development, placed pressure on existing groups, and needed to change. He proposed that groups receiving grants up to £10,000 should be eligible to apply for an 80% advance, or alternatively 50% followed by a further 30% after claiming the initial amount.

The current structure - full payment up to £500, 50% up to £3,000, and 30% up to £10,000 - was not fair and should be changed.

Referring to the management of grants, he expressed concern that volunteers were being passed between multiple staff and departments, which was stressful, time-consuming, and did not reflect the joined-up approach the Council wished to portray. He gave an example of a group delivering a Christmas festival that had to liaise with community development, events, licensing, assets and properties, and senior management. He felt volunteers should not have to deal with five different people and proposed that each group should have one point of contact from the department managing the grant - tourism for tourism grants, leisure for sport grants etc.

In closing, Councillor Wray emphasised that he was asking for a report on adapting these changes. He acknowledged that there might be difficulties or a cultural shift required but hoped Members would agree to explore these areas to make the grant process easier and more accessible for volunteers.

The seconder, Councillor Hollywood spoke of the importance of the Notice of Motion and its objectives. He was aware of the current issues, as outlined by the proposer, that were faced by community groups across his former DEA of Bangor West and also in his new DEA in Holywood and Clandeboye. He hoped that Members could support it.

Committee Members rose to support the Motion, with Councillor S Irvine noting the difficulties faced by groups in Newtownards including sports clubs. He referred to his own club's experience, recalling that volunteers had often had to dip in to their own pockets in order to navigate the cashflow challenges resulting from the claims process. Dealing with many different sections of Council also led to confusion, he added.

Referring to 20 years of experience with voluntary groups in his own DEA, Councillor Boyle felt applicants were frustrated by the system though this was no reflection on the work of officers, and he recognised the work they put in. He explained the challenges faced by groups who were often planning projects without certainty of

funding and then had to be able to adapt projects accordingly. He went on to praise the contribution of volunteers, pointing to the long running Portaferry Gala which had been in existence for 58 years. He emphasised the importance of making it easier for those volunteers to retain their dedication and expertise.

In a further point, Councillor Boyle wondered what the challenges would be for the Council to implement the proposed system. He put this to the officers and the Director referred to limitations placed on external funding where the Council acted as the administrative body. There would also be financial risks in terms of organisations that the Council did not have a relationship with, and this also applied where the Council, as the awarding body, was acting as the creditor. Officer expertise was also spread across multiple sections so the designated grants officer would not have the knowledge to hand on licencing matters for example. Those considerations would need to be worked through.

The Head of Community and Culture explained that the grants policy fell under the remit of Corporate Services, and it would be up to the owner of that policy to implement the proposed system. She would consult with the Head of Finance on the matter, and a follow up report would be presented jointly to this Committee.

Councillor W Irvine felt that there was an onus on the Council to do the best it could to support applicants. He welcomed the concept of a coordinating officer along with increased advanced payments, particularly for those groups with limited reserves.

Adding his support, Alderman Cummings felt that the proposal would assist a wide range of charitable, voluntary and third-sector organisations. He recognised the increased amount of officer time that would be involved in processing larger advanced payments, noting that many organisations were small and had a smaller skills base and therefore would require additional guidance. He recognised this would have an impact on the future operations of the Capital Grants Working Group which worked within criteria set annually by the Council. He felt it would be helpful to get an understanding of how the proposed changes would impact the work of that working group.

Councillor McKee echoed the support of previous speakers and welcomed what would be a 'volunteer centred' approach while Councillor McBurney, from her own work within the sector, appreciated the dedication of volunteers and the challenges they faced in navigating what was an incredibly complex process. She welcomed the proposal for what would be an incredibly important piece of work.

The Head of Community and Culture advised that claims could be processed more frequently and there was flexibility for grant recipients to make monthly claims as opposed to every quarter. The officer encouraged Members to pass on this message which she felt could help ease the cash flow challenges referred to.

Councillor McClean was not normally supportive of vague motions but felt that the vagueness of the motion was appropriate in this case as it was attempting to set a direction of travel. He felt that if Council was asking the community to deliver these wonderful and sometimes crucial services then it was important to make the grant process as easy as possible for applicants. He felt that this common-sense

perspective should be central to every decision taken by the Council going forward to make the process as straightforward as possible.

In summing up, Councillor Wray thanked Members for their support. He had held previous discussions with multiple Directors due to overlapping responsibilities, and he had understood that the motion was going to be referred to the Corporate Services Committee rather than this one. He agreed that the motion was intended to set a clear direction of travel, and he acknowledged that some funders did set stipulations but was hopeful those barriers could be addressed. While he appreciated that some schemes allowed additional claims, some did not and he felt adopting the approach of PCSP for example would be a good step forward.

Councillor Wray felt it would represent progress if all funders adopted the same approach where applicants could receive 50% upfront and then claim a further 30%.

He appreciated that specialist knowledge was spread across multiple service areas but felt that the information could be relayed through the single point of contact.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

(Councillor Wray withdrew from the meeting – 7.58 pm)

9.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McKee and Councillor Kendall (Referred back to Committee following December 2025 Council)

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.

The proposer and seconder amended the motion on Monday 12 January 2026 to include the following addition:

Further that Council works with AND PCSP to explore how we can effectively tackle the antisocial behaviour associated with fireworks.

(Councillor Kendall joined the meeting remotely – 7.58 pm)

Proposed by Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the Notice of Motion, as amended, be adopted.

Councillor McKee stated that he had submitted a small amendment in advance to reflect the will of the committee and the amendment made by the Deputy Mayor when the Notice of Motion had been heard the previous month. Given he had spoken at the previous meeting on this, he would focus on why it remained so important that the Council continued to take a clear and united stand on this issue.

The proposer explained that the immediate catalyst for the motion had been the devastating news that two much-loved family dogs in the Borough had recently died after panicking due to fireworks. These were not just pets but family members, and their sudden loss was heartbreaking. He extended sincere sympathies to the families affected.

This tragedy reflected a much wider and recurring problem. Each year across the Borough, animals bolted from gardens, horses and livestock injured themselves, wildlife was disturbed, and vulnerable residents - including children, older people, veterans, and those with sensory sensitivities - were left frightened and distressed by sudden, unpredictable explosions.

Continuing, Councillor McKee stressed that the debate was not about stopping celebration or joy, but about responsibility, predictability, and safety.

Northern Ireland already had some of the strictest fireworks legislation in the UK, yet problems persisted. Illegal fireworks continued to circulate, antisocial behaviour spiked every year around Halloween, enforcement was fragmented, and the lived experience of residents did not reflect what the law promised on paper.

Given that antisocial behaviour was such a significant part of the problem, he stated that it was vital that the PCSP did all it could to assist in tackling this within communities. Alongside enforcement, he highlighted that education and community awareness were essential in helping people understand the real harm irresponsible firework use caused to animals, vulnerable people, and neighbourhoods.

Councillor McKee also recognised the tireless work of local animal welfare groups and volunteers, who every year comforted terrified pets, searched for missing animals, and supported distressed owners. He stated that their compassion was remarkable, but that they should not be left to deal with the consequences of a system that was not working as it should.

This was why he and Councillor Kendall were calling for an urgent and meaningful review of fireworks legislation by the Department of Justice, focused on three key areas: stronger controls on sale and importation, with a move toward licensed,

organised displays; clearer and better-resourced enforcement powers for councils, the PSNI, and the Department; and Northern Ireland-wide time restrictions, so people knew when fireworks would be used and could prepare.

He felt that these were balanced, reasonable measures that allowed celebration without chaos, and that they recognised Northern Ireland's unique context, where fireworks could too easily become tools of nuisance and intimidation.

He concluded that by supporting the motion, the Council would send a clear message to residents that they were heard, that the distress caused was understood, and that the Council was committed to real, meaningful action. He urged Members to support the motion.

The seconder, Councillor Kendall said the fireworks affected people and animals in many ways and she echoed the points raised by Councillor McKee. She referred to quotes from members of the public to illustrate the impact, including one individual whose dog of 11 years had been killed after being spooked by fireworks, and another referred to people and feelings of uncontrollable terror and panic due to loud bangs.

Councillor Kendall referred to a YouGov poll commissioned by the Dogs Trust which showed powerful support for change in Northern Ireland with 95% of respondents supporting the view that fireworks move to licenced public displays only with 93% wanting date and time restrictions, and 70% wanting low or no noise fireworks and 31% supporting a full ban. This showed that despite the existing licencing regime, more action was clearly needed.

She acknowledged the efforts of community groups in sharing information and helping to protect vulnerable people and animals during firework periods but she argued that the Council should also act to support this community-led work.

Councillor Kendall pointed to international examples including Italy's requirement for silent fireworks and Dutch cities that had banned consumer fireworks in favour of low-noise professional displays. She explained that the motion was not intended to stop the enjoyment of fireworks but to ensure that celebrations could take place without causing distress, trauma or harm. Councillor Kendall referred to strong public support for change and the need to protect vulnerable people and animals.

Recognising that the motion had been heard last month, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Moore spoke briefly to thank the proposer and seconder for incorporating her amendment. As much as Standing Orders were an important framework in how the Council conducted its business, she said that the work in achieving real change for constituents was done through collaboration and she was grateful to the proposer and seconder.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND on the proposal of Councillor McKee, seconded by Councillor Kendall, that the Notice of Motion, as amended, be adopted.

(Councillor Kendall withdrew from the meeting – 8.06 pm)

10. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

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

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

REPORTS FOR NOTING

11. NCLT QUARTER 2 2024-2025 (FILE CW51)

(Appendix XIII – XV)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION – SCHEDULE 6

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that as part of the leisure services management contract the Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT) provide Officers with quarterly reports on performance.

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with a high-level update on the Trust for Q2 25/26.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

(Mr Chris Kelly, attending remotely, joined the meeting – 8.07 pm)

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

(Mr Kelly withdrew from the meeting – 8.12 pm)

12. PCSP MINUTES (FILE PCSP MINS)

(Appendix XVI)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION - SCHEDULE 6**Exemption: 6a statutory provision**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that a meeting of the Ards and North Down Borough Council PCSP Partnership was held on 24th November 2025.

At the meeting on the 24th November, the PCSP Partnership approved the minutes of 15th September 2025.

The minutes were attached.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the minutes.

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

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.14 pm.

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	28 January 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	12 January 2026
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Invitation to Army Benevolent Fund - Belfast Blitz Concert
Attachments	Appendix 8.1 - Letter of Invitation to Army Benevolent Fund - Belfast Blitz Concert

Background

On 12 January 2026, the Chief Executive received a letter from David Forsey, Director at Army Benevolent Fund offering a number of VIP tickets to Councillors, Executives and Support Staff to a concert at the Waterfront Hall featuring the Band, Bugles, Pipes & Drums of the Royal Irish Regiment, to commemorate the 85th Anniversary of the Belfast Blitz. A copy of the letter is attached at appendix 1.

The date is Saturday 21 March 2026 and tickets are priced at £70 per person.

All proceeds from the concert will go to aid soldiers, veterans and army families in times of need.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council consider nominating a Member(s) to attend.

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	28 January 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Regeneration
Date of Report	14 January 2026
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Small Business Rates Relief Options - Consultation Response
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Finance Minister Oral Statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly Rating Policy - Update on Strategic Roadmap Appendix 2 - Consultation Paper Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) Options Appendix 3 - ANDBC Consultation Response - Small Business Rate Relief Options

Background

Members may be aware that on 9th December 2024 the then Minister of Finance outlined a Strategic Roadmap for the Rating system to the Assembly. The proposal was to build a progressive rates system for both households and businesses. The Minister advised that this process was to be based on the principles of fairness and equity, and to ensure that the rates system aligned with the Executive's policy objectives of stimulating the local economy and supporting the growth of the rating taxbase, while providing appropriate support for those who need it.

Not Applicable

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On 18 November 2025 the Minister of Finance made an oral statement to the Assembly which is attached at Appendix 1. As part of the statement the Minister announced his intention to bring about change that would see enhanced support for small businesses.

On 4th December 2025 the Department for Finance wrote to the Council inviting a response to the Consultation Paper on Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) options which is attached at Appendix 2. The consultation paper outlines four potential policy options and requests consultees respond to eight specific questions. This consultation process has a very tight timeframe as the Minister wishes to make changes in time for April 2026.

The Council's Heads of Service Team (HoST) has reviewed the proposals and compiled a draft response which is provided at Appendix 3. The response to each question is aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan 2024 -2028 and The Big Plan 2017 – 2032. The draft response to each question is in bold, and responses detailed below each question.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves the draft response to the consultation for formal response before the consultation completion deadline of 29th January 2026.

ORAL STATEMENT TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

RATING POLICY – UPDATE ON STRATEGIC ROADMAP

18 NOVEMBER 2025

JOHN O'DOWD, MLA MINISTER OF FINANCE

Ceann Comhairle, I wish to provide Members with an update on the progress made on the Review of the Rating system and my intended steps over coming weeks.

Less than a year ago it was announced that my Department would be undertaking a systematic Review of all rates supports.

Substantial progress has been made to date with four policy reviews completed. I am accelerating the Review process and can confirm today that every single rates support will have been reviewed by the end of the 2027-28 rating year.

The remaining policy areas will be “front loaded” in order of strategic importance within that remaining timeframe.

The aim of this process has been and remains to secure positive and progressive changes to the rating system.

This need has been echoed strongly by interested parties through the course of significant engagement with my officials.

Today I will be outlining how I intend to bring about:-

- Change that sees enhanced support for small businesses - the backbone of our local economy;
- Change that tackles the high level of vacancies in our town and city centre;
- Change that supports businesses starting out; and
- Change that helps accelerate business growth.

I cannot do this in isolation – and I have spoken many times, both in this House and around the Executive table of the constrained financial environment within which we operate.

In terms of how we deliver rating changes in such a context, the interlinked nature of rating policies, both domestic and non-domestic, is critical. This is particularly the case as we aim to improve the system with limited resources.

Where changes to make the system more progressive can act to deliver savings in one area, those savings can then allow us to ease the tax burden on others.

Following the public consultation on increasing the Maximum Capital Value and reducing the Early Payment Discount which concluded in April, responses were assessed and proposals put forward to the Executive in June for decision.

Those proposals have the potential to unlock £9 million worth of government spending power.

To illustrate the significance of that in rating terms that £9 million being diverted to the Small Business Rate Scheme enhances an existing scheme which costs £22 million and already supports 30,000 ratepayers.

Many in this Chamber have called for additional support for small businesses since the Executive returned last year.

The proposals I am bringing forward pave the way for that, while recognising the financial realities within which we are operating.

It would be easy to set out my policy aims and seek additional funding to support these. That is not what I am doing.

Operating a responsive progressive rating system cannot mean layering additional supports at the cost of other Executive priorities. Instead, we must carefully consider how best the limited support levers available can be applied in the current operating context to best effect.

I am not seeking additional funding to enhance support for businesses.

Instead, I am asking for support to deliver changes in one part of the rating system which allows additional support in another with the two adjustments operating on a cost-neutral basis.

I want to see extra help going to small business properties that provide vital employment supporting workers, families, and communities.

Today's proposals, stemming from the discussions with businesses, align with my own desire to deliver positive change for businesses and boost economic growth.

Small Business Rate Relief

Firstly, the Small Business Rate Relief scheme.

It was clear from the Strategic Review of this area there was an appetite from representative bodies, industry and local government for enhanced support to be delivered to small businesses.

Our local economy is overwhelmingly made up of SME businesses, and around 90% of businesses here are classified as micro-businesses with less than 10 employees.

I fully endorse such an approach. A sustainable small business sector is at the heart of a thriving economy. It comes as no surprise that other jurisdictions are also supporting this ambition through their own policy proposals.

The analysis from my Department concurred that there was a need to enhance support aimed at bolstering businesses in smaller properties.

While the approach taken in other jurisdictions has been to “cherry pick” specific sectors, that is often on the basis of legacy support put in place during the pandemic.

I have listened to the views provided and am instead in favour of taking a sector-neutral approach to any enhancement for Small Business Rates support.

I want to create an environment that brings businesses into town and city centres.

However, I want that to be an environment that creates a level playing field for all types of businesses by enhancing support across business types. I see no hierarchy in need.

I want to encourage business startups of any type and do what we can by lowering operating costs for businesses in that category.

There are two methods by which I can deliver an enhancement to the current Small Business Rate Relief scheme.

The first method is to **increase the amount of reductions delivered** under the scheme. The current reduction levels of 20%, 25% and 50% have remained static since the scheme was last reviewed in 2012.

It would be my preference to increase these reduction levels.

The second method of enhancement is to **increase the upper valuation threshold** that applies within the scheme. Again that upper valuation level hasn't been assessed since 2012 and needs adjusted to modern rental values.

Given that Reval 2026 will be the fourth revaluation process in 11 years, it would be my preference to raise the rental value threshold so that it is broadly in line with valuation list growth.

I will now be moving to consult in the next few weeks on both these aspects to continue to allow changes to be made for the next rating year.

The scalability pertaining to both forms of enhancement is critical and is a key part of that discussion.

It is no secret that the Executive's finances are under significant pressure at present.

I have brought proposals forward already on two policy areas that would raise £9m. Likewise lowering operating costs, through rates support, itself will have the potential

to grow the taxbase by bringing more businesses into the rating system and generating more revenue in overall terms.

Those two factors, plus the fact the changes can be made alongside a Revaluation exercise gives us an opportunity to make important changes while maintaining the overall level of rating revenue generated through the broader rating system.

I am also willing to consider all ideas on co-funding models from across Executive Departments and Councils to enhance Small Business Rate Relief support.

Supporting small businesses should be high on all of our agendas and working in partnership to optimise joint efforts is my preferred approach.

My officials are working at pace to put these proposals out for consultation between now and the New Year to get the views of business before final proposals are submitted to my Executive colleagues for decision.

The progress made in taking forward policy considerations on rate reliefs clearly demonstrates my commitment to deliver positive change.

To be clear to translate policy into action members in this chamber must understand that progressive rating does not mean considering policy proposals in isolation but as a whole.

Vacant Rating

As regards the second area of review, I have already stated both in this Chamber and at the Finance Committee that I want to increase the level of liability for Non-Domestic Vacant Rating.

Admittedly the views on this policy varied within the Review feedback. The case for increasing liability was clear cut for commercially attractive areas or where there is clear regeneration potential. Support for increasing liability was understandably weaker for less commercially viable areas where owners can struggle to let properties despite taking active steps to do so.

On balance however, I take the view that to tackle the high prevalence of vacant units work now needs to be undertaken to move the Non-Domestic Vacant Rate from 50% to 75% and then to 100%. When fully implemented it is estimated that those changes would have the potential to unlock a further £20 million of revenue between central and local government.

Given the Executive's Programme for Government commitments on housing and regeneration and the work on preventing dilapidation, again I think there is a unique

window of opportunity to maximise the impact of this change working actively at a cross-Departmental level.

This is, however, a significant change that connects to many strands of Executive policy and Executive agreement will be required before the change can be implemented. I have now instructed my officials to take forward the policy work required to secure that Executive agreement.

I also appreciate that to respond to the concerns expressed during the review, there will be a need to provide a sufficient lead in time for any change to allow owners to respond to this future shift in policy direction.

Business Growth Accelerator

As I have stated the engagement with stakeholders over the summer was extensive.

One of the discussion points was what can be done through the rating system to encourage business expansion.

When a business takes a decision to expand their business that will usually increase their rates liability immediately once work is completed. That additional rates liability in turn creates more revenue for public services.

I recognise however that the initial outlay, coupled with the increased rates liability associated with that can be off putting for some businesses waiting to take steps towards expansion.

To that end I want to progress rating policy so that the additional rate liability incurred is staggered where that may make the difference between a business deciding to expand or deciding not to.

I am happy to announce my Department will be taking forward consultation proposals in the New Year to progress policy development for a Business Growth Accelerator policy.

This will seek views on the policy options for using the rating system to **aid** business expansion rather than **prohibit** it, while also unlocking future increased rates income for local and central government.

That unlocking of future taxbase growth would operate alongside existing initiatives brought in since the restoration of the Executive last year such as the Back in Business Scheme.

Reviews of Receipts and Expenditure Valuation Methodology in Scotland and England

As part of this Review we have worked closely with the hospitality sector.

Since the Executive returned a central ask from the sector has been to assess the valuation methodology for the receipts and expenditure method of valuation where this is used for pubs and hospitality.

Similar sentiments have been expressed in Scotland and England, both those jurisdictions have announced that they will be reviewing how the methodology is used in their jurisdictions.

I am pleased to confirm that we will be taking account of the findings of both those review processes to assess any implications they may have for our own local valuation processes.

Next steps

There has been a significant amount of work done within my Department over a period of less than a year since the Strategic Review of Rates was announced.

We remain on track to facilitate changes for businesses for April 2026 provided political agreement can be achieved to do so.

I do recognise that change is hard. But if we keep doing the same things we will keep getting the same outcomes.

People elected us to serve and deliver.

I want to deliver positive change but that requires buy-in and partnership working.



Consultation Paper

SMALL BUSINESS

RATE RELIEF

(SBRR) Options

December 2025



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Foreword Minister of Finance

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy.

Supporting them means supporting growth, resilience and opportunity for everyone.

I want to deliver positive and progressive changes to the rating system.

I want to see extra help going to those businesses that provide employment supporting workers, families, and communities.

The Small Business Rate Relief scheme currently provides vital support for operating costs for around 30,000 small business properties at a cost of £22.5 million for the 2025/26 year. I want to create a fair environment for all businesses, where entrepreneurship thrives, where vacant properties become vibrant spaces, and where small businesses can flourish.

This consultation sets out options to enhance the Small Business Rate Relief scheme using two distinct methods:

Increasing percentage reductions – current relief levels of 20%, 25%, and 50% have remained unchanged since 2012. Where funding allows, I want to adjust the percentage reduction tiers to deliver greater impact.

Updating valuation thresholds – these have not been reviewed since 2012 and, in my view, there is a need for these to be adjusted to reflect modern rental values, particularly as Reval 2026 marks the fourth revaluation in 11 years – delivering on a prior request from business groups for more frequent valuations to reflect changes in the market.

Scalability and affordability are central to the proposals within this paper.

In addition, the consultation paper does not propose enhancing Small Business Rate Relief through sector-specific targeting. In my view, such an approach would introduce additional cost and complexity to the delivery of support. This preference also reflects the reality that labour and property markets are constantly evolving, and businesses increasingly operate across multiple sectors. However, I am keen to hear your views on this matter as part of the consultation.

The timing of this consultation reflects my desire to secure Executive agreement and facilitate legislative change in time for the 2026/27 rating year to deliver for our small businesses.

It is no secret that the Executive's finances are under significant pressure at present. I have brought proposals forward already on two policy areas in the domestic rating system that would raise £9m.

My aim in doing so is to secure savings in parts of the rating system and redirect resources to provide additional support to those businesses that need it most.

Delivering on this positive change will require buy-in and partnership working from my Executive colleagues and the Assembly.

The proposals in this consultation is our chance to deliver local solutions to local challenges. I invite and welcome your views on these proposals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John O'Dowd'.

John O'Dowd
Finance Minister

BACKGROUND TO RATING SYSTEM

Background to the Rating System

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The rating system here is a devolved tax with no direct links to similar taxation systems in England, Scotland or Wales. There are two different rates levied here: a domestic rate for residential properties and a non-domestic rate for businesses.

The total amount of revenue collected through both domestic and non-domestic rates locally is now over £1.6 billion, with just under 55% of this being funded by non-domestic rating. This is used to pay for both local district council services as well as regional services delivered by the Executive such as education, health and roads. Regional Rate revenue alone provides approximately 4% of the Executive's public spending power.

Land & Property Services (LPS), within the Department of Finance, administers the rates system and has little discretion in doing so as everything is governed by legislation or case law. Rates paid by households and businesses make a vital contribution to funding the local public services delivered by the Executive and District Councils.

The systems of reliefs and exemptions that apply within the rating system are a key feature of the devolved tax. Reliefs, allowances, and exemptions are perceived as the main means through which the rating system can be used as a tool of social, economic and environmental policy. Differences have developed over many years because of different policies and priorities set by Westminster and the Executive at various points in time.

Providing any rate relief means either foregoing revenue or charging other ratepayers more.

An exemption or relief is often viewed from the perspective of who it benefits, but there is a real cost, as every pound raised through the rating system stays here as a resource to help pay for hospitals, schools, and other essential regional services.



CONTEXT TO CONSULTATION

Announcement of Strategic Review of Small Business Rate Relief

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On 9 December 2024 the then Minister of Finance outlined a Strategic Roadmap for the Rating system to the Assembly to build a progressive rates system for both households and businesses. This process was to be based on the principles of fairness and equity, and to ensure that the rates system aligned with the Executive's policy objectives, stimulates the local economy and supports the growth of the rating taxbase, while providing appropriate support for those who need it.

It was also announced that following engagement with the business community and after listening to the challenges posed by the cost of doing business crisis, post-Covid period and in light of the added impact of the Chancellor's Autumn Budget in 2024, that the Department of Finance would prioritise the policy area of the Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) Scheme as part of the 2025/26 phase of policy reviews.

Process for Review

The following work was undertaken within the Department as part of the Strategic Review work that has underpinned the policy direction for the SBRR scheme contained within this paper:-

- the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Review of SBRR was formally published on 2 June 2025;
- the Finance Committee was briefed on the process to be undertaken on 25 June 2025;
- formal review meetings with external stakeholder groups were held during June, July and August 2025;
- a supplementary survey was issued to those stakeholder groups on 20 August and closed on 15 September 2025 to allow individual businesses to provide a view;
- meetings were held with SOLACE and NILGA to highlight the engagement with the business sector to date and to discuss funding options;
- desk research on policy models elsewhere and taxbase analysis was completed and updated to take account of the publication by Treasury of their interim report on Transforming Business Rates which was published in mid-September.
- briefing on the Review process undertaken was provided to the Finance Committee on 15 October 2025.
- the Finance Minister made an Oral Statement on next steps on 18 November 2025 in which the intention to take forward this consultation was announced.

Transforming Business Rates

The announcement on the Strategic Review of SBRR broadly coincided with a parallel announcement at Westminster on the Autumn Budget 2024. That announcement also highlighted the British Government's proposed changes for the business rates system in England.

[Transforming Business Rates | GOV.UK](#)

In mid-September 2025 Treasury published an interim report on those changes planned for April 2026.

[Transforming Business Rates Interim Report | GOV.UK](#)

The core proposal within Transforming Business Rates, now confirmed by the British Chancellor in the Autumn Budget statement of 26 November 2025, is to lower the poundage multiplier rate in England for certain retail, hospitality and leisure properties paid for by charging large businesses (those valued at over £500,000) more.

[Budget 2025 | GOV.UK](#)

Our local business rates system

Due to the nature of our local rating system we are unable to replicate these proposals. This is because we do not have a system that applies a Uniform Business Rate. Instead we levy two different business rate poundages locally, a district rate (to fund councils) and a regional rate (to fund central government), through the one business rates assessment.

This means we have 11 different business rate poundages for the 11 district council areas. This is because each local council here sets poundages to meet their own specific and local expenditure decisions.

In addition, and as noted by those who contributed to the Strategic Review process over the summer, our local taxbase simply does not possess the same depth of high-value commercial property to sustain such a cross-subsidy on the scale being applied in England. Our local rate base is dominated by small and mid-sized properties, with only a limited number of very large properties, many of which are public sector or utility assets. As a result, any equivalent scheme to that being progressed in England would represent a direct and ongoing revenue loss to the Executive rather than a fiscally neutral rebalancing within the system.

During the Strategic Review process, although strong views were put forward at a sectoral level from those who would benefit from an approach similar to that being adopted in England, equally strong views were put forward for a sector neutral approach on rates support generally, and small business property support in particular.

That latter approach is consistent with any policy aim to grow the overall number of business properties paying rates regardless of sector, and has directly informed the approach that has now been adopted within the options put forward within this paper.

Announcement on Consultation

On 18 November 2025, the Minister of Finance announced that he intended to bring about change that will see enhanced support for small businesses outlining his view that the SBRR scheme currently provides vital support for small businesses. The Minister's full statement can be accessed below:-

Finance Minister Oral Statement - Rating Policy Update on Strategic Road Map

The Minister acknowledged that the support delivered under the SBRR scheme has remained unchanged since 2012. In that context the Minister noted that he planned to consult before the New Year to give businesses and stakeholders the chance to share final views before any policy proposals are put to Ministerial colleagues on any future enhancement to the support.

This paper lays out 4 potential policy options to inform the final design of any revised SBRR provision.



ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

Who can respond to this consultation?

The Department of Finance is seeking views on the policy options in this paper from all interested parties, individuals and groups, on the matters covered by this consultation.

Purpose of this consultation

The policy options set out here will have a direct impact on businesses and individuals. The Department of Finance recognises the need to keep the public informed on such important matters and to allow people the opportunity to comment on the policy proposals. This consultation therefore invites people to answer a number of questions in relation to the proposed changes. The questions are posed at the end of this document.

Scope of the consultation

The consultation applies to all, whether a member of the public, a business, organisations or professional bodies.

Duration of the consultation

As this is a targeted consultation aimed at facilitating policy changes for April 2026 it will run for a period of 8 weeks and the consultation will close for responses on 29 January 2026 without exception.

How to respond to this consultation

You can respond to this consultation online through the link to Citizen Space provided at the end of this document. This is the Department's preferred mode for consultation responses.

You can also send your consultation responses by e-mail to:
ratingpolicy@finance-ni.gov.uk

When responding, please state whether you are doing so as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents and, where applicable, how the views of members were assembled. We will acknowledge your response.

The consultation document will be available in other formats upon request. You can email any queries to: **ratingpolicy@finance-ni.gov.uk**

Draft impact screening assessments have also been made available on the consultation website. Related papers can also be obtained in hardcopy on request, using the contact details above.

Consultation principles

- consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage;
- the proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and response;
- consultation is only part of a process of engagement;
- adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and
- government responses should be published in a timely fashion.

Confidentiality

Under Data Protection legislation, you have the right:

- to be informed of the personal data held about you and to access it;
- to require us to rectify inaccuracies in that data;
- to (in certain circumstances) object to or restrict processing;
- for (in certain circumstances) your data to be ‘erased’;
- to (in certain circumstances) data portability; and
- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection.

DoF Privacy Notice

The DoF Privacy Notice, explaining how we use your personal data, can be viewed at:

[**Department of Finance Privacy Notice | Department of Finance**](#).

HOW THE SCHEME OPERATES

How the SBRR scheme operates

SBRR was an initiative originally introduced to support the growth and sustainability of small business property occupiers by reducing their business rates burden.

The scheme was first introduced on 1 April 2010 and was implemented as a downturn measure following the 2008 economic crash. The scheme provides different levels of rate relief based on the Net Annual Value (NAV) of a business property. The NAV reflects the rental value of a property for rating purposes at the common valuation date determined by the Department (known as the “antecedent valuation date”, currently 1 October 2021).

There are currently three levels of rate relief;

- 50% relief: for business properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less;
- 25% relief: for business properties with an NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000;
- 20% relief: for business properties with an NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000.

No relief is currently available for properties with an NAV of more than £15,000 under this scheme, a threshold that has remained the same since 2012. Likewise no relief is available for those who own 3 or more businesses.

That latter exclusion from relief operates as a result of what is known as the “multiples” exclusion. This means that SBRR will not apply to any property where a person occupying an otherwise qualifying property for the SBRR scheme occupies more than three hereditaments which are, or would fall to be, shown in the non-domestic valuation list. The policy intent of this is to exclude large multi-national business chains.

Breakdown of current support by threshold

SBRR		
Threshold	Properties	Support
50% (NAV of 2000 or less)	4,548	£1,842,933
25% (NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000)	11,224	£5,923,630
20% (NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000)	13,450	£14,276,240
Totals	29,222	£22,042,804

How it currently works: key features of SBRR

Automatic award: Qualifying businesses receive the rate relief automatically on their annual bill. There is no need to apply for SBRR and this is a key feature of reducing the administrative burden on businesses identified within prior Regulatory Impact Assessment work.

Calculation: In basic terms business rates are calculated by multiplying the valuation of the property (Net Annual Value or NAV) by the non-domestic rate poundage (which includes regional and district rates). The SBRR relief is then applied to that amount in order to reduce the liability within the calculated rates bill.

Annual extension: The scheme requires new legislation to extend it annually and it was most recently extended for the 2025-26 rating year.

Interaction with other reliefs: In broad terms businesses are unable to receive any other rate reliefs when they are in receipt of SBRR support.

How SBRR is currently distributed throughout our councils

The table below outlines the distribution of support currently provided to businesses within the 11 District Council areas:

SBRR		
District Council	Number of Properties	Support Provided
Antrim and Newtownabbey	1,743	£1,267,752
Ards and North Down	2,105	£1,570,341
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	3,176	£2,337,158
Belfast	5,533	£4,623,020
Causeway Coast and Glens	2,540	£1,757,038
Derry and Strabane	2,279	£1,973,286
Fermanagh and Omagh	2,448	£1,570,765
Lisburn & Castlereagh	1,840	£1,423,399
Mid & East Antrim	2,036	£1,593,727
Mid Ulster	2,569	£1,749,951
Newry, Mourne and Down	2,953	£2,176,363
Total	29,222	£22,042,804

Support for Post Offices

The SBRR scheme in Northern Ireland also provides enhanced rate relief specifically for small Post Offices. This initiative aims to help maintain vital services, particularly in disadvantaged areas, by supporting smaller, independent Post Offices.

The support provided by this scheme enhancement is outlined in the table below:

SBRR			
District Council	Number of Properties	Support Provided	
100%	131	£360,474	
Enhanced 50%	43	£138,671	
		174	£499,146

The eligibility for SBRR for Post Offices is also determined by the NAV of the property, which is an assessment of the annual rental value the property could reasonably be let for on the open market.

There are three distinct tiers of relief detailed in the table below:

Net Annual Value (NAV)	Relief Percentage
£9,000 or less	100% Relief
More than £9,000 but not more than £12,000	50% Relief
More than £12,000 but not more than £15,000	20% Relief (Post Offices with an NAV of over £12,000 then fall within the standard SBRR scheme cohort).

Automatic Award: Similar to the SBRR scheme, there is generally no application procedure for this enhancement. If a Post Office qualifies, the relief will be applied automatically to the business rates bill in the same manner as the general SBRR support.

Policy options for future SBRR support

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As noted earlier in this paper at present the cost of the rate support for the current percentage tiers of SBRR is as follows (rounding applied):

NAV band	% discount	Properties	Cost
NAV of 2000 or less	50%	4,500	£2M
NAV of more than £2,000	25%	11,200	£6M
NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000	20%	13,450	£14M
Total	-	29,200	£22M

The cost of any uplift, presented at a scalable level for each 5% increase in the current percentage discount level structure, would be as follows.

NAV band	% discount	Properties	Cost
NAV of 2000 or less	50%	4,500	£0.2M
NAV of more than £2,000	25%	11,200	£1.2M
NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000	20%	13,450	£3.5M
Total	-	29,200	

In terms of any potential increase in support there is then the issue of establishing a rational basis for the quantum of any increase in provision for the purposes of modelling options within this consultation.

This consultation document proposes retaining the 50% level for the smallest business premises. That is on the basis that support is already covering half of any rating liability associated with a property (which equates to the current vacant rating liability for business premises).

The other proposed percentage discounts have been elevated by the aggregated effect of CPI increases (as measured at 1 April each year since Covid in 2020). That uplift has been applied to the baseline percentage reduction levels within the SBRR tiers. This elevation is proposed as a one off step to elevate the percentage reduction to reflect the specific combination of issues hitting business operating costs since the pandemic.

Taking that approach would see percentage reduction levels within the scheme (rounded to the nearest percentage point) increase as follows:

NAV band	% discount	Properties	Additional Costs
NAV of £2,000 or less	50%	4,500	£0
NAV of more than £2,000	32%	11,200	£1.68M
NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000	26%	13,450	£4.2M
Total	-	29,200	£22M

To smooth the resultant increased “cliff edge” associated with an elevated upper tier however, and to take account of the impact of the revaluation exercises since 2015 which have seen respective valuation list growth of 8% (Reval 2015), 6.37% (Reval 2020) and 0% (Reval 2023) the Department has also modelled additional NAV band(s) as consequential adjustments and to smooth any potential cliff edge in support.

If those growth levels are applied to the NAV threshold in place within the scheme since 2012 then this would see a new upper threshold of around £17,500. Some of the sub-options modelled also apply a tier up to £20,000 to adjust the tapering off further.

Options 1 to 4 (tables below) have thus been developed by the Department as potential policy options for uplifting the current rate provision to reflect elevated operating costs for small businesses experienced since the pandemic.

A note is provided at the end of this section on the considerations associated with costing related to the timing of this consultation. As noted earlier in the paper, consultation is required at this time to facilitate any policy change for the 2026/27 rating year.

It is proposed that Post Offices with a valuation above £15,000 would be included within the additional NAV tiers within each of the options below.

Option 1

Option 1 will retain a small business rate reduction of 50% for those business properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less. Under this option business properties with an NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000 will see their reduction go from the current level of 25% to 32%, while business properties with an NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000 would see their reduction go from the current level of 20% to 26%.

To smooth cliff edges, support is then tapered under **Option 1** so that business properties with an NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £17,500 would fall within a new reduction tier under the scheme of 20%, and business properties with an NAV of more than £17,500 but not more than £20,000 seeing a reduction of 10%. These new bands will be available to post offices under existing eligibility criteria.

NAV band	% discount	Properties on current valuation list	Estimated Additional Cost
NAV of £2,000 or less	50%	4,500	N/A
NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000	32%	11,200	£1.68M
NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000	26%	13,450	£4.2M
NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £17,500	20%	1,800 (estimated)	£3.3M (estimated)
NAV of more than £17,500 but not more than £20,000	10%	1,350 (estimated)	£1.5M (estimated)
Total additional cost of package			£10.68M

Option 2

Option 2 will retain a small business rate reduction of 50% for those business properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less. Under this option business properties with an NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000 will see their reduction go from the current level of 25% to 32%, while business properties with an NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000 would see their reduction go from the current level of 20% to 26%.

To smooth cliff edges, support is then tapered under **Option 2** so that business properties with an NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £20,000 would see a new reduction under the scheme of 15%. This new band will be available to post offices under existing eligibility criteria.

NAV band	% discount	Properties on current valuation list	Estimated Additional Cost
NAV of £2,000 or less	50%	4,500	N/A
NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000	32%	11,200	£1.68M
NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000	26%	13,450	£4.2M
NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £20,000	15%	3,150 (estimated)	£4.6M (estimated)
Total additional cost of package			£10.48M

Option 3

Option 3 will retain a small business rate reduction of 50% for those business properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less. Under this option business properties with an NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000 will see their reduction go from the current level of 25% to 32%, while business properties with an NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000 would see their reduction go from the current level of 20% to 26%.

To smooth cliff edges, support is then tapered under Option 3 so that business properties with an NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £17,500 would see a new reduction under the scheme of 10%. This new band will be available to post offices under existing eligibility criteria.

NAV band	% discount	Properties on current valuation list	Estimated Additional Cost
NAV of £2,000 or less	50%	4,500	N/A
NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000	32%	11,200	£1.68M
NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000	26%	13,450	£4.2M
NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £17,500	10%	1,800 (estimated)	£1.65M (estimated)
Total additional cost of package			£7.53M

Option 4

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Option 4 will retain a small business rate reduction of 50% for those business properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less. Under this option business properties with an NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000 will see their reduction go from the current level of 25% to 32%, while business properties with an NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000 would see their reduction go from the current level of 20% to 26%.

To smooth cliff edges, support is then tapered under **Option 4** so that business properties with an NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £17,500 would see a new reduction under the scheme of 15%. This new bands will be available to post offices under existing eligibility criteria.

NAV band	% discount	Properties on current valuation list	Estimated Additional Cost
NAV of £2,000 or less	50%	4,500	N/A
NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000	32%	11,200	£1.68M
NAV of more than £5,000 but not more than £15,000	26%	13,450	£4.2M
NAV of more than £15,000 but not more than £17,500	15%	1,800 (estimated)	£2.48M (estimated)
Total additional cost of package			£8.35M

Note on the financial modelling and cost estimates within Options 1 to 4

The costing of Options 1 to 4 above are predicated upon the current distribution of the SBRR scheme and current valuation of properties just above the current SBRR NAV thresholds. April 2026 will see a new non domestic valuation list go live and therefore this will alter that distribution of SBRR which will have an effect on final costings.

Likewise, the figures provided in Options 1 to 4 for properties in excess of the current NAV threshold may include so called “multiples”. As noted earlier in this document multiples are excluded from the remit of the Small Business Rate Relief scheme and as a result the cost estimates provided for the proposed additional tiers are likely to be higher than the final costs.

Options 1 and 2 provide two different cost estimate models which reflect different approaches to how “steep” the taper that applies to any new tier should be. Options 3 and 4 then show cost estimated models that can apply to a smaller funding envelope. The scalability costing at the start of this section will allow consultees to assess other potential adjustments of existing SBRR tiers when considering the proposals.

All factors noted above, in conjunction with the views provided through the consultation process, will inform any final policy decisions by the Department.

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTEES

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- 1. Do you view SBRR as an effective use of public money and should it be continued?**
- 2. Do you currently receive SBRR?**
- 3. Should automatic awards of SBRR continue?**
- 4. Should an application-based system be adopted instead of automatic awards to allow targeting of the scheme, either by sector or by other criteria such as profitability, turnover, etc?**
- 5. Do you favour sectoral support or sector neutral support?**
- 6. What Policy Option do you favour?**
- 7. How should additional support be funded?**
- 8. Do you have any other views on the policy you wish to submit as part of this consultation?**

Click to answer the questions above 

Impact screening

New Draft Impact Assessment screening exercises have been conducted on this proposal. That screening documentation has been published alongside this consultation document. Evidence from consultees is also sought on this area to inform this work.



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Draft Consultation Response: Small Business Rates Relief

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTEES

1. Do you view SBRR as an effective use of public money and should it be continued?

Ards and North Down Borough Council see SBRR as an effective use of public money and should be continued.

NISRA data details there are an estimated total of approximately 5,271 registered companies in Ards and North Down, of which there are around 4,028 are estimated to be Small & medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

SBRR supports the Community Plan's strategic outcomes by sustaining local employment, strengthening town centre vitality, and helping ensure long-term community wellbeing. It contributes to a whole system approach to local economic resilience, complementing partnership led initiatives (e.g., regeneration, town centre vitality, skills development) across Community Planning and other Partnerships.

Given the high proportion of businesses located in the Borough that are SME's we see the SBRR as having a significant impact on our local economy. By reducing overhead costs for small businesses SBRR helps maintain business viability, sustain employment, and encourage entrepreneurship.

We recommend regular reviews of the SBRR scheme to ensure it remains effective and fair. Reviews should align relief levels with current economic conditions, target genuinely small businesses, and keep administration simple and cost-efficient. We feel that by updating thresholds and relief percentages the scheme will be able to maximise impact while delivering value for public money.

2. Do you currently receive SBRR?

N/A as Council

3. Should automatic awards of SBRR continue?

ANDBC would recommend that the scheme continues to deliver automatic awards of SBRR. Continuing automatic awards offers clear benefits for small businesses. Automatic allocation ensures that eligible businesses receive support without unnecessary administrative burden by improving efficiency and reducing administrative costs. Automatic allocation ensures fairness by granting relief to all eligible businesses and reduces risk of exclusion due to lack of awareness or challenges faced with an application process.

Automatic awards would need to be supported by current and up-to-date NAV information to ensure that relief is allocated appropriately. Access to accurate valuation data is essential for maintaining the integrity of the scheme and ensuring that support is targeted only at those who meet the intended eligibility criteria.

Additionally, thresholds should be systematically updated each time a non-domestic revaluation is undertaken. Relying on outdated NAVs diminishes the benefits available to businesses, as eligibility criteria no longer reflect current market conditions or actual rateable values. By basing thresholds on the most recent valuation data, the system can continue to direct relief to those who genuinely require it.

4. Should an application-based system be adopted instead of automatic awards to allow targeting of the scheme, either by sector or by other criteria such as profitability, turnover, etc?

ANDBC would not be in favour of an application-based system. An application process adds administrative burden for both businesses and the department, increasing costs and delays. Many small businesses lack resources or awareness to complete applications, meaning those most in need could miss. The scheme should remain sector-neutral and automatically applied, with eligibility based on clear, objective criteria to ensure fairness, a simple process, and maximum reach.

5. Do you favour sectoral support or sector neutral support?

In order to ensure a fair scheme ANDBC favour a sector-neutral approach. A sector-neutral approach that is based on property value rather than business type ensures fairness, simplicity, and transparency. As all small businesses face overhead costs, regardless of sector a neutral approach is deemed most appropriate. Introducing a targeted approach by sector would require detailed eligibility checks therefore increasing the administrative burden of the scheme for the Department and carries greater risk. Supporting all sectors helps maintain a balanced local economy rather than prioritising a selected industry specifically given that sectoral need will vary per Council area. Therefore, resulting in sectoral support unintentionally disadvantaging businesses outside the chosen sectors, creating imbalance and reducing the scheme's effectiveness.

6. What Policy Option do you favour?

ANDBC favour Policy Option 1. This option provides the most comprehensive support by introducing two new tiers (20% relief for NAV £15,000–£17,500 and 10% relief for NAV £17,500–£20,000).

Option policy 1 helps the most businesses and extends relief to properties currently excluded, reducing the “cliff edge” effect. Option 1 offers wider coverage to strengthen the small medium business sector of which there are a high proportion in Ards and North Down.

7. How should additional support be funded?

ANDBC believe that current NAV assessments are outdated and welcomes the new non-domestic valuation list that will go live in April 2026. The review and potential updated valuations will hopefully result in making relief thresholds more accurate.

In addition to implementing the updated valuation list, the Council recommends a comprehensive review of current/previous schemes. This review could highlight outdated schemes that no longer deliver meaningful benefits and allow them to be phased out, streamlined, or repurposed redirecting resources from these redundant reliefs to support funding the Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) scheme.

ANDBC also recommend that industrial de-rating be reviewed. By lowering the existing de-rating percentage, the council could create additional revenue, which in turn could help finance the suggested increase in relief without imposing further financial pressure.

8. Do you have any other views on the policy you wish to submit as part of this consultation?

The review of SBRR could see more businesses, especially those in higher-cost areas like Bangor and Newtownards, qualify for relief under updated thresholds. We welcome a scheme that reduces the sharp cut-off at the current £15k NAV limit that will help businesses that currently do not receive any rates assistance.

Businesses in high cost or economically vulnerable areas of the Borough benefit from SBRR's stabilising effect, helping prevent vacancy, maintain service availability, and underpin community vibrancy.

Any amendment to SBRR should be screened to ensure there is no disproportionate impact on groups or places experiencing deprivation, rural isolation, or economic vulnerability, consistent with the Section 75 responsibilities and our commitment to reducing inequalities.

We note from the consultation document that there would be no relief available for those who own 3 or more businesses known as the "multiples" exclusion. There is potential that business owners can own many micro-businesses with the aim of diversifying in order to respond to local demand. These micro businesses have the potential to revive vacant premises and could be seasonal therefore these businesses are not large multi-national business chains but may be perceived as such ultimately leaving these businesses vulnerable.

Microbusiness models play an important role by filling gaps in local services, activating vacant spaces, and responding flexibly to community need. Applying the 'multiples' exclusion without nuance risks undermining these place-based benefits.

It is our considered opinion and recommendation that individual owners of multiple micro businesses in the NAV of £2000 or less category should be regarded as eligible for the SBRR.

Unclassified

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ITEM 12**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	28 January 2026
Responsible Director	Acting Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	20 January 2026
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Notice of Motion Status Report
Attachments	Notice of Motion tracker

Please find attached a Status Report in respect of Notices of Motion.

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

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes the report.

	Responsible Committee	Date Received	Submitted by	Notice (Original and any amendment)	Council & Committee Meetings (Date & Item)	Status (Most recent status update at the top followed by detail of what has been accomplished to date)	Responsible Officer	Final Outcome
11	Active & Healthy Communities	31.05.15	Councillor Muir & Alderman Keery	Rory McIlroy Recognition	Council June 2015 Corporate Services Committee October 2015	Officers discussing options with McIlroy Organisation. Proposal currently being drafted related to supporting young people in sport for their consideration and then will be reported to Council. The Chief Executive has now met with the Rory McIlroy Foundation and a proposal will be presented to them in due course.	Adele Faulkner (Director of Active & Healthy Communities)	
330	Environment	21.01.19	Councillor Brooks & Councillor Smith	This Council brings back a report on providing a shelter or sheltered area near the slipway in Donaghadee which would provide cover for the growing numbers of open water swimmers that use the area on a daily basis.	Council January 2019 Environment Committee 06.02.19 Item 16.3	Report to be brought back to Committee to close off the NOM	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
370	Active & Healthy Communities	13.09.19	Councillor Cathcart & Alderman Gibson	That this Council acknowledges that Council byelaws are in need of review. Many of our Council byelaws are now outdated and do not cover new housing developments and playparks in the Borough. The Council therefore will carry out a comprehensive review of Council byelaws to create a modern system to assist the Council in meeting the outcomes identified within the Community Plan	Council - September 2019 Referred to Environment Committee - October 2019 Environment Committee 02.09.20 Item 12 Council - April 2025 Item 14	Report to be brought back on the possible strengthening of no alcohol consumption byelaws on Council land and at the Borough's beaches and parks. Report to also explore options on possible restrictions of open fires and the use of disposable BBQs at beaches and parks. Review of the byelaws to commence and be undertaken in three stages. Phase 1 - Scope, Phase 2 - Council Review and Phase 3 - Recommendation and Decision Financial provision 2026/27. Update to April A&HC Committee.	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services	
514	Environment	19.05.22	Councillor Cummings & Councillor Johnson	Business case for redesign of the parallel sports pitches and facilities at Park Way, Comber	Council June 2022 Community & Wellbeing Committee September 2022 and deferred to October 2022	Update report to be brought to EC February 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Council agreed Comber 3G pitch is ranked 21st in project prioritisation. Stakeholder engagement to commence at the appropriate time. Leasing application has been received from Comber Rec.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	

519	Active & Healthy Communities	20.06.22	Councillor Kendall, Councillor McRandal & Councillor McClean	Engagement with relevant community stakeholders to ascertain community need and desires in respect of the Queen's Leisure Complex	Council June 2022 Community & Wellbeing Committee September 2022 and deferred to October 2022	Report to November 2024 C&W Committee. Community Engagement took place on 24th September 2024; meeting with councilors in January 2025, further engagement has been requested and clarity is still awaited on the details of that request. Report to June C&W Committee if that clarity is obtained in advance. Meeting to be held on 27 November 2025 with the Mayor, Members and Officers had to be postponed until the new year. Update paper went to P&P Committee on 8 January 2026. Report to March A&HC Committee.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
522	Corporate Services	05.07.22	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery Amendment received from Councillor Cathcart	That this Council changes the name of Queen's Parade to Queen's Platinum Jubilee Parade in honour and recognition of the 70th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne. *** Amendment - That this Council, in recognition of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee and her conferment of City Status upon Bangor, agrees to name an appropriate place or building within Bangor in her honour and that future Council Bangor entrance signs make reference to Bangor being a Platinum Jubilee City.	Council July 2022 Environment Committee September 2022 Corporate Services January 2024	April 2023 - Letter requesting permission to use the Royal Name sent to the Cabinet Office and awaiting response January 2024 - Report brought to Corporate Committee Amendment Agreed and advice sought from Cabinet Office December 2024 - Advice still outstanding January 2026 - Advice now received, update report to be presented to Corporate Committee	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
564	Environment	08.02.23	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery	That this Council tasks officers to begin discussions with the Education Authority with regards to the Future of Bloomfield playing fields, Bangor. This is to include the lease and the exploring of the possibility of bringing the facility up to intermediate level for football. A report to be brought back to Council following said discussions.	Council February 2023 Community & Wellbeing Committee March 2023	NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Officers awaiting response from EA in order for report to be brought back to future Environment Committee. EA has responded to say they '...would be in contact when they are ready to progress...' several chasers have been sent. 26.02.25 Email received from Virginia Lowe of the EA confirming there is no further update at this time. Compliance section continues to chase.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	

567	Corporate Services	14.02.23	Councillor Adair & Councillor Edmund	This Council rename the square at Portavogie War Memorial Queen Elizabeth Square in memory of our late Sovereign Queen Elizabeth II.	Council February 2023 Corporate Services Committee March 2023	A response has been received from the Cabinet Office and a report went back to Committee 30/5/24 - follow up letter sent to Cabinet Office for update. Letters sent to the Cabinet Office requesting use of the Royal Name July 2024 - Advice now received - Report presented at September CSC. Agreed that combined EQIA more appropriate . A further report to be brought to CSC when EQIA ready to go. January 2026 - Advice now received on other requests, update report to be presented to Corporate Committee	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
585	Environment	16.10.23	Alderman Adair, Councillor Edmund & Councillor Kerr	That Council recognise the value of our Beaches and coastal environment to our residents and tourists alike note the new DEARA regulations for the cleaning and maintenance of our beaches and task officers to bring forward a report on cleaning and maintaining our beaches on a proactive basis in line with the new DEARA regulations to ensure our beaches continue to be a clean, safe, attractive and well-managed coastal environments.	Council October 2023 Item 15.2 Environment Committee 3 December 2025 (Item 8)	Update report at December EC: ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATION AGREED that Council agrees in principle to the purchase of a mobile bio beach cleaning station and relevant machinery to ensure that our beaches are properly maintained in a clean, safe and attractive way in accordance with environmental laws. That the purchase of this machinery will be subject to the estimates process NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Report to C&W Committee in January 2025 Further report requested to future C&W Committee to include site visits to Causeway Coast & Glens and Newry Mourne and Down District Council as per amended recommendation at January C&W Committee. Since January C&W Committee a summer site visit has been organised. Report to be brought back to October 2025 C&W Committee. Meanwhile beaches continue to be monitored on a	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	

586	Corporate Services	16.10.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Martin	<p>That this Council, further to recent positive discussions with landowners, agrees to reexamine the April 2014 decision of North Down Borough Council to accept a gift of open space at Ambleside, Bangor, which was never completed and tasks Council Officers to bring back a report looking at (i) acquiring the land and (ii) options around future uses for the land.</p>	<p>Council October 2023 Corporate Services Committee November 2023 Corporate Services Committee September 2024</p>	<p>DEC 2020. The sellers' solicitors have confirmed that they were not willing to undertake first registration. Officers sought further legal advice and CLT agreed to refer the matter to Arthur Moir – the former Registrar of the Land Registry would be asked to provide advice on the various issues in the title and provide an indication of the likelihood of achieving Good Leasehold title. This will allow the Council to make a better informed decision on the purchase. This project is continuing to incur costs to the Council. January 2026 update : The former registrar of the Land Registry has just</p>	<p>Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)</p>	
595	Environment	16.11.23	Councillor McCracken & Councillor Blaney	<p>This Council recognises the importance of Bangor's early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council recognises the importance of Bangor's early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This</p>	<p>Council 29.11.2023</p>	<p>Update report to be brought to a future EC</p>	<p>Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)</p>	
599	Active & Healthy Communities	21.11.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Gilmour	<p>"That this Council recognises the invaluable work undertaken by community/voluntary groups and organisations in this Borough in identifying and tackling the needs of communities and residents. The Council therefore, commits to undertaking a root and branch review of community development funding, arts and heritage, sports development and all other funding streams to ensure that it provides the most efficient, effective and responsive service to our community, thus maximising impact, accessibility and equitable allocation of resources. The review should examine the following 4 categories: (see further wording on agenda)</p>	<p>Council 20.12.23 Community & Wellbeing Committee January 2024 and April 2024 and June 2024 and September 2024. Corporate Committee September 2024</p>	<p>Project ongoing for 24 months with reports brought to C&W Committee as necessary. First working group was on 10th May 2024. Grants transformation project already underway. Regular Updates will be brought. Next report will be to February 2026 Committee.</p>	<p>Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)</p>	

616	Environment	19.03.24	Councillor McCollum & Councillor Irwin	<p>That this Council recognises the significant opportunities which the redevelopment of Donaghadee Harbour could bring to the local economy in terms of leisure sailing and tourism and thus instructs officers to work with local groups to scope potential operational facilities which could enhance the offering in the Harbour and further brings back a feasibility report on the various options, including costings and possible funding streams.</p> <p>Further, that this Council recognises the issues associated with high winds and coastal change and reviews the original 2020 Harbour Study conducted by RPS including the necessity for an offshore breakwater and agrees to bring back a report in time to be presented to Council in September 2024, outlining the budget required to undertake this work, any key considerations, next steps and identify which stakeholders would need to be involved.</p>	<p>Council 27.03.24 Item 18.3 Enviroment Committee 10.04.24 Item 14 Environment Committee 04.09.24 Item 14 Environment Committee 06.11.24 Item 3 Environment Committee 11.06.25 Item 3</p>	<p>Agreed that the Council writes to the Department for Infrastructure Rivers Agency, sharing the findings of the study undertaken by AECOM, and asking that enhanced coastal defence schemes be progressed for the inner and outer parades in Donaghadee. Further agreed that Council officers make meaningful engagement with local stakeholders and incorporate their responses in an update report to be brought back to Council within 6 months.</p> <p>Agreed that the Council proceeds with the 'Phase 1' further investigation work regarding potential Donaghadee sea defence enhancements.</p> <p>Agreed that Council proceeds as proposed in section 4 of the report, with the outcome of engagement outlined being reported back to Environment Committee in 2025.</p> <p>Environment Committee April 2024 - Agreed to bring back a report.</p>	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
624	Corporate Services	20.05.24	Councillor Kendall, Alderman McRandal and Alderman Graham	<p>This Council notes that, subsequent to submission of a Notice of Motion in 2017, Council agreed to provide funding to assist in the building of a new war memorial in Conlig village; and to liaise with, and assist, the Conlig War Memorial Project Group in their efforts to build a monument to the seventeen men who are known to have lost their lives in World War I.</p>	<p>Council - May 2024 - Corporate Services Committee June</p>	<p>January 2026: This matter is progressing in line with the actions agreed by both The Council and Conlig Community Regeneration Group. The NIHE has agreed to the sale of the land and it is with LPS for a valuation.</p>	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance) & Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	

629	Environment	19.08.24	Councillors Gilmour, Hollywood, McClean and McKee	<p>That this council notes that significant investment was previously made to deliver a play park, MUGA and amateur league sized football pitch on the Clandeboye road. Notes with regret there have been ongoing issues with the pitch. Instructs officers to reinstate the goalposts and mark out the pitch so that it can be played on by the local community.</p> <p>Furthermore, following consultation with the local community, that a report is brought back regarding the longer term maintenance and enhancement of the site, to ensure any necessary provisions can be considered during the rate setting process to ensure that the football pitch is fit for purpose and can be used as previously agreed.”</p>	<p>Council 28 August 2024 (Item 25.3)</p> <p>September C&W Committee Environment Committee 3 December 2025 (Item 6)</p>	<p>Update report at EC December: ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATION AGREED. That the item be deferred to allow officers to set up a meeting as soon as possible between Council officers, CVCA and interested environment committee & Bangor West DEA elected reps.</p> <p>NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation</p> <p>Report to January 2025 C&W Committee. Funding approved for 25/26 to progress first stage. Report to June C&W Committee with progress report as communicated to DEA members and local community in April and May 2025 on next steps and plans for enhancement of the site. Update to October 2025 C&WC.</p>	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
631	Corporate Services	7.8.24	Alderman McIlveen, Councillor Boyle, Alderman McDowell, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, Councillor Smart, Councillor Kennedy, Councillor S Irvine	<p>That this Council bestows the Freedom of the Borough upon Rhys McClenaghan - European, Commonwealth, World and Olympic Gold Medallist - in recognition of his outstanding achievements in sport.</p>	<p>Council September 2024 (Item 13.1)</p>	<p>Meeting with Rhys McClenaghan took place in January 2025. January 2026: Progressing - Events on 23 and 25th January 2026 .</p>	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	

632	Environment	21.08.24	Councillor Irwin and Alderman McRandal	That this Council tasks officers with producing a report outlining how pedestrian access to Household Recycling Centres in the Borough could be facilitated. This report should include consideration of health and safety requirements, the HRC booking system and the ability to provide pedestrian access in other council areas in Northern Ireland.	Council September 2024 (Item 13.2) Environment Committee 2 October 2024 (Item 11.1) Environment Committee 7 May 2025 (Item 3) Environment Committee 3 December 2025 (Item 4)	Agreed not to continue with the pedestrian access arrangements in their current form. Furthermore, officers to investigate other means of safely providing pedestrian access to HRC sites alongside vehicular access and report the outcome of this to a future meeting. Agreed at EC 7 May 2025 to proceed with a three-month trial at Holywood and Donaghadee HRCs Agreed at April 2025 Environment Committee to proceed with Option 3 for a pilot scheme in Holywood and Donaghadee HRCs in order to obtain a proper evidence basis for demand; and that consideration of pedestrian access is included in the work around the future of the HRC estate as outlined in Option 1. Further report to follow. Agreed at Environment Committee 2 October 2024	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	
636	Active & Healthy Communities	16.10.24	Councillors Boyle & Wray	That officers bring back a detailed report surrounding options to celebrate the huge success of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex. Options would include a Civic Reception to celebrate 6 years of the huge success of the facility in 2025	Council October 2024 Item 23.3 - Community & Wellbeing Committee November 2024	Report to April C&WC. To be referred back to a future C&WC as per April Council decision. Report to February 2026 A&HCC with the aim of tying this in with the Leisure Strategy launch.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	

638	Place & Prosperity	22.10.2024	Councillors Harbinson & McCracken	<p>That this Council should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare a visual map for all public sector land in Bangor City Centre and Ards Town Centre and colour code holdings that are potentially connected with future developments (even if not yet fully agreed), including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizen's Hub and the Council's Car Park Strategy. This includes public land belonging to the Council and NI Executive Departments. 2. To further identify public sector land that is currently unproductive and outside the scope of wider strategies, which could be made available for future private sector development. This includes land that is either vacant, contains empty or derelict buildings, or contains buildings that are under-utilised or dated to the point that redevelopment is required. The map should also include land that is facilitating meanwhile use. 3. Prepare a summary report to highlight how unproductive public sector land could be repurposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive disposal policies. 	<p>Place & Prosperity Committee November 2024 (Item 14.2)</p> <p>Council October 2024 (Item 23.5)</p>	<p>Strategic Development, Lands, and the GIS officer met 16.10.25 to discuss how to get the information from GIS. Update to be provided to Elected Members by 17.10.25</p> <p>Update report to P&P in the first quarter of 2026</p> <p>Agreed at 7 Nov 2024 P&P and ratified by 27 Nov Council 2024 - initial report to be brought back to future P&P Committee</p>	<p>Director of Place and Prosperity</p>	
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640		05.11.2024	Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Adair	<p>That this Council condemns the failure by the UK Government to prioritise farming families and the rural economy as part of the Autumn Budget; notes with deep concern the decisions to introduce new thresholds for Inheritance Tax and Agricultural Property Relief, which will jeopardise succession planning on farms and discourage investment in many farm businesses.</p> <p>Further to this, Council calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals to mitigate the impact of these damaging policies on local farms, as well as avoid significant increases in food prices; further commits to engage with the Chancellor at the earliest opportunity and demonstrate his absolute support for farmers affected by this budget and further calls on the Minister to work with the Minister of Finance to deliver an early and firm commitment to farming families that current levels of financial support will not only be maintained but increased in the next financial year.</p>	<p>Council meeting 27.11.2024 - Heard and agreed.</p>	<p>Letter sent to Minister on 9 December and response received 13 January. Report to go to January Council.</p>		
644	Environment	10.12.24	Alderman McIveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	<p>That Council notes the poor condition of the Bowtown children's play park and its poor provision of accessible play equipment and tasks officers to bring forward a report on enhancing and improving the play park to meet the needs of local children.</p>	<p>Council 18.12.24 and Community and Wellbeing Committee 15.01.2025 Environment Committee 3 December 2025 (Item 7)</p>	<p>Update report at December EC: Agreed that the Council continues to support Bowtown Community Association through the delivery of a Community Growing Space in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and further recommended that when Bowtown Play Park falls within the lowest scoring play parks, as per the Independent Inspectors Annual Report, it is prioritised for refurbishment in line with the approach currently being followed as outlined in the Play Strategy. Referred to the February 2025 meeting of Community and Wellbeing Committee. Reported to April C&W Committee. April Council determined that Director & HoS to visit site. Site visit took place on 3 June 2025. A masterplan/feasability study to be carried out.</p>	<p>Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)</p>	

655	Environment	18.02.2025	Alderman Cummings and Councillor Douglas	That this Council brings back a report outlining the design, cost and positioning of an additional plaque on the War Memorial in Comber, to accommodate a list of historically researched names, currently being collated as per War Memorial Trust guidelines, of the fallen in the Great War 1914-1918, which were previously not included	Council 26.02.2025 Environment Committee 5 March 2025	Update report to be brought to EC April 2026 Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion at Environment Committee 05.03.2025. Agreed to refer to Environment Committee at Council 26.02.25	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
657	Environment	18.02.2025	Alderman Adair & Councillor Edmund	That Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Islandview Road Greyabbey to ensure future intermediate football standards by the local sporting clubs and community of Greyabbey.	Council 26.02.2025 - Community & Wellbeing Committee March 2025	Update report to be brought to EC April 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Agreed that Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Islandview Road Greyabbey to ensure future intermediate football standards by the local sporting clubs and community of Greyabbey	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
658	Environment	03.03.2025	Councillor McClean & Councillor Cathcart	That Council notes the tired and inconsistent presentation of Christmas lights and illuminations in Bangor City Centre, particularly during the Christmas period, and considers potential festive lighting improvements for Christmas 2025. Further, that Council tasks officers to bring back a report presenting options that draw on successful practice and displays elsewhere, including the use of festoon lighting over Main Street. The report should look at the feasibility of the future expansion of these concepts to the remainder of the Borough, if proven successful in Bangor.	Council 26.03.2025 Environment Committee 02.04.2025 Environment Committee 11.06.25 Council 25.06.25	Update report to be brought to EC February 2026 Agreed the proposals in the update report in relation to Christmas Lighting in Bangor, utilising DfC funding wherever possible, with any shortfall coming from existing Christmas Lighting maintenance budgets. Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion - Environment Committee 02.04.2025. Report to future EC.	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	

665	Environment	15.04.2025	Councillor Morgan and Councillor Ashe	We are all aware that dog ownership has increased significantly over the past years. There is fenced off area on "Muckers" in Comber, which is currently being used by NIW which when they have finished their work might lend itself to creating a dog park. This Council should bring back a report that explores the options for creating a dog park in Comber.	Council 30.04.25	Update report to be brought to EC January 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Assigned to June 2025 C&W Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
667	Corporate Services	23.04.2025	Councillor S Irvine and Alderman McIlveen	That this Council notes with deep respect the tragic loss of four Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) soldiers - John Bradley (25) , John Birch (28), Stephen Smart (23), and Michael Adams (23) - who were murdered in a 1,000 lb IRA landmine attack on April 9, 1990, on the Ballydugan Road near Downpatrick. Recognises the pain and sacrifice felt by their families, comrades, and the wider community, and acknowledges the bravery of these young men who served their country during a difficult period in our history. Proposes that a permanent memorial be added to the cenotaph in Newtownards in honour of these four UDR soldiers, ensuring their memory is preserved within the heart of their home town for future generations. Requests that this Council engage with the families of the fallen, veteran organisations, and local stakeholders to develop appropriate wording and design for the memorial addition, and to ensure the tribute is carried out with the dignity and sensitivity it deserves.	Council 28.05.25 and Corporate Committee June 2025	December update :Consultation with key stakeholders took place end November and report will be presented to January 2026 Committee. January 2026 update : Approach approved as per Corporate Services Committee Report in Jan 2026. Remove from tracker in February.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
668	Active & Healthy Communities	23.04.25	Councillor Wray and Councillor Hollywood	Council amends funding eligibility criteria to allow for voluntary dance groups to avail of grants within either the arts or sport funding streams. Council acknowledges the opportunities performance arts bring in terms of community wellbeing, education, tourism, and our local economy. Officers will provide a report on how Council can further grow performance art across Ards and North Down	Council 28.05.25 and Community and Wellbeing Committee 18.06.25	January 2026 : Approach approved as per January Corporate Committee report . Remove from tracker	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
670	Environment	07.05.25	Councillor Morgan and Councillor Irwin	This Council is pleased with the recycling rates for waste that have been achieved in the Borough, however there are currently limited facilities to recycle litter. This sends out a poor message to our residents and visitors. This Council asks that officers bring back a report that explores how, and when recycling litter bins could be introduced to the Borough. Indicator of costs should be included.	Council 28.05.25 and Environment Committee 11.06.25	Report to be brought to EC February 2025 Agreed to adopt NOM at June 2025 Committee Assigned to June 2025 EC Agenda	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	

671	Active & Healthy Communities	20.05.25	Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee	<p>Responsible Dog Walking in Public Spaces. This Council, as a 'Dog Friendly Borough' recognises the increasing use of public parks and footpaths by professional and recreational dog walkers, and the need to balance animal welfare, public safety, and the enjoyment of public spaces for all of our Borough's residents. This Council notes that:</p> <p>Multiple dogs under the control of a single individual may pose challenges to effective management and public safety. Excessive numbers of dogs being walked simultaneously can lead to increased risk of dog fights, interference with other park users, fouling, and uncontrolled behaviour; There has been an increasing number of professional dog walkers, offering services within the Borough and there is a lack of licencing, registration or other requirements which may lead to inadequate insurance, training and experience, adding further potential risks to people and pets; and · Many local authorities across the UK, including our neighbour Belfast City Council, have introduced limits on the number of dogs that may be walked at one time. The Council therefore resolves to:</p> <p>Produce a report outlining the costs and steps required to introduce a local restriction under the relevant provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environments Act (Northern Ireland) 2011: Limiting the number of dogs that any one person</p>	<p>Council 25.06.25</p> <p>Environment Committee - September Item 20.1</p>	<p>Agreed to adopt NOM at September EC</p> <p>Assigned to September 2025 EC Agenda. Moved to A&HC due to restructure. Update to March 2026 A&HC Committee.</p>	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services	
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672	Place & Prosperity	20.05.25	Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson	<p>Amendment to Notice of Motion 672 submitted by Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson</p> <p>“This Council welcomes the update on Marine Gardens provided by Bangor Marine on 13 August 2025 and agrees that:</p> <p>1. Council officers should work alongside Bangor Marine to support public communication around this project. This includes inviting Bangor Marine to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders, supporting the proposed public consultation hub led by Bangor Marine, and by holding regular meetings with Bangor Marine to ensure accurate and complementary messaging on respective websites, newsletters and social media.</p> <p>2. Council should also work with Bangor Marine to support a commercial marketing plan with the aim of attracting investment for the further phases of Queen’s Parade along with complementary investment that will support the ambitions of the wider City Deal. An initial outline should be brought to Committee in Q1 2026 with a view to approve draft marketing collateral that can be used at future property investment conferences in the UK and abroad.”</p>	<p>P&P 4.9.25</p> <p>Council 25.06.25</p>	<p>1. BM to be invited to next CAG (soon to be relaunched as LAG, likely Jan/Feb 2026 whilst the C/TAG to LAG process is formalised</p> <p>2. Re: commercial marketing plan, update report to P&P in first quarter of 2026.</p> <p>Agreed to adopt NOM at Sept 2025 P&P - ratified at Sept 2025 Council</p>	Director of Place and Prosperity	
673	Environment	21.05.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Cochrane	<p>That this Council notes the popularity of public spaces such as beaches during the summer months. Further to this Council will task officers to bring back a report to explore options for the extension of public toilet opening hours during the summer months to 9pm near beaches and other busy areas. Council Officers will further bring back a report on expanding baby changing facilities within our Borough at public toilets.</p>	<p>Council 25.06.25</p> <p>Environment Committee - September Item 20.2</p> <p>Environment Committee 03.12.2025 Item 3</p>	<p>Update report to be brought to February 2026 EC</p> <p>Report brought to December 2025 EC:</p> <p>ALTERNATIVE RECOMMENDATION</p> <p>AGREED to note the report and bring back a report on costs and options on extending the summer opening hours to cover April and September as well as May to August, to redevelop and relaunch a community scheme to increase provisions for the public during the summer months and review its impacts in order to bring a report back to Council after a period of review.</p> <p>Agreed to adopt NOM at September EC</p> <p>Assigned to September 2025 EC Agenda</p>	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	

676	Active & Healthy Communities	16.06.25	Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum	That this Council recognises the success of Love Ballyholme and thanks all involved for their hard work and commitment; further recognises the importance of community led initiatives to improve community cohesion, while supporting local businesses, and asks officers to bring back a report, which includes a plan and funding opportunities to support the replication of this community led model in the Rathmore area of Bangor.	Council 30.07.25 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	Assigned to September 2025 C&W Agenda. Report to February 2026 A&HC Committee.	Nikki Dorian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
677	Environment	24.06.25	Alderman Smith and Councillor Smart	That this Council produces a report to scope the potential of introducing a public hire bicycle scheme similar to Belfast Bikes for use across the new Greenway network. That the report outlines the benefits, risks, costs, potential partnerships and any funding opportunities including those provided through DfI Active Travel to inform a Council decision on progressing such a scheme.	Council 30.07.25 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	Update report to be brought to EC April 2026 NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Assigned to September 2025 C&W Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
678	Corporate Services	21.07.25	Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers	That this Council notes the role played by Donaghadee Cricket Club in promoting sport, health, and community engagement in Donaghadee, particularly for our youth. Council further requests that officers prepare a report to look at how sports clubs like Donaghadee could be better supported by Council, particular through the lease charges levied against the clubs acknowledging the great community work these organisations do as well as the role they play in maintaining the facilities	Council 30.07.25 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	January 2026 update: The Lands team are looking at options and a report will be brought back to committee.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
680	Active & Healthy Communities	05.09.25	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Edmund	That this Council recognises the importance of every child having the opportunity to learn to swim - a vital life skill that supports physical health, mental wellbeing, and water safety. Swimming is not only one of the most effective forms of exercise, but also a key activity for building confidence and resilience in young people. Further to this Council agrees to- 1. An Audit of current indoor swimming lesson provision and also open water safety awareness programmes across the Borough against local demand; and 2. The development of a strategy to ensure that no child is denied access to swimming lessons or safety awareness programmes due to cost or capacity.	Council 24.09.25 - October Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Leisure Officers to progress.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	

681	Corporate Services	09.09.25	Alderman McIveen and Councillor Cathcart	That this Council expresses its deep disappointment at the correspondence sent to each councillor in Northern Ireland by NAC NI dated 2 September 2025 recommending that councillors take "industrial" action and considers the balloting of members to take any form of strike action is inappropriate, ill-judged and unlawful. Notes that the eleven Councils in Northern Ireland pay a corporate rate to fund the NAC NI in Northern Ireland and that individual councillors are by default members of NAC NI rather than by choice. Is further of the view that if the NAC NI wishes to act like a union then it should be governed by the same laws as any other union and that membership should be voluntary and a matter for individual councillors rather than funded by the ratepayer. As such, this Council agrees to withdraw its corporate funding from the NAC NI, writes to inform the NAC NI of this decision and calls on the executive members of the NAC NI to resign their positions given the gross over-reach of this correspondence and how it has brought the role of hard-working councillors into disrepute.	Council 24.09.25 - October Corporate Services Committee	Added to the agenda for CS 14/10, 14/11 letter sent to NAC NI by CEX. NAC NI have confirmed that this will be discussed at the meeting of their Executive Committee in December and that they will respond after this.		
682	Corporate Services	17.09.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Gilmour	Council recognising the importance of Holywood as a Garrison town, seeks in conjunction with the Craigavon and Helen's Bay Branch of the Royal British Legion, to bring a military event to Holywood.	Council 24.09.25. Corporate Services Committee	December update : Meeting to take place in Jan 2026 to work up proposal. Once there is a proposal a report will be presented to Committee. January 2026 update : Meeting has taken place. draft plan proposed.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
684	Environment	10.10.25	Councillor Hennessy and Alderman Brooks	That this Council brings back a report, with associated costs, detailing the possible road safety and lighting improvements that could be made between Donaghadee harbour and Donaghadee Community Centre.	Council 29.10.25 Environment Committee	Agreed to adopt NOM at November EC 2025 - to be ratified at November 2025 Council Assigned to November 2025 EC Agenda	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	

685	Active & Healthy Communities	14.10.25	Councillor Kendall and Councillor S Irvine	<p>This Council recognises the link between domestic abuse and non-accidental harm to companion animals and the emotional trauma this causes victims and survivors, acknowledging that companion animals are often used as tools of coercion and control in abusive relationships and that their welfare is intrinsically linked to the safety and wellbeing of victims. The introduction and implementation of Ruby's Law, as proposed in other parts of the UK, seeks to provide legal protection for pets in households where domestic abuse occurs, ensuring that they are considered in protective orders and safeguarding measures.</p> <p>Therefore, this council resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write to the Ministers for Justice, Communities, Finance, DAERA, and Health, calling for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The introduction of Ruby's Law in Northern Ireland; and 2. Them to work in partnership to deliver a cross-departmental collaboration with Causeway Coast Dog Rescue charity, and other animal welfare and domestic abuse organisations as required, to ensure the development of robust and enforceable provisions, taking a multidisciplinary approach to identify key stakeholders and government agencies to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse and coercive relationships and the protection of their pets. 	Council 29.10.25 AHC	Report to March 2026 A&HC Committee.	Gareth Kinnear (Interim Head of Environmental Health)	
686	Corporate Services	15.10.25	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Gilmour	<p>That this Council is deeply alarmed that the definition of victim in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 does not distinguish between those who perpetrated wrongdoing during the Troubles and the innocent victims they harmed, injured, killed or bereaved; believes that innocent victims should not have to interact with terrorists and their supporters when accessing victim support services; asserts that there is no moral equivalence between victim-makers and innocent victims; welcomes the fact that the victims pension legislation makes a clear distinction between perpetrator and victim; condemns the Alliance Party's decision to intentionally blur this line by removing the word "innocent" from the description of a victim in a recent Assembly motion addressing the legacy of the past; and resolves to write to the Justice Minister requesting that she personally apologise for suggesting that victim makers could also be considered victims.</p>	Council 29.10.25 Corporate Services Committee	On the draft agenda for CS 11/11. Letter to go to Minister of Justice-draft with CEX 16/12. Reply received and report to go to CS Feb 2026		

687	Active & Healthy Communities	16.10.25	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.	Council 29.10.25. AHC	Deferred to December A&HC Committee	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
688	Corporate Services	16.10.25	Alderman Graham and Alderman McIlveen	That Council in liaison with Belfast City Airport arranges a visit to the Airport for members and officers.	Council 29.10.25 Corporate Services Committee	On the draft agenda for CS 11/11. CEX office to issue an invite in January. Deputation request issued to BCA via their representative at Brown O'Connor.		
689	Environment	21.10.25	Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund	That Council task officers to bring forward a report on the possibility of permitting wooden memorials at our cemeteries as part of regulations going forward.	Council 29.10.25 Environment Committee	Agreed to adopt NOM at November EC to be ratified at November 2025 Council Assigned to November 2025 EC Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
690	Corporate Services	31.10.25	Councillor W Irvine and Councillor S Irvine	That this Council pledges to oppose the introduction of any Digital ID system that would be mandatory or linked to essential services. We resolve to write to the Prime Minister urging the Government to abandon any Digital ID initiative and calling for a full public consultation to take place on the subject prior to any future proposals being brought forward.	Council November 26.11.25 Corporate Services Committee	Added to the agenda for CS 9/12		

691	Environment	11.11.25	Alderman Smith and Councillor Chambers	<p>This Council notes the Ulster Farmers' Union's unprecedented motion of no confidence in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), which reflects deep and widespread frustration within the farming community.</p> <p>This Council recognises the unrelenting pressures faced by family farmers across Northern Ireland, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The unresolved and escalating crisis surrounding Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB); •Uncertainty regarding future Inheritance Tax arrangements for farm succession; •Continued planning paralysis affecting essential agricultural development; and •Increasing policy and regulatory pressures, with little meaningful assurance, progress, or action from DAERA to address these challenges. <p>This Council further acknowledges that family farmers are the backbone of Northern Ireland's agri-food sector, sustaining rural communities, underpinning the regional economy, and serving as essential custodians of our environment and biodiversity.</p> <p>This Council therefore calls on the Minister for DAERA to move beyond an "open door" approach</p>	Council November 26.11.25 Environment Committee 7 January 2026 (Item 9.1)	Agreed to write to the Environment Minister asking that they engage more with the farming community	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
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692	Active & Healthy Communities	12.11.25	Councillor McKee and Councillor Kendall	<p>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.</p> <p>This Council writes to The Department of Justice to request the commission of an urgent review of Northern Ireland's fireworks legislation, to include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Council November 26.11.25 Active and Healthy Communities Committee</p>	Officers to progress.	<p>Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services & Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community)</p>	
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693	Environment	26.11.25	Alderman McRandal and Alderman McAlpine	<p>That this Council notes with concern the signs of erosion which have arisen on Station Road, Craigavon in recent years and that this Council recognises that Station Road, Craigavon is an integral section of the North Down coastal path and the Ulster Way.</p> <p>That this Council reassess whether it has responsibility for maintaining the road and for strengthening the sea wall and sea defences along the North Down coastal path section of Station Road, in view of:</p> <p>the fact that Council was prepared to assume responsibility for the road and sea defences under the failed Greenway project;</p> <p>the fact that this is a right of way as asserted by Council.</p> <p>That a report is brought back to the relevant Committee, to include assessment of who owns or is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the sea wall and sea defences along Station Road.</p>	<p>Council December 2025 and Environment Committee 7 January 2026 (Item 9.2)</p>	<p>Report to be brought to a future meeting of the Corporate Services Committee to include legal advice regarding responsibility for the sea defence wall.</p> <p>EC February 2025 Agreed to adopt NOM at June 2025 Committee</p> <p>Assigned to June 2025 EC Agenda</p>	<p>Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)</p> <p>Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)</p>	
694	Corporate Services	27.11.25	Councillor Ashe and Councillor McBurney	That this Council returns a report researching paternity leave provision for council employees including, but not limited to: benchmarking of paternity leave provision	Council December 2025 and Corporate Services Committee January 2026			
695	Active & Healthy Communities	01.12.25	Councillor Smart and Alderman McIlveen	<p>In light of the recent difficulty of West Winds Community Church in accessing council facilities to provide their Christmas Day service of worship, we agree that the Borough community facilities will be made available on Christmas Day, only on the strict proviso that the relevant individual staff choose to work on Christmas Day and cannot be mandated to do so.</p> <p>A review of this provision would then be included in the current and ongoing policy review relating to council community facilities.</p>	Heard and Agreed at Council meeting December 17 2025	Report to February 2026 A&HC Committee.		

697	Active & Healthy Communities	08.12.25	Councillor Douglas and Alderman Cummings	<p>That this council is deeply concerned regarding the length of time that people battling with Motor Neurone Disease must wait to receive help through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Disabled Facilities Grant.</p> <p>To write to the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Minister for Communities to ask what the current length of time is for MND sufferers to have home adaptations completed and to ask them to implement a scheme to fast track these vital and much needed home adaptions.</p>	<p>Council December 2025 and Active and Healthy Communities Committee Jan 2026</p>	<p>Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)</p>	
698	Active & Healthy Communities	09.12.25	Councillor Wray and Councillor Chambers	<p>Council acknowledges the vital role that our voluntary community groups play across the borough. Through our grants programmes these groups deliver initiatives such as community events, sporting activities, and festivals promoting tourism.</p> <p>As we rely on these groups to continue this important work across the borough, we must ensure they are supported, and that the management of these grants is easy to navigate.</p> <p>Advance payments are essential for small organisations who don't have large reserve sums of money in their bank accounts. Another complication for groups is being passed across various council departments during the delivery of their initiative.</p> <p>In order to improve this process, Officers will bring back a report considering the implications of making the following changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advance payments available to groups is extended to 80%. • If a group is successful in a funding application, the advance payment will be 50% of the total grant. 	<p>Council December 2025 and Active and Healthy Communities Committee Jan 2026</p>		

699	Corporate Services	09.12.25	Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum	That this Council notes with concern the increased cost of living and the impact this has upon families and individuals within the Borough; further notes that the absence of a clear Anti-Poverty Strategy makes it challenging to understand and strengthen our role in alleviating poverty and reducing inequality and therefore tasks Officers with bringing forward proposals to enhance the effectiveness of Council's contribution to poverty alleviation, including but not limited to, funding allocated to volunteer led community groups involved in poverty alleviation work. This work should complement, and not duplicate, any borough-wide Anti-Poverty action planning being undertaken by external partners.	Council December 2025 and Corporate Services Committee Jan 2026				
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