

June 24th, 2026

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 24th June 2026 at 7:00 pm** in **Hybrid - City Hall, Bangor and via Zoom.**

Agenda

Agenda

(Attached)

Attachment: C 2026.06.24 Agenda.pdf

Page 1

1. **Prayer**
2. **Apologies**
3. **Declarations of Interest**
- 4 **Mayor's Business**
- 5 **Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month of June 2026**

Copy attached

Attachment: Mayoral Engagements - June 2026.pdf

Page 5

6 **Minutes of Council Meeting dated 27 May 2026**

Copy attached

Attachment: C 2026.05.27 Minutes.pdf

Page 9

7. **Minutes of Annual Meeting dated 3 June 2026**

Attachment: AM 03.6.2026 Minutes.pdf

Page 18

8. **Minutes of Committees**

8.1 **Planning Committee dated 9 June 2026**

Copy attached.

Attachment: PC 2026.06.09 Minutes.pdf

Page 42

8.2 **Environment Committee dated 10 June 2026**

Copy attached.

Attachment: EC 2026.06.10 Minutes.pdf

Not included

8.3 Place and Prosperity Committee dated 11 June 2026

Copy attached

Attachment: PP 2026.06.11 Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: PP 2026.06.11 MinutesPM.pdf

Page 167

8.4 Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 15 June 2026

Copy attached.

Attachment: AHC 2026.06.15 Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: AHC 2026.06.15 Minutes PM.pdf

Page 207

8.4.1 Arising from Active and Healthy Communities Committee - Funding Update

Copy attached.

Attachment: 8.4.1 Funding Update.pdf

Page 273

Attachment: 8.4.1 Appendix 1 - Table of Community Central Gov Funded programmes.pdf

Page 276

8.5 Corporate Services Committee dated 16 June 2026

Copy attached

Attachment: CS.2026.06.16 Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: CS.2026.06.16 MinutesPM.pdf

Page 279

9. Deputation Requests

9.1 Bangor Chamber of Commerce

Copy attached.

Attachment: 9 Deputation request from Bangor Chamber of Commerce.pdf

Page 312

Attachment: 9.1 Deputation Request Bangor Chamber of Commerce.pdf

Page 314

10. Schedule of Meetings 2027

Copy attached.

Attachment: 10 Schedule of Meetings 2027.pdf

Page 319

Attachment: 10.1 Schedule of Meetings 2027.pdf

Page 321

11. Battle of the Somme Pilgrimage 2026 - Update

Copy attached.

Attachment: 11. Battle of the Somme Pilgrimage - Update.pdf

Page 325

12. Changes to the Standing Orders

Copy attached.

Attachment: 12. Changes to the Standing Orders.pdf

Page 327

Attachment: 12. Appendix 2 - Special Meeting Requisition - DRAFT.pdf

Page 333

13. Update on the Joint Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government Elections 2027 from the Secretary of State

Copy attached.

Attachment: 13. Update on the Joint Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government Elections 2027 from the Secretary of State.pdf

Page 334

Attachment: 13. Appendix 1 - Secretary of State to Susie McCullough - Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Elections June 2027.pdf

Page 336

14. A Public Consultation on the Local Growth Fund in NI 2026-2029

Copy attached.

Attachment: 14 A Public Consultation on the Local Growth Fund in NI 2026-2029.pdf

Page 339

Attachment: 14.1 Appendix 1 NIO Consultation paper on the Local Growth Fund in NI 2026-2029.pdf

Page 341

Attachment: 14.2 Appendix II Local Growth Fund Consultation Response.pdf

Page 353

15. Sealing Documents

16. Transfer of Rights of Burial

17. Notice of Motion Status Report

Copy attached.

Attachment: 17 Notice of Motion Status Report.pdf

Page 367

Attachment: 17. NoM Tracker.xlsx

Page 369

18. Notices of Motion

18.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Gilmour

That this Council condemns recent anti-social behaviour witnessed in Bangor and the North Down coast and commits to reviewing our own resources, as well as working with relevant agencies to tackle this problem. Whilst grateful for police action taken, this Council recognises that the officers need additional powers to tackle anti-social behaviour and expresses disappointment that the Justice Minister has ruled out passing relevant legislation during this Assembly mandate. This Council therefore agrees to write to the Justice Minister, calling for action on anti-social behaviour legislation, more police officers for the Borough, the reopening of Bangor custody suite and the rejection of any lowering of the age of criminal responsibility.

18.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cochrane, Alderman Brooks, Councillor Chambers, Councillor Quinn, Councillor Thompson and Councillor Hennessy

That this Council notes the publication of NICCAP3 and recognises the need for practical measures to address coastal erosion, flooding and infrastructure resilience in Northern Ireland.

Further to this, Council notes that the delivery of the associated Adaptation Delivery Plan would 'designate responsibility to a NICS department to oversee coastal management and bring forward policy and legislation on managing coastal change' and believes this designation must be supported with associated Executive funding.

Recognises that coastal councils, including Ards and North Down Borough Council, are increasingly exposed to the impacts of coastal change, while lacking the statutory powers and resources to respond effectively;

Further notes that Ards and North Down has the longest coastline of any council area in Northern Ireland and is therefore particularly affected by these risks;

Further notes that the coast and coastal walks are arguably the 'jewel in the crown' of our community and tourism assets;

Acknowledges the increasing evidence of coastal impacts within the Borough, including flooding, storm damage, and pressure on public infrastructure.

Accordingly, this Council calls on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

1. Designate a lead department or agency with statutory responsibility for both coastal flooding and coastal erosion and clarify its relationship with Councils in delivering improved intelligence, monitoring and protection;
2. Introduce a framework for long-term coastal planning, such as Shoreline Management Plans or a Northern Ireland equivalent;
3. Establish a dedicated coastal protection and resilience fund to support councils and relevant agencies in delivering necessary infrastructure and adaptation measures;
4. Bring forward proposals, within a defined timeframe, to address governance, funding, and delivery of coastal protection in Northern Ireland.

The Council further agrees to:

Write to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and relevant Executive Ministers, outlining this position;

Engage with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and other coastal councils to seek a coordinated, regional approach to this issue.

Support efforts to ensure that coastal communities are adequately protected from flooding, coastal erosion and other environmental pressures.

18.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Chambers

That Council writes to the Department for Communities requesting a review of their current policy that stops businesses located outside of town centre core boundaries from applying for grant support.

18.4 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McRandal and Councillor Harbinson

That this Council acknowledges the financial costs that it incurs in dealing with and disposing of litter and in seeking to take enforcement action.

That this Council acknowledges that it needs to take further action to positively influence the attitude of some people towards littering.

This Council therefore resolves to consider what additional actions it can reasonably take both to inform the public about the various harms that result from littering and to seek to change people's attitudes towards littering.

Council should furthermore consider developing and implementing a formal litter action plan, where all actions relating to the handling and disposal of litter enforcement and education and prevention are brought together in one place.

A report should be brought back to the Committee with recommendations in respect of the above.

18.5 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Brady and seconded by Councillor McKee

That Council reverse its decision of 29th October 2025 to withdraw funding from the NAC NI Region and reinstates its membership, in line with the other ten councils in Northern Ireland.

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

Items for Approval

19. Former Ards Leisure Centre Site, William Street, Newtownards - Vesting Compensation

Copy attached.

Attachment: 19 Former Ards Leisure Centre Site William St Newtownards Vesting Compensation June 2026.pdf

Not included

20. Request for a Rent Abatement - Lease to Donaghadee Sailing Club

Copy attached.

Attachment: 20 Request for a rent abatement - Lease to Donaghadee Sailing Club.pdf

Not included

Attachment: 20 Appendix 1 - Lease Map - Request for a rent abatement.jpg

Not included

Attachment: 20 Public Summary - Request for a rent abatement - Lease to Donaghadee Sailing Club.pdf

Not included

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

17 June 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, 24 June 2026 at 7.00pm.**

Yours faithfully

Susie McCullough
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Prayer
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Mayor's Business
5. Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month of June 2026 (Copy attached)
6. Minutes of Council meeting dated 27 May 2026 (Copy attached)
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8. Minutes of Committees (Copies attached)
 - 8.1. Planning Committee dated 9 June 2026
 - 8.2. Environment Committee dated 10 June 2026
 - 8.3. Place and Prosperity Committee dated 11 June 2026
 - 8.4. Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 15 June 2026
 - 8.4.1 Arising from Active and Healthy Communities Committee – Funding Update (To follow)
 - 8.5. Corporate Services Committee dated 16 June 2026
9. Deputation Requests

- 9.1 Bangor Chamber of Commerce (Report attached)
10. Schedule of Meetings 2027 (Report attached)
11. Battle of the Somme Pilgrimage 2026 – Update (Report attached)
12. Changes to the Standing Orders (Report attached)
13. Update on the Joint Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government Elections 2027 from the Secretary of State (Report attached)
14. A Public Consultation on the Local Growth Fund in NI 2026-2029 (Report attached)
15. Sealing Documents
16. Transfer of Rights of Burial
17. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)
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- Recognises that coastal councils, including Ards and North Down Borough Council, are increasingly exposed to the impacts of coastal change, while lacking the statutory powers and resources to respond effectively;
- Further notes that Ards and North Down has the longest coastline of any council area in Northern Ireland and is therefore particularly affected by these risks;
- Further notes that the coast and coastal walks are arguably the 'jewel in the crown' of our community and tourism assets;
- Acknowledges the increasing evidence of coastal impacts within the Borough, including flooding, storm damage, and pressure on public infrastructure.

Accordingly, this Council calls on the Northern Ireland Executive to:

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

Items for Approval

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20. Request for a Rent Abatement - Lease to Donaghadee Sailing Club (Report attached)

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	
Alderman McRandal	Councillor Kendall
Alderman McDowell	Councillor Kerr
Alderman McIlveen	Councillor McBurney
Alderman Smith	Councillor McClean
Councillor Ashe	Councillor McCollum
Councillor Blaney (Mayor)	Councillor McCracken
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McKee
Councillor Brady	Councillor Moore
Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Chambers	Councillor Newman
Councillor Cochrane (Deputy Mayor)	Councillor Quinn
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Smart
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Thompson
Councillor Gilmour	Councillor Wray

LIST OF MAYOR'S/DEPUTY MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS
FOR JUNE 2026

Monday 1 June

- 9.45 am Eco Schools Green Flag Awards 2026, Bangor Elim
- 2.00 pm Visit from Bangor Central Primary School Council, City Hall, Bangor
- 7.00 pm Visit from Scoil Rince Realta Dance Group, City Hall, Bangor

Tuesday 2 June

- 11.00 am Visit from Bangor Trefoil Guild, City Hall, Bangor
- 3.00 pm Visit and Photo for Volunteer Week, City Hall, Bangor

Wednesday 3 June

- 9.30 am Photo – Window Box Planting, Killard School, Donaghadee
- 10.30 am Visit from representative from Youth Voice to Annual Meeting, City Hall, Bangor
- 7.00 pm 50th Anniversary Dinner – Newtownards Men's Probus, Royal Ulster Yacht Club

Thursday 4 June

- 12.00 noon Video to promote Ards Business Awards, City Hall, Bangor
- 7.00 pm Celebration and Recognition Event, Queen's Hall, Newtownards

Friday 5 June

- 9.00 am Bangor Horticultural Society Annual Plant sale, 67 Groomsport Road, Bangor
- 1.00 pm BeHere Opening of Exhibition, Mountstewart

Saturday 6 June

- 10.00 am Ards Community Hospital Ladies Committee coffee morning, Streatan Presbyterian Church, West Street, Newtownards
- 10.30 am DEPUTY MAYOR – Launch of Donaghadee Summer Festival, Pier 36, Donaghadee
- 1.30 pm Love Bangor Litter Pick and weeding, 189 Ballyree Drive, Bangor

Sunday 7 June

10.15 am Nowhere to Run - 5k Fun Run, Ward Park, Bangor

Monday 8 June

3.00 pm Creative Peninsula Launch Photo, 47 Warren Road, Donaghadee

4.30 pm Photo – Launch of Seaton 10k Classic, Ward Park, Bangor

7.00 pm KWC Conference - Let Her In Network, City Hall, Bangor

Tuesday 9 June

10.30 am Celebration of Carers Event, City Hall, Bangor

12 noon Photo – Comber Earlies Food Festival, City Hall, Bangor

12 noon DEPUTY MAYOR – Photo Summit of the Cities Conference, Grand Central Station

7.30 pm Your Place, Reimagining Our Space Event, City Hall, Bangor

Wednesday 10 June

10.30 am Clifton Special School P7 Record of Achievement, Clifton Special School

1.00 pm Reminiscence Project, Donaghadee Community Centre

Thursday 11 June

1.00 pm Visit to HMS Tracker, Bangor Marina

Friday 12 June

9.15 am Bloomfield Gallery – Celebrating Cultural Diversity, Bloomfield Primary School

10.15 am Launch of Groomsport Play Area, Groomsport

12 noon Launch of ANDBC Groomsport Inclusive Beach, Groomsport

6.30 pm Ards Peninsula Business Awards, Clandeboye Lodge Hotel

Saturday 13 June

2.00 pm Love Ballyholme Community Day, Ballyholme Yacht Club

3.30 pm Regatta Day Reception, Royal Ulster Yacht Club

Sunday 14 June

1.00 pm Trucks at the Track, Kirkistown Race Circuit

Monday 15 June

11.30 am Orchardville's Annual Awards and Celebration Event, Titanic, Belfast

1.30 pm Launch of Considerate Parking Campaign, Aurora, Bangor Aurora and Leisure Complex, Bangor

3.00 pm Gymnastics/Commonwealth Media Launch, Ards Blair Mayne and Leisure Complex, Newtownards

Tuesday 16 June

10.45 am CareMark NI Memory Café 5 Year Anniversary, Bangor Elim

Wednesday 17 June

11.00 am Meeting with Ards and North Down Business Forum, City Hall, Bangor

1.00 pm Photo to promote 10 years of Picnic in the Park, Ward Park, Bangor

1.30 pm Bangor Academy Annual Art Exhibition, Bangor Academy

6.15 pm Ards Town Centre Races (Criterium) 2026, Conway Square, Newtownards

Thursday 18 June 2026

12.30 pm Visit to Jossie Pops Snow Patrol Mural, Dufferin Avenue, Bangor

6.30 pm Ards Business Hub – Mingle Summer Edition, Kiltonga Hall, Newtownards

7.30 pm The Extraordinary Auction VIP Night, Dicksons Garden Centre, 79 Cootehall Road, Bangor

Friday 19 June

7.00 pm DEPUTY MAYOR – Kilcooley Women's Centre Annual Summer Social Event, Coffee Cure, North Down Museum, Bangor

7.30 pm Ballygowan Flute Band 150th Anniversary Concert, Ballygowan Presbyterian Church Hall

Saturday 20 June

10.30 am Private viewing inside Donaghadee Lighthouse, Donaghadee Harbour

11.00 am DEPUTY MAYOR Donaghadee Lifeboat Festival, Donaghadee

11.30 am Comber Earlies Food Festival, Comber Leisure Centre

5.45 pm Ballyholme Presbyterian Church -Drumming Night and BBQ

Tuesday 23 June

3.30 pm Ards and North Down Schools Growing Club, Sullivan Upper School

6.30 pm Commonwealth Dinner, Europa, Belfast

7.30 pm DEPUTY MAYOR – Summit of the Cities pre-event dinner,
McConnell's Distillery, Crumlin Road Goal, Crumlin Road

Wednesday 24 June

8.30 am Summit of the Cities Conference, Belfast City Hall

12 noon DEPUTY MAYOR Presentation of Ireland's Best Kept Town Awards,
Riddel Hall, 185 Stranmillis Road, Belfast

Thursday 25 June

10.30 am Summit of the Cities – Visit from Bill de Blasio, Courthouse, Bangor

7.30 pm Bangor Drama Club – Performance of The Donahue Sisters, Studio
1A, Bangor

Friday 26 June

7.00 pm Queen's Hall Snooker and Billiards Club – Annual Finals Night,
Queen's Hall, Newtownards

Saturday 27 June

10.30 am Comber Historical Society – Treasures of our Town Exhibition, 4
Ballygowan Road, Comber

1.00 pm Stunt Scooter Spectacular, Lemon's Wharf, Donaghadee

Sunday 28 June

1.15 pm Somme Commemoration Wreath Laying Service, Ward Park, Bangor

Tuesday 30 June

7.00 pm DEPUTY MAYOR - Next Generation Schools Exhibition Launch, Ards
Art Centre

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on Wednesday 27 May 2026 commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair:	The Mayor (Councillor McCollum)	
Aldermen:	Adair Armstrong-Cotter Brooks Cummings McAlpine	McDowell McIlveen McRandal Smith
Councillors:	Blaney Brady Cathcart Chambers (7.04pm) Cochrane Edmund Gilmour Harbinson Hennessy Hollywood Irvine, S Irvine, W Kendall (Zoom)	Kerr (Zoom 7.05pm) McBurney McClellan McCracken McKee (Zoom) Moore Morgan Newman Quinn Smart Thompson Wray

Officers: Chief Executive (S McCullough), Director of Active and Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Director of Environmental Services (G Bannister - Zoom), Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

1. PRAYER

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

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies had been received from Alderman Graham, Councillor Boyle and Councillor Douglas.

NOTED.

(Councillor Chambers entered the Council Chamber at this stage – 7.04pm)

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

NOTED.

(Councillor Kerr joined the meeting at this stage via Zoom – 7.05pm)

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

The Mayor reported that this month, she had been delighted to attend the Garden Party at Hillsborough Castle hosted by His Majesty the King and Her Majesty The Queen. She then had the honour of hosting, alongside the Chief Executive, His Majesty The King and Her Majesty The Queen in Conway Square, Newtownards on 21 May for an industry showcase of some of the Borough's talented artists and food and drink producers. They had also been joined by some pupils from a number of the local primary schools who joined for a photo with The Queen and Paddington Bear. Continuing she stated that this had been swiftly followed by the fantastic Sea Bangor events over the bank holiday weekend which had brought huge numbers of visitors to Bangor. She stated that it was wonderful to see back-to-back events showcasing what the Borough had to offer, and she had been delighted to see so many of her colleagues from the Council Chamber and members of the public in attendance.

The Mayor also took the opportunity to thank Council officers for their work in delivering two extremely successful events acknowledging that it took dedication, attention to detail and collaboration to deliver events on this scale. She congratulated all who had been involved in both events.

At this stage the Mayor referred to the assaults which had taken place at the weekend in Helen's Bay stating that her thoughts were with the families of all those involved.

NOTED.

5. MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR ENGAGEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2026

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the month of May 2026.

The Mayor spoke with enthusiasm on a number of engagements which she had attended and had enjoyed and highlighted some of the engagements which had taken place during May 2026 ably assisted by Deputy Mayor, Councillor Moore:-

- Charity Bridgerton Themed Afternoon Tea, City Hall, Bangor
- May Day, Holywood
- Final series of Belonging Afternoon Teas
- Mayoral Receptions for a variety of organisations
- My Ride, Our Right – Women’s Cycling Event, City Hall, Bangor
- 100th Birthday Visit (Betty McCracken), Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre, Newtownards
- Seaside Awards Event, The Stables, Groomsport
- Photo – Smartphone Free School, Donaghadee Primary School
- Lunch and Information Session with Bangor Churches, City Hall, Bangor

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

6. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING DATED 29 APRIL 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the minutes be agreed as a correct record.

Item 11 Queens Parade Update – Page 25

Councillor Brady indicated that he wished to raise a matter of accuracy around comments made on Page 25 namely:

“Other options included spaces within the Gardens, within the new events space and at Bregenz House but for a variety of reasons that again was not going to be feasible”

Councillor Brady suggested that what Mr Mitchell had actually said was:

“They were closed down for various reasons by the Council and the Director of Place and Prosperity could explain that further”.

However, Councillor Brady noted that explanation had not been provided on the night, and he understood the rationale had been published on the Council’s website and as such he asked for some clarification around what Mr Mitchell had meant by this.

The Director of Place and Prosperity reminded Members that minutes were not a verbatim account and instead were a flavour of the debate which had taken place. Continuing he reported that he had been asked about the car park issue by a number of Members and through a variety of Freedom of Information requests. As a result, he had subsequently written a full explanation of the various car parking

proposals which explained how car parks had been assessed, the rationale behind them and why they were deemed not to be acceptable. It was noted this document was available on the Council website and if anyone had any queries the Director had indicated that he was more than happy to discuss those. Members were further advised that this information had also been made available to members of the public.

NOTED.

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

7. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

7.1 Planning Committee dated 5 May 2026

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 6 May 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

Item 9 - Notice of Motion 707 Removal of Planting at The Commons, Donaghadee

Councillor Cochrane proposed an amendment, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that the minutes be approved and adopted and furthermore that this Council notes this report and further agrees to task officers to engage with officials from DAERA around possible options under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order (1985) and 30by30 designation that Council can take to help protect the Commons. Officers will bring a follow up report on this.

The proposer Councillor Cochrane noted the general cross-party support for this, adding that on the night of Committee meeting there had been some confusion around the wording and this amendment would keep the matter on the agenda going forwards.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that the minutes be approved and adopted and furthermore that this Council notes the report at Item 9 and further agrees to task officers to engage with officials from DAERA around possible options under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order (1985) and 30by30 designation that Council can take to help protect the Commons. Officers will bring a follow up report on this.

7.3. Place and Prosperity Committee dated 7 May 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

7.4. Corporate Committee dated 12 May 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

7.5. Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 13 May 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the minutes be approved and adopted.

7.6. Special Planning Committee dated 14 May 2026

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.

7.7. Audit Committee dated 18 May 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

8. DEPUTATION REQUEST FROM DONAGHADEE RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive stating that a deputation request had been received from Peter Walker on behalf of Donaghadee Rugby Football Club.

The attached request form stated, at the outset, that:

“Donaghadee Rugby Football Club wished to make the deputation to encourage the Council members to support our case for a new lease to replace the current 50 year lease and to build a new clubhouse at Donaldson Park, Donaghadee.

C.2026.05.27

14

The current lease has 5 years to run. A new lease is fundamental to funding the rebuilding of the clubhouse as we currently cannot get Grant Aid to improve the rugby grounds and the rest of the site as our current lease only gives us leasehold interest of the first floor bar and kitchen area”.

The deputation request form was attached at Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers the request.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Brooks, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the Deputation be heard by the Active & Healthy Communities Committee.

9. SEALING DOCUMENTS

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

- (a) Grants of Rights of Burials – D41350-D41381
- (b) Lease from ANDBC to Northern Ireland Electricity Networks Limited – Substation Site at Queens Parade, Bangor
- (c) Section 76 Planning Legal Agreement, to be executed in association with planning permission (reference LA06/2022/0301/F) for extension to Ballystockart Quarry (63 Ballystockart Road, Comber) as approved by the Planning Committee at its meeting of 14 May 2026.

10. TRANSFER OF RIGHTS OF BURIAL

The Mayor advised that no Transfers of Rights of Burial had been received.

NOTED.

11. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching a Status Report in respect of Notices of Motion.

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

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

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

Councillor Cathcart referred to the following Notices of Motion (NOM):

- NOM 370 – Review of Bye Laws
- NOM 599 – Changes to Community Development Funding

He welcomed the progress which had taken place in respect of both NOM's particularly since the new Director of Active and Healthy Communities had taken up post. He also thanked the Acting Head of Communities Nikki Dorian for her work on the Community Grant Funding.

The Mayor echoed those comments particularly in respect of NOM 599.

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

12. NOTICES OF MOTION

12.1. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Edmund and Alderman Adair

That this Council task officers to bring forward a costed programme of works to bring slipways and harbours in Council ownership or control up to an appropriate standard in order that they can be utilised by leisure users as part of our wider tourism offering and to investigate appropriate funding streams to deliver this.

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

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

This Council recognises the service and sacrifice of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), including those from the Borough and surrounding areas who served with dedication during a difficult period in Northern Ireland's history. Accordingly, tasks officers to bring back a report this Council on providing a memorial bench within Clandeboye Cemetery, Bangor, dedicated to the memory and service of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. The proposed bench should provide a dignified place for remembrance and reflection for families, veterans, and members of the wider community.

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

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

Following the deputation from pupils of Rathmore Primary School and Strangford College, which highlighted the importance of ensuring children and young people are included in decisions that affect them, this Council recognises that political literacy is fundamental to a healthy democracy and to preparing the next generation for active civic participation.

Accordingly, Council requests that officers bring forward a report setting out options for the development of a children's political literacy project to be delivered in advance

of the May 2027 election, including, but not limited to: support available from the Electoral Commission; opportunities for Council to deliver the project alongside identified suitable partners; a workshop explaining how government works in Northern Ireland; and the organisation of a mock election to enable children and young people to express their views on the issues that matter most to them.

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

12.4. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Newman

That this Council acknowledges increased demand for service experienced by North Down and Ards Women's Aid. Over the last three years referrals for floating support have increased by over 33% and referrals for refuge have increased by over 186%.

This Council is committed to the campaign of ending violence against women and girls, and to providing the best possible support service to victims, therefore officers will be tasked to:

- Writes to the Minister for Communities requesting a review into the funding provided to Women's Aid through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Supporting People Grant.
- Writes to the Northern Ireland Executive welcoming the funding provided, but expressing concerns that the (EVAWG) programme is primarily resourced to support prevention activity, rather than provision of services. While investment in prevention is essential, it is already resulting in increased disclosures and referrals, particularly to Women's Aid services. The letter should also highlight the need for multiyear funding, and increased funding allocation for the Tier 3 EVAWG programme, which currently doesn't cover the cost of one additional member of staff.

Secondly to letter should propose the establishment of a dedicated Emergency Fund in Northern Ireland to support women who are fleeing domestic abuse but face immediate financial barriers to accessing safety. Many women, particularly those who are working or have limited access to benefits, are unable to afford refuge accommodation costs or secure private rental housing due to high upfront expenses such as deposits and rent in advance. As a result, they are often forced to remain in unsafe environments or face homelessness. This fund would provide flexible, rapid financial assistance to cover emergency costs, refuge stays, and access to long-term housing, ensuring that no woman is prevented from leaving an abusive situation due to a lack of financial resources.

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

MAYOR'S CLOSING COMMENTS

At this stage the Mayor expressed her thanks to Members for their support throughout her Mayoral term, adding that it had been without doubt one of the best years of her life.

NOTED.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.28pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid Annual Meeting of the Ards and North Down Borough Council was held in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Bangor and via Zoom on Wednesday, 3 June 2026 commencing at 11.00 am.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: The Mayor (Councillor McCollum)

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

Councillors:	Blaney	W Irvine (11.25am)
	Boyle	Kendall (Zoom)
	Brady	McClellan
	Cathcart	McCracken
	Chambers (11.04am)	McKee (Zoom)
	Cochrane	Moore
	Douglas	Newman (11.05am)
	Edmund	Quinn
	Gilmour	Smart
	Harbinson	Thompson
	Hollywood	Wray
	S Irvine	

Officers: Chief Executive (S McCullough), Director of Environment (G Bannister), Director of Active & Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Director of Place & Prosperity (B Dorrian), Head of Corporate Governance (A Curtis), Head of Communications & Marketing (C Jackson), Manager – Chief Executive’s Office (F Thompson), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officers (P Foster, J Glasgow, R King and H Loebnau)

1. PRAYER

The meeting commenced with the Chief Executive reading the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor (Councillor McCollum) sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies had been received from Councillors Ashe, McBurney and Hennessy.

An apology for lateness had been received from Councillor Newman.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor asked for any Declarations of Interest at this stage and none were made.

NOTED.

4. MAYOR'S REVIEW

At this stage the Mayor undertook her Mayoral review of her year.

Councillor McCollum began by acknowledging the end was near and as such she must face the final curtain. She reflected that it was impossible to overstate what an extraordinary privilege the role had been. It transcended superlatives, but those Members who had gone before her and those who would come after her would understand what it meant to be invited into the lives of people across this Borough to champion their efforts, celebrate their triumphs, and on occasions to share in their grief.

(Councillors Chambers and Newman entered the Chamber at this stage – 11.04am)

Every Mayor brought something of themselves to the office including their values, hopes, and vision for the place we all called home. She stated that for her own part she had set out to reinforce a sense of identity, a connection between people and place and to be a Mayor for Belonging. She believed that belonging to this Borough was not something anyone must earn but instead it was everyone's by right, simply because we all lived here and called this place home. And the Borough, in turn, belonged equally to everyone.

Continuing Councillor McCollum surmised that from the outset, she had chosen charities whose work directly addressed barriers to belonging. Orchardville, St Vincent de Paul and North Down and Ards Women's Aid, all charities whose work had never been more vital, and which had never needed support more. Not only did those charities mean a great deal to her personally, but through their work together this year as the Mayor's Charities, they formed a tremendous mutually supportive alliance, frequently making cross referrals and planning powerful collaborations. She added that their work together this year had been one of the most rewarding aspects of her role. At times she acknowledged that she bitten off more than she could chew, however the great thing about being Mayor was that nice people found it hard to say no. As such in her efforts to support the charities and a

sense of belonging, she had asked a lot of favours and was rewarded a thousand times over with the most extraordinary generosity of time, talent, labour and hard cash.

Supported every step of the way by the Mayor's team and other officers, Councillor McCollum expressed great pride in the events which had been hosted in support of her charities. The Mayor's Cup for Belonging, a three-day football tournament over February half term for 140 boys and girls from all over the Borough. This she stated had been a passion project and it was humbling to arrive at Ards Blair Mayne on the first day and see it all come together. She added that it had also been amazing to hear feedback from parents about chats around the dinner table with normally grumpy teenagers and how important it was to talk about feelings and to support their friends. Then in March 2026, at Bangor Elim Church, she hosted the Mayor's Concert for Belonging, again in aid of her charities, featuring a fantastic array of the Borough's most exceptional performers, musicians and choirs in a packed programme. This had lifted not only everyone's spirits but raised all out of their seats at the finale with an incredible combined performance of two of the finest traditional music traditions, the Ards Comhaltas and the Cleland Memorial Pipe Band. She stated that it had been a truly breathtaking and emotional show and filled the audience with a sense of wonder, pride, affection and of Belonging.

Following on from that in May there was the Mayor's Afternoon Tea for Belonging. Bridgerton themed, with 120 tickets sold out in less than a day, which took us all by surprise. The event had been an outstanding success, enormously enjoyed by all who attended and made over £3,000 for the charities. She recalled how she had suggested that it had not been much bother at all, until she was gently and kindly corrected by her ever-patient secretary Jeni, who had said "No Mayor it was a lot of bother!".

Along with the Chief Executive, the Acting Chief Executive and the Directors, she had engaged with the Council's most significant statutory and community partners to promote this Borough and to position places and people where opportunities for growth lay. She had hosted meetings with Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland, Food Ireland, DfI, DAERA, Department for Economy, NI Fish Producers, Sustainability NI, all the Borough's Chambers of Commerce and many more.

Thanks also to this incredible role, she had had some of the most unforgettable experiences of her life. Those had included hosting their Majesties the King and Queen and meeting Princess Anne, President Michael D Higgins and The Taoiseach Michael Martin. During her term in office, she had also conferred the Freedom of the Borough on Olympian Rhys McClenaghan and hosted Armed Forces Day for over 60,000 people. Councillor McCollum also recalled how she had been welcomed many times in Donaghadee, Ballywalter, Holywood, Kircubbin, Conlig, Portaferry, Ballyhalbert, Millisle, Comber, Carrowdore, Helen's Bay, Portaferry and Portavogie. Each of those places had also been hosted as her guests as it had been important to her in creating a sense of Belonging that she opened the doors and shone a spotlight from Bangor Castle on groups all over the Borough who had worked tirelessly away in their communities to build connection, reduce isolation and provide lifelines to people most in need. With that in mind she had hosted 15 Afternoon Teas on the nominations of Members and over 100 Mayoral receptions and Civic

Receptions. She had also hosted visits from a larger variety of groups who had the opportunity to see the Castle, learn about its history, hear about the work of Council and discuss their hopes and dreams to improve the lives of people in the Borough. Connections were made and relationships were forged with Council officers which would endure, and she was very aware how very proud and grateful everyone was for those hours spent learning more about each other.

At this stage the Mayor referred to regrets one of which being that it was for only one year adding that she had so many people to thank. Firstly, her party colleagues in Alliance for trusting her with this important role which she had promised to give her all and she believed she had done so. Councillor McCollum then expressed her thanks to her amazing Deputy Mayor Councillor Vicky Moore who had brought her own inimitable brand of verve, wit, compassion and endless star quality to every engagement. She had been a tireless support, sometimes quietly but mostly loudly, always loyally and with the people of this Borough as her priority. She added that it had been an honour and a privilege to do this job with her. She then thanked her Party Leader, colleague and friend Alderman Martin McRandal who had encouraged her every step of this journey and more importantly had lifted a load of constituency work in Holywood and Clandeboye from her, day in, day out, with extraordinary good grace, enabling her to concentrate on the Mayoralty. Without that support she would not have been able to throw herself into the role in the way that she wished and as such she would always be profoundly grateful for that.

At this stage she acknowledged that a Mayor was a Team and she profoundly regretted that she could not take the Mayor's Team home with her. These wonderful people raised you up every day and were the ones who made it all happen. Every member of the team had demonstrated day in day out that the good of the Borough was their priority and they had each brought their own skills, experience and wonderful personalities to their roles. While the team was large and everyone had played their individual part, she stated that she would like to single out those with whom a Mayor spent the most time with. Jeanette who simply knew how every single thing in the Council worked, who every officer was, all of Standing Orders, and how to make every Borough event run smoothly. She added that even Brigadiers asked Jeanette what to do. Jonny who was the supreme host for every event, extending a warm welcome to all visitors, enthraling them with the Castle's history and managing everything that happened in the Mayor's parlour so beautifully. Colin and Steve the drivers who knew without asking, that everything that was said in the Mayor's car stayed in the Mayor's car. Their calm, cool professionalism coupled with extraordinary kindness to her and her children would stay with her. They were there for A Level joys and driving test miseries and as such they would always be her friends, plus now they knew too much. Gary McCormick for superior tech expertise in every domain, for making things happen, for saying yes to things he really, really did not want to say yes to and for making me sound good. Emma Thompson in Comms, such an integral part of the Mayor's team, a consummate professional by her side making sure the spotlight rightly shone where it was needed. The generator of so many great ideas whose creativity she would very much miss. And finally, Councillor McCollum stated that she would miss the Mayor's secretary Jeni most of all as she was the Mayor's guardian angel. A steadfastly loyal supporter, endlessly encouraging and with an abiding love, compassion and respect for the people of the Borough. She stated that she had lost count of the times that visitors had asked her

to pass on their thanks to Jeni for how welcome she had made them feel and how efficiently and sensitively she had met everyone's needs. Plus, she added the sight of her at the Mayor's Afternoon Tea in her homemade Victorian Maid's costume was a level of loyalty that she would never be able to repay.

Continuing the Mayor expressed her thanks to the Chief Executive Susie, Acting Chief Executive Michael and the whole Leadership team who had made her feel heard, valued and included at every stage of what was in many ways a very challenging year. Along with them she had engaged this year with the Council's most significant statutory and community partners to promote this Borough and to position its places and its people where opportunities for growth lay. She advised that she had hosted meetings with Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland, Food Ireland, DfI, DAERA, Department for Economy, NI Fish Producers, Sustainability NI, all the Borough's Chambers of Commerce and many more and she was grateful to have had the opportunity to play a part in our regeneration.

At this stage Councillor McCollum thanked her children, who were always her north star and with whom it had been a joy to share so many of these wonderful experiences with. They had always been her fiercest champions and whom she would now get to see a little bit more of.

To Councillors Blaney and Cochrane, she stated that their parties had chosen well and selected two absolutely fantastic public servants who she believed would work brilliantly together to represent the best of the Borough. She stated that she had left the place in good nick and asked Members not to mess it up.

In summing up she said to the people of the Borough that she felt indebted to them all, grateful for every village, every town, for this great city, for the beaches and parks, clubs and societies, charities and amazing community groups. She was grateful for belonging to Ards and North Down and to finish she said that she believed she had carried out her Mayoral year her way.

At this stage Alderman McRandal commented that it had been quite the year and he had been exhausted just listening to all of the events she had attended. All of which he added were done in true Gillian style and her chosen theme of Belonging was evident throughout her Mayoral term. Alderman McRandal on behalf of the Party group congratulated her for a truly successful year and encouraged her to take a well deserved holiday.

On behalf of the Democratic Unionist Group (DUP), Alderman McIlveen expressed his thanks to Councillor McCollum for a great year with many highlights and memories. He acknowledged that she had represented the Borough fairly and with dignity adding that her hard work and enthusiasm was evident in everything that she did. In terms of Charing Council meetings, he noted that she had done so fairly and impartially with just the right amount of discipline. He added that she also had the bonus of a crash course in Standing Orders and now she could relax back into her blue robes. Alderman McIlveen wished Councillor McCollum every success for the future.

Adding to the comments Alderman Smith offered his congratulations on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) on a very significant year with events such as Armed Forces Day and visits from the King and Queen. Continuing he thanked her for her support in the Comber District Electoral Area noting the energy and enthusiasm she had brought to the role throughout her term. Now he stated was the chance for her to take stock, review and take a well-earned rest.

Councillor S Irvine commented that it was quite the year to celebrate and one which had been full of events and engagements. He stated that she had done a brilliant job, highlights for him were the hosting of the Walking Football Group, the Christmas Hamper Group and four of his local Community Groups. He noted that she had also cheered on Ards Rugby Football Club during its unforgettable season. Other events of note were the bestowing of the Freedom of the Borough upon Rhys McClenaghan and welcoming the King and Queen to Conway Square, Newtownards. He stated that she had served the Borough with dedication and dignity and as for the incoming Mayor, Councillor Blaney he sent best wishes to him for a successful and enjoyable year. Councillor Irvine added that he had served as a Member of the Council under four Mayors and as such he had very big shoes to fill, particularly as now the Mayor's shoes may require Planning Permission. In summing up he thanked Councillor McCollum for a fantastic year.

Councillor Boyle indicated that he wished to add to those comments and congratulate Councillor McCollum on a fantastic year. He believed that she had been the perfect Mayor being so inclusive and engaging. Her three charities were amazing each in their own right and he noted that she had always incorporated all Members who were in attendance at her Mayoral events. Continuing he stated that he had been delighted to attend many events with her and all his local Community Groups had always been keen to pass on their thanks for the Mayor attending their events. Councillor Boyle referred to an event which had taken place the previous week in Portaferry and even though the Mayor had a very busy schedule and was running late she had still managed to come along for a very short time, the photographs were taken and all those involved had been incredibly grateful for that. Continuing he noted that throughout her term while attending all of the various events she had always been brilliantly colour co-ordinated. At this stage Councillor Boyle took the opportunity to express his thanks also to the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Moore on her year and turning to both the incoming Mayor and Deputy Mayor he wished them well for a successful year. He added that he would always be at the end of the phone to provide them with any help or assistance which they may require throughout the forthcoming year.

(Councillor W Irvine entered the Council Chamber at this stage – 11.25am)

Councillor McKee then took the opportunity to add his thanks to both the outgoing Mayor and Deputy Mayor for their hard work throughout the year while acknowledging the sacrifices which would have been made. The strong impression along with great representation both had made on behalf of the Council had not gone unnoticed and for that he thanked them both.

(Councillor Boyle left the meeting at this stage – 11.28am)

Councillor McCollum thanked everyone for their support and kind comments throughout the year mindful of the many heartfelt messages of support she had received during her term. At this stage she invited the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Moore to make a few comments.

Councillor Moore stated that as her year as Deputy Mayor came to a close, she wished to take a moment to reflect on what had been a truly memorable and rewarding experience. It had been a tremendous honour to serve the Borough. Every engagement, every event and every conversation had reminded her of the strength, kindness and resilience that existed right across the community.

Over the past year, she had had the privilege of meeting so many dedicated individuals, volunteers, charities, community organisations and local businesses who worked tirelessly to make Ards and North Down a better place for everyone. So often, those were the people quietly making a difference behind the scenes, stepping in where help was needed, bringing people together, and showing what could be achieved through compassion, commitment and community spirit.

Some of the highlights throughout the year had included:

- Official Opening of the Greenway
- Switching on Christmas Lights at Killinchy
- St Patrick's Day event
- Portaferry Regatta
- Unveiling of Rhys McClenaghan mural in Newtownards

At this stage she indicated that she would like to express her sincere thanks to the Mayor, Councillor Gillian McCollum, for her support and partnership throughout the year. It had been a pleasure to work alongside her in representing the Borough and highlighting the many causes and communities that deserved recognition and support. Councillor Moore also expressed her thanks to her fellow Councillors, Council officers and staff, whose professionalism, guidance and hard work made so much possible. Behind every civic event and every public initiative was a great deal of dedication, and she had been deeply grateful for the support she had received throughout the year.

By way of summing up she expressed her thanks to the people of Ards and North Down. For the welcome they had shown her, for the conversations which had been shared, and for the opportunity to serve. Councillor Moore added that it had been a genuine privilege to be Deputy Mayor and she left the role with pride in all that the Borough was, and with confidence in all that it could continue to become. She wished both the incoming Mayor and Deputy Mayor well for the year ahead.

Alderman Smith offered his congratulations to the Deputy Mayor on a busy and eventful year. He acknowledged that working with a Party colleague likely made things a little easier and added that together they had made a great team. Continuing he also took the opportunity to thank Councillor Moore for her support for his own District Electoral Area.

Alderman McRandal noted that Councillor Moore had taken to the role of Deputy Mayor like a duck to water. He noted that she had enjoyed a very busy year and worked well alongside her colleague Councillor McCollum. Alderman McRandal stated that her warmth, interest and care for others had shown through in everything she had done and he congratulated her on a successful year.

At this stage Alderman McIlveen rose to add his thanks also to the Deputy Mayor for her year and her efforts. He agreed that she had worked well alongside the Mayor and had made a wonderful team adding that it had greatly helped that both were from the same political Party. Alderman McIlveen thanked her for her service during the year.

Councillor McCollum on behalf of the Deputy Mayor thanked Members for holding the positions in such respect and for carrying out their roles with such good grace while cheerleading each other.

NOTED.

5. APPOINTMENTS TO POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY (FILE CX210) (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive stating that appointments to Positions of Responsibility were governed by Part 3 and Schedule 1 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. In accordance with the Act, the Council agreed at its Annual Meeting on 7 June 2023 a list of 91 positions to be appointed as Positions of Responsibility, and that such appointments would be made using the d'Hondt method. Party Nominating Officers and Independent Members thereafter proceeded to select Positions of Responsibility in the order determined by the d'Hondt calculation.

Where Positions of Responsibility were not for the full four-year term of the Council, Party Nominating officers were only required to specify the individual Party Members taking Year 1 (2023/24) Positions. Year 2 – Year 4 Positions were allocated on a Party basis and individual Party Members were appointed to those by the Nominating Officers at the Annual Meeting in the relevant year.

Year 4 Positions of Responsibility to be appointed

Party Nominating Officers should identify the Members to be appointed to the year 4 (2026/27) Positions of Responsibility as follows:

Position	Year 4
Mayor	UUP
Deputy Mayor	DUP
Corporate Services Committee - Chair	UUP
Corporate Services Committee – Vice Chair	Alliance
Place and Prosperity Committee - Chair	UUP
Place and Prosperity Committee - Vice Chair	Councillor Brady
Planning Committee - Chair	Alliance
Planning Committee - Vice Chair	DUP

Environment Committee - Chair	DUP
Environment Committee - Vice Chair	Alliance
Active and Healthy Communities Committee - Chair	DUP
Active and Healthy Communities Committee - Vice Chair	Councillor S Irvine
Audit Committee - Chair	Alliance
Audit Committee - Vice Chair	DUP

Please note, Members of the Audit Committee should not hold the position of Mayor or Deputy Mayor. It was agreed at the Audit Committee meeting in May 2026 to remove the restriction that Chairs of Committees or Sub-Committees could not sit on the Audit Committee.

Should any Party or Independent not wish to avail of a Position of Responsibility to which they were entitled, the Position would be allocated using d'Hondt to the next Party in line for making a choice, which at present was the UUP (see list attached at Appendix).

RECOMMENDED that the following Party Nominating Officers confirm the Members to be appointed to the Positions of Responsibility as outlined in the table above:

- Alderman McIlveen (DUP)
- Alderman McRandal (Alliance)
- Alderman Smith (UUP)

At this stage the Chief Executive explained that there was a report which had been circulated to members outlining the process of appointing to Positions of Responsibility which was set out in legislation. The process of nominating to the position of Mayor fell to the Nominating Officer of the UUP, Alderman Philip Smith.

Alderman Smith proposed, that Councillor Blaney be nominated for the position of Mayor.

At this stage the Mayor, Councillor Blaney indicated that he wished to make a few remarks. He began by stating that it was a tremendous honour to sit before everyone as Mayor of Ards and North Down. He sincerely thanked his fellow Councillors for placing their trust in him, adding that this was a role he accepted with great humility, pride and a very deep sense of responsibility. The Mayor also thanked the UUP Group Leader, Councillor Philip Smith, for his kind words adding that he hoped he could live up to them. He expressed his thanks for his trust in him and his support since becoming a Councillor. The Mayor noted that both Councillors Irvine were in attendance and he encouraged them not to miss him too much in the back corner of the Council Chamber.

At this stage he paid tribute to the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Gillian McCollum who had carried out the role with warmth, dignity and real commitment to the people of this Borough. She had represented Ards and North Down with great energy, and he knew everyone in the chamber would want to join him in thanking her for her service. Continuing he stated that it had struck him this morning just how much he was going

to struggle to match Gillian. It was not when he was reading over his speech but instead when he opened his small wardrobe and looked at his six almost identical navy suits that he thought, "Oh no she has me beat here." As such the Mayor suggested that it was fair to say on the style front, Gillian, he did not think anyone was ever going to compete.

Councillor Blaney indicated that he also wished to acknowledge Councillor Jennifer Gilmour, who had served as Mayor in the first year of this Council term, and Councillor Alistair Cathcart, who served in year two. Jennifer, Alistair and Gillian had each brought something different to the role of Mayor this term, and he wished to thank all three of them for the example they had set. Of course, there were many colleagues in the Chamber who had offered advice and encouragement over the years and while sometimes they had their differences politically, he wished everyone to know that he valued their friendship and service greatly.

On a personal note, Councillor Blaney expressed delight that his mum and dad were both in attendance this afternoon. They had supported him in everything he had done, sometimes proudly, sometimes nervously, and sometimes probably wondering what on earth he was getting himself into. However their love, encouragement and example had meant everything to him. As such he knew how much today would mean to them, because it meant a huge amount to him, and he was delighted that they were there to share this moment with him. Continuing he stated that if he had any achievements to be proud of in his life, he had only achieved those because his parents had helped, supported, encouraged and guided him in a way to make those achievements possible. As such he stated that he would be eternally grateful for everything they had done for him. Continuing Councillor Blaney commented that to be elected as a Councillor was a privilege, but to be chosen to serve as Mayor of this great Borough was something very special indeed. Thinking back to the reception for local Olympian Rhys McClenaghan, he had talked about what a special moment it was for him to win his Olympic Gold medal and how it was his wish that everyone should experience that just once in their life, what he called "their own Gold Medal moment". Councillor Blaney remarked that as his parents would attest sporting greatness sadly always alluded him and today was perhaps the equivalent "Gold Medal" moment for him.

At this stage Councillor Blaney said that he also wanted to say a very special thank you to his wife, Nikki, and their son, Elliott. He thanked his wife for her love, patience and support not just today, but through all the evenings, weekends, meetings, events and phone calls that came with public life. None of this happened without support at home, and he knew there would be many more occasions over the next year when she would be holding everything together while he was out representing the Borough. He stated that he was incredibly grateful for that and promised that he did not take it for granted. Referring to his son Elliott, he thanked him for agreeing to be good for mummy, to go to bed when he was told, and to behave himself even when daddy was not there. He realised that was probably the biggest commitment anyone was making today.

Councillor Blaney commented that Ards and North Down was not just a place on a map but was home. He had been born and raised there and he and his wife had set up home there where they were raising their family. As such he was completely

invested in making the Borough the best it could possibly be not just for his family, but for everyone's. From Bangor to Newtownards, from Holywood to Portaferry, from Donaghadee to Comber, from the Ards Peninsula to our towns, villages, townlands and coastal communities, the Borough was rich in character, heritage, talent and opportunity. It was a place of remarkable natural beauty, but more importantly, it was a place of remarkable people. As Mayor, he wished to be a champion for those people and wanted to celebrate the volunteers who gave their time quietly and selflessly and the community groups who kept local life moving. The churches, charities, schools, sports clubs, youth organisations, emergency services, carers, health workers and local leaders who made the Borough stronger every single day. Too often, the people who did the most asked for the least and as such during his term, he wished to shine a light on them.

At this stage Councillor Blaney indicated that this year he wished to have a clear theme and a year that championed enterprise, entrepreneurship and ambition across Ards and North Down. Local business was something he was genuinely passionate about and he knew what it felt like to take risk and back yourself. To worry about sales, bills, customers, staff, marketing, social media and all the pressures that come with trying to build something. Local businesses were not just shopfronts or names above doors but were families, employers, creators, risk-takers and people who put everything into making their ideas work. They were the backbone of the local economy and he wished to use his year as Mayor to champion them because entrepreneurship was not just about business but was about attitude. He believed it was about seeing opportunity where others saw obstacles and about having the courage to try. It was he stated about innovation, resilience, confidence and belief and those were values he wished to promote across the Borough.

Continuing he stated that he wanted young people in Ards and North Down to know that they did not have to leave this place to find opportunity. Instead he wished for them to see that ideas could start there, businesses could grow, careers could be built, and success happen here. He acknowledged that not every young person would want to start a business however every young person should have the chance to be creative, to pitch ideas, to build confidence and to see that opportunity could be created in Ards and North Down. This coming year he indicated that he hoped to work with local schools as well as the Chambers of Commerce, and other business leaders to encourage young people to get a flavour of entrepreneurship and to connect experience with ambition. He believed those efforts were timely as the recent Milburn report had brought renewed attention to young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEETs). In fact he noted that the latest figures showed that more than one million young people aged 16 to 24 across the UK were now in that position. This he believed was a serious challenge for all as a society and it simply must not be allowed that a lost generation should come to pass. There was another number however that should give everyone hope as the Milburn report also found that 84% of young people surveyed wanted to find work, education or training. That he believed told everyone something important that it was not about a lack of ambition but was about making sure young people could see a path forward.

Councillor Blaney acknowledged that a Mayor could not solve that alone but it could help if it did its bit. Doors could be opened and it could connect young people with employers, schools, colleges and mentors. It could also show them local role models

and give them the confidence to believe that opportunity existed here. That was why this theme mattered to him. Enterprise was not just about starting businesses but instead was about confidence, ambition and finding your place in the world. He believed that even if a few young people finished this year thinking, "I could do that," in terms of setting up a business, then that would be a legacy worth having and one which he would be immensely proud of.

Continuing Councillor Blaney stated that he also wished to champion Ards and North Down as a place to invest and do business. It had beautiful towns and villages with an incredible coastline along with talented people and strong community spirit. It also had brilliant local businesses and in his opinion huge untapped potential. He added that he had always believed in the future of Bangor and the wider Borough and while there were challenges to be faced with town centres changing, families under pressure, public finances stretched, businesses operating in difficult circumstances and long running issues remaining including Queen's Parade, he believed better days were ahead. With major investment linked to Bangor's waterfront, the Belfast Region City Deal and the regeneration of Queen's Parade, this was hugely important moment for Bangor and for the wider Borough. Those projects had the potential to restore confidence, attract visitors, support local businesses and change how people saw the area. Indeed he stated that one of the main reasons he had stood for Council was to see Queen's Parade delivered. He believed that what should always have been one of the jewels in Bangor's crown was, for too long, allowed to become a symbol of delay and missed opportunity. To serve as Mayor at a time when people could see real progress on this site would mean a huge amount to him personally and he acknowledged how much it mattered for Bangor, for tourism, for local business, for confidence and for the whole Borough.

However Councillor Blaney commented that regeneration was not just about buildings but was about belief and confidence. It was about giving people confidence to invest, to open a business, to expand, to create something new and special. The Council and Councillors needed to be confident for the Borough and that was the spirit he wished to encourage during his year as Mayor. He would use the Mayor's Parlour as a platform for local talent as there were local artists producing brilliant and inspiring works of art which he wished to show off. He added that there were also local food and drink producers making fantastic world class products which he wished to display, showcase and champion. Entrepreneurs were also building exciting businesses and he encouraged everyone to recognise and support them.

Councillor Blaney acknowledged that while the Mayor could not solve every challenge, the role did provide a platform which he intended to use positively and confidently to:

- Promote the Borough
- Support communities
- Champion local enterprise
- Encourage investment and apprenticeships
- Celebrate ambition
- Remind people just how much their was to be proud of

He undertook to represent the whole Borough, every town, village, community and tradition.

By way of summing up Councillor Blaney stated that he wished to acknowledge Council officers and staff who worked every day to deliver services across Ards and North Down. It had been a privilege to work with them all over the last seven years as a Councillor and he looked forward to the year ahead as Mayor. Across all the Council teams, events, regeneration, waste and recycling, planning, community, tourism, parks, cemeteries and more they were blessed to have such hard working and dedicated staff led by a wonderful and passionate Chief. The Borough had heart, ambition, identity and enormous potential and he believed its best days were ahead. He expressed his thanks for the honour of serving as Mayor adding that he looked forward to the year ahead, and to working with everyone for the good of this Borough and its people.

At this stage, Alderman Smith rose to congratulate Councillor Blaney on his appointment to the office of Mayor for the incoming year. He commented that he had first met him almost twenty years ago and his enthusiasm and passion for all things political very much remained. Councillor Blaney was very much a champion of businesses in the community as well as young people wishing to start their own businesses. Alderman Smith noted that he had previously served a term as Deputy Mayor and been instrumental in the Freedom of the Borough being bestowed upon Gary Lightbody. As such he believed he had plenty of experience and he knew how incredibly proud and supportive his family would be of him throughout his year. Alderman Smith encouraged him to take plenty of photographs and keep press cuttings of his year as he would undoubtedly be very busy and above all he encouraged him to enjoy it.

Alderman McIlveen took the opportunity to congratulate Councillor Blaney on behalf of the DUP adding that each Mayor brought their own unique skills to the role. He welcomed his vision which he had set out in respect of young people to inspire them and consider entrepreneurship. Continuing he noted that he would be the fourth Bangor Mayor in a row and as such he looked forward to the next term when there would be four Ards Mayors in a row. Referring to his comments around a gold medal he reminded Councillor Blaney that he was wearing the Ards chain of office which was festooned with gold medals with each one representing a gold medal winning rose from the Lady Dickson Gardens. Alderman McIlveen wished him well for his year ahead adding that he could be sure of the full support of the DUP.

Alderman McRandal also congratulated Councillor Blaney on behalf of the Alliance Party Group wishing him a very successful and enjoyable year as Mayor. He acknowledged his priorities which he had set out adding that he would have his Party's full support.

Alderman McIlveen then proceeded to make his nomination for the position of Deputy Mayor stating that he was delighted to nominate Councillor James Cochrane for the position. He had been Chair of the Corporate Services Committee for the past year and had done so with great confidence and ability. Despite only been elected in 2023 he had taken to being a Councillor like a duck to water and the DUP as a

Group were in no doubt that he had all of the skills and attributes required to make an excellent Deputy Mayor. As such he wished him well for the forthcoming year.

The Mayor, Councillor Blaney, congratulated Councillor Cochrane on his appointment and invited him to wear the chain of office and to address the Council.

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Cochrane, stated that he was deeply honoured and humbled to stand before everyone today following his installation as Deputy Mayor of Ards and North Down Borough Council. To be entrusted with this position was a privilege that he did not take lightly and he was sincerely grateful to his colleagues within the DUP for the confidence and trust they had placed in him through their nomination. He added that their support meant a great deal, and he thanked them for the opportunity to serve the Borough in this new capacity.

Councillor Cochrane also took the opportunity to congratulate the Mayor on his installation, adding that he looked forward to working alongside him over the year ahead as they represented and promoted the interests of all who lived, worked and visited Ards and North Down.

Continuing Councillor Cochrane acknowledged how fortunate they were to live in one of the most beautiful parts of Northern Ireland. With its stunning coastline, the longest of any Council area in Northern Ireland, to vibrant towns, villages and rural communities, the Borough was blessed with tremendous natural beauty, rich heritage and strong community spirit. However, what truly made Ards and North Down special was its people. Every day you were able to see the dedication of volunteers, community groups, churches, charities, businesses and local organisations who worked tirelessly to make communities stronger, safer and more welcoming places to live. He acknowledged that they were the backbone of the Borough, and added that it would be a privilege to meet and recognise many of them throughout the year ahead.

As Deputy Mayor, Councillor Cochrane stated that he was mindful that the office carried a responsibility to represent every resident, regardless of background, or political outlook. As such he would seek to carry out that responsibility with humility, respect and a commitment to serving all sections of the community to the very best of his ability.

At this stage Councillor Cochrane took the opportunity to thank his family, friends and supporters for their encouragement and support. Public service often required sacrifice, and he was grateful for their understanding and constant encouragement.

As he would begin his year in office, Councillor Cochrane stated that he would do so with enthusiasm and optimism for the future of the Borough. He looked forward to supporting communities, celebrating local achievements, promoting the area and working constructively with colleagues across the Council chamber in the interests of those who they were privileged to serve. He expressed his thanks for the great honour adding that he looked forward to the year ahead and to serving the people of Ards and North Down as Deputy Mayor.

Alderman Smith offered his congratulations to Councillor Cochrane adding he along with the Mayor, Councillor Blaney, would make an excellent team and he wished him well.

Alderman McRandal also congratulated Councillor Cochrane on his appointment as Deputy Mayor adding that on behalf of the Alliance Party he wished him every success during his term of office.

Councillor Gilmour at this stage congratulated the Mayor on his appointment and thanked him for his kind words towards herself and Councillor Cathcart. She knew how well supported he would be by his family but emphasised the importance of bringing them with him along the way as that could be the only time he gets to see them. She wished him well for his year ahead. Turning to the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Gilmour commented that she had known Councillor Cochrane for many years having worked with Peter Weir. She wished him well for his year ahead and was confident he would do an excellent job as Deputy Mayor. She welcomed his mum and aunt along to the Council chamber and added that she knew his dad would be proudly looking on.

The Mayor invited Party Nominating Officers to make their nominations to the positions of Chair and Vice Chairs of the Committees as per the report.

Position	Year 4	Member
Mayor	UUP	Councillor C Blaney
Deputy Mayor	DUP	Councillor J Cochrane
Corporate Services Committee - Chair	UUP	Alderman P Smith
Corporate Services Committee – Vice Chair	Alliance	Councillor V Moore
Place and Prosperity Committee - Chair	UUP	Councillor R Smart
Place and Prosperity Committee - Vice Chair	Councillor Brady	Councillor T Brady
Planning Committee - Chair	Alliance	Councillor G McCollum
Planning Committee - Vice Chair	DUP	Alderman A Graham
Environment Committee - Chair	DUP	Councillor A Cathcart
Environment Committee - Vice Chair	Alliance	Councillor R Ashe
Active and Healthy Communities Committee - Chair	DUP	Alderman T Cummings
Active and Healthy Communities Committee - Vice Chair	Councillor S Irvine	Councillor S Irvine
Audit Committee - Chair	Alliance	Councillor P Morgan
Audit Committee - Vice Chair	DUP	Councillor E Thompson

RESOLVED, that the nominations be noted.

6. APPOINTMENTS TO SUB-GROUPS, WORKING GROUPS AND OUTSIDE BODIES (FILE CX210)

(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive advising at the Council’s Annual Meeting on 7 June 2023, appointments were made to Sub-Committees, Working Groups and Outside Bodies by way of nomination. Some of those appointments were for a one-year term only. Those one-year appointments were outlined in the tables attached at Appendix 1, including any further changes to the composition of the groups since then.

Nominations were now sought to fill the one-year appointments as outlined in Appendix 1 for the year 2026/27. It had been normal practice to fill those positions using single transferrable vote where the number of nominations exceeded the number of places available.

RECOMMENDED that the Council proceeds to appoint Members to the Sub-Committees, Working Groups and Outside Bodies listed in Appendix 1 by way of nomination.

The Mayor sought proposals and the following nominations were made:

CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor McBurney	Councillor McBurney
2	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
3	Councillor Brady	Councillor Brady

COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

Body: Arts and Heritage Advisory Panel – 5 Places (1 Year Appointment)

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Thompson	Councillor Thompson

2	Councillor Kennedy	Councillor Kennedy
3	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart
4	Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Harbinson
5	Councillor Wray	Councillor Wray

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
2	Alderman Cummings	Alderman Cummings
3	Councillor L Douglas	Councillor L Douglas
4	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart
5	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Thompson	Councillor Thompson
2	Alderman McAlpine	Alderman McAlpine
3	Councillor Wray	Councillor Wray

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Brady, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Alderman Graham	Alderman Graham
2	Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Cochrane
3	Councillor McBurney	Councillor McBurney
4	Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Harbinson
5	Councillor Hollywood	Councillor Hollywood
6	Councillor Quinn	Councillor Quinn
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 Brady	Councillor Brady
13	Councillor Newman	Councillor Newman
14	Alderman McRandal	Alderman McRandal
15	Councillor Hennessy	Councillor Hennessy

Body: Aurora Pool Joint Management Committee – 1 Place (1 Year Appointment)

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Blaney	Councillor Blaney

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Kerbside Working Group – 11 Places (1 Year Appointment – members are elected by D’hont)

It should be noted that this is a Task and Finish Group, and although nominations were initially for one-year period, it is recommended that the current membership is retained for the lifetime of the working group.

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the following Members be appointed for the lifetime of the working group:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Alderman Adair	Alderman Adair
2	Alderman Graham	Alderman Graham
3	Alderman McAlpine	Alderman McAlpine
4	Alderman McIlveen	Alderman McIlveen
5	Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Cathcart
6	Alderman McRandal	Alderman McRandal
7	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee
8	Councillor Morgan	Councillor Morgan
9	Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Harbinson
10	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart
11	Councillor Wray	Councillor Wray

EXTERNAL APPOINTMENTS**Body: North Down and Ards Road Safety Committee – 7 Places (1 Year Appointment)**

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Alderman McRandal	Alderman McRandal
2	Councillor Thompson	Councillor Thompson
3	Councillor Morgan	Councillor Morgan
4	Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Cochrane
5	Councillor Wray	Councillor Wray
6	-	-
7	-	-

Body: Northern Ireland Amenity Council – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Alderman Adair	Alderman Adair
2	Councillor Ashe	Councillor Ashe

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Hennessy	Councillor Hennessy
2	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum
3	-	-
4	-	-

Body: Bangor Alternatives Advisory Committee – 1 Place (1 Year Appointment)

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor W Irvine	Councillor W Irvine

Body: Portaferry Regeneration Ltd – 1 Place (1 Year Appointment)

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that Alderman Adair be appointed.

Alderman McRandal proposed, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that Alderman McAlpine be appointed.

As two nominations had been made for one position a vote was taken by a show of hands.

Alderman Adair received 14 votes, Alderman McAlpine received 8 votes and 10 Members abstained from voting.

RESOLVED:- that Alderman Adair be appointed :-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Alderman McAlpine	Alderman Adair

Body: Northern Ireland Drainage Council – 2 Places (1 Year Appointment)

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Wray	Councillor Wray
2	-	-

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Moore	Councillor Moore
2	Councillor Kendall	Councillor Kendall

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McRandal, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart
2	Councillor Moore	Councillor Moore

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Moore	Councillor Moore
2	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee
3	Councillor Smart	Councillor Smart
4	Councillor McCollum	Councillor McCollum

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Thompson	Councillor Thompson
2	Councillor Newman	Councillor Newman
3	Councillor S Irvine	Councillor S Irvine
4	Alderman Cummings	Alderman Cummings

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

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McRandal, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Harbinson
2	Councillor Thompson	Councillor Thompson
3	Councillor McKee	Councillor McKee

Body: Kilcooley Neighbourhood Partnership – 1 Place + 1 Substitute (1 Year Appointment)

Each Member having been duly proposed and seconded, it was

RESOLVED:- Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the following Members be appointed:-

	2025/26	2026/27
1	Councillor Gilmour	Councillor Gilmour
Sub	Councillor McClean	Councillor McClean

7. COUNCIL GOVERNANCE

7a. UPDATES TO THE SCHEME OF DELEGATION (CX210)

(Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Chief Executive stating that in 2024, Council revised its scheme of delegation for the first time in a number of years. Part of this review included the undertaking to review this each year at the Annual Meeting.

Proposed Changes

The main changes were in:

- Uplift to the delegated powers to Committees regarding the statutory limit of awarding contracts. Appendices 2-6 – Committee Terms of Reference were updated to reflect this change.
- Update to delegated amount to Service Unit Managers regarding approving budget transfers.
- Changes to wording around flexible working with regards to flexible retirement.
- Update to wording on agency staff recruitment and recruitment of posts.
- Small textual changes and formatting.

Committee Terms of Reference changes:

- Appendix 1 – changes to allow for Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs now to be included in the membership of the Audit Committee, in order to allow for better continuity of knowledge and expertise, as well as update to meeting frequency.
- Appendices 3, 4 and 5 – updated to clarify responsibility regarding Marinas and Harbours, Bangor Marina and tweaks to overall purpose and objectives.
- Appendix 7 – Statutory Powers and Duties of the Council, clarification on delegated authority to institute legal proceedings with respect to Building Control and Planning.

The next formal review of the scheme would be in advance of the Annual Meeting in 2027.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves version 5.0 of the Scheme of Delegation and authorises the updating of all policies, procedures, plans, strategies etc with changes contained in this scheme.

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

The proposer Alderman McIlveen noted proposed changes to the membership of the Audit Committee with Chairmen and Vice Chairmen now able to take a position on that. He recalled that previously there had been an Audit recommendation that that should not be the case. As such he asked if the change being recommended had come from the Auditors and furthermore, he sought clarity on the reasons behind the proposed change at this stage.

The Director of Corporate Services commented that he could not recollect that it was an Audit recommendation and instead he believed that it was a long-standing issue which had caused particular problems over the past number of years. As such for the sake of good governance it was believed to be good practice that neither the Mayor or Deputy Mayor should sit on the Committee. It was further believed that given the Council's Committee structure there were no problems anticipated with Chairmen or Vice Chairman having a position on the Audit Committee.

Alderman McIlveen stated that he completely agreed with the Director however he was aware that back in 2011 there was a recommendation that members of the Audit Committee should not be Chairmen or Vice Chairmen.

In response the Director stated that recommendations were just that. He added that on balance this issue that it was causing the Council with the membership of the Audit Committee changing significantly every year, was having an impact on the Committee's ability to run effectively given that it only met four times throughout the year.

At this stage Councillor McCollum having previously sat as a member on the Audit Committee recalled a report from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) which highlighted the difficulty posed of Committee membership chopping and changing. This was not considered good governance or good for continuity of the Committee hence the recommendation put forward by the NIAO at that time.

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

8. CLOSE OF MEETING AND PLAYING OF NATIONAL ANTHEM

The Mayor, Councillor Blaney thanked members for attending, officers for supporting the meeting and to all of those who had been watching the livestream. He advised that the meeting would now be closed with the playing of the National Anthem. Members were asked to stand if able.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 12.24pm.

ITEM 8.1

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Planning Committee was held in the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, on Tuesday 09 June 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor McCollum

Aldermen: Graham
McAlpine (Zoom, 7.06pm)
McIlveen (Zoom)
Smith

Councillors: Cathcart (Zoom) McClean (Zoom)
Harbinson (Zoom) McKee (Zoom)
Hennessy (Zoom) Morgan
Kendall (Zoom) Smart

Officers: Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Head of Planning and Building Control (A McCullough), Principal Planner (G Kerr), Senior Planners (J Hanna & A Todd) and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Alderman McDowell and Councillor Wray.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest was made but Members were reminded of their ability to declare at any time throughout the meeting.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES OF 05 AND 14 MAY 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above.

AGREED on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the minutes be noted.

4. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

4.1 LA06/2026/0158/F – INSTALLATION OF PAINTED STEEL EXTERNAL SPIRAL STAIRCASE FOR ACCESS TO ROOF OVER 2ND FLOOR APARTMENT FOR MAINTENANCE AND AMENITY ACCESS
(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Hollywood & Clandeboye

Committee Interest: – Call in request from Alderman McIlveen.

Proposal: Installation of painted steel external spiral staircase for access to roof over 2nd floor apartment for maintenance and amenity access

Site Location: 12 Ardavon, Hollywood

Recommendation: Refuse Planning Permission

The Senior Planner (A Todd) outlined the Case Officer's Report, explaining that Item 4.1 sought planning permission for the installation of a steel external spiral staircase to enable access to the upper roof of the building for maintenance and amenity purposes at 12 Ardavon, Hollywood.

The application had been recommended for refusal and was presented to Committee following a call-in request from Alderman McIlveen to allow consideration as to whether the scale, massing, location, design and materials of the proposal were sympathetic with the built form and appearance of the existing property and the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

The site was located within the recently constructed Ardavon development, off the Glen Road, Hollywood. The development included detached dwellings, a residential courtyard and an apartment building which was the subject of this application and was shown outlined in red.

In terms of the development plan context, the site lay within the settlement limit of Hollywood and also within the proposed Marino, Cultra Craigavad ATC and the proposed Folk Park/Creighton LLPA in Draft BMAP.

The proposal involved the erection of a 5m high steel spiral staircase on the roof of the apartment building which also included a 6m long walkway with glazed balustrades to enable access to the uppermost part of the roof. The staircase was located at the south-eastern side of the roof directly above the main entrance to the building. The existing and proposed north-eastern elevation of the apartment building showed the elevation that faced onto the main access lane into the development. The north-western elevation showed the proposed amenity area located between the chimneys. The south-eastern elevation showed the proposed staircase positioned directly above the main entrance to the building and the south-western elevation was also illustrated.

These were the existing and proposed roof plans of the building and on the proposed plan the location of the staircase could be seen, with the walkway leading to the central amenity area.

The staircase and amenity area would only be accessible from the second-floor Penthouse apartment via two doors as highlighted, one from the living area and one from the master bedroom. The amenity area would therefore be exclusively for the use of the occupants of this apartment which already benefited from the use of the roof terraces at second floor level equating to approximately 130sqm. This was well in excess of the 10–30sqm of amenity space recommended for apartments in Creating Places, therefore it was not considered that there was a need for any additional amenity space to serve the Penthouse.

As outlined in the Case Officer's Report, the Planning Department was of the opinion that the proposal failed to comply with the SPPS and criterion (a) of policy EXT1 of Planning Policy Statement 7 Residential Extensions and Alterations, in that the scale, massing, location, design and materials of the proposal were not sympathetic with the built form and appearance of the existing property and would detract from the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

While there were no direct views of the building from the Glen Road, the proposed staircase would be highly visible from public views within the Ardavon development itself. The first view of the staircase would be on approach along the main access lane into the development as indicated.

(Alderman McAlpine joined the meeting remotely – 7.06pm)

From this viewpoint the staircase and walkway would be highly visible, and it was considered that it would appear as an obtrusive and dominant feature, incongruous to the design and character of the existing building. Paragraph A4 of the J&A of Policy EXT1 advised that "An extension or alteration should be designed to become an integral part of the property functionally and visually". The apartment building was originally designed to reflect the character and features of the original Victorian Villa on the site, Ardavon House, which unfortunately could not be retained due to its poor condition. It was considered that the addition of the large spiral staircase and walkway to the roof of the building would not be sympathetic or respectful in any way to the design or built form of the building.

The next view was from the south where the parking area for the apartments and access lane to the residential courtyard were located.

Viewed from here, the staircase and walkway would be extremely prominent on the roof. Paragraph A9 of the J&A of Policy EXT1 advised that "Alterations to the front of a property require great care as poor design can upset the architectural integrity of the building and they should appear to be part of the existing property – not an obvious addition."

The third view was from the west at the front of the adjacent residential courtyard. The staircase and walkway would also be extremely prominent and appear incongruous with the building from this viewpoint. Paragraph A6 of the J&A of Policy EXT1 also advised that “It will not usually be appropriate to allow an extension to project above the ridge line of an existing property”.

The applicant advised that the staircase and walkway were necessary to provide safe access for the purposes of maintaining and cleaning the air conditioning units, solar panels, roof coverings, chimneys and roof lights in addition to providing further amenity space for the Penthouse. As already outlined, there was no need for additional amenity space to serve the Penthouse and the Planning Department also did not consider that the staircase was essential to enable occasional maintenance and cleaning and this would not be sufficient justification to outweigh the visual harm that would be caused. It was considered that access could easily be gained from a discreet ladder located on the side of the mansard roof with no need for the elaborate spiral staircase, walkway and amenity deck.

Objections had also been submitted from 12 local residents who raised concerns in relation to the obtrusive visual impact of the proposal as well as the potential impact on privacy. While the staircase and amenity area would allow views towards existing adjacent properties, these were towards the front of the dwellings rather than any private amenity space and would not result in any greater views than those already available from the second-floor roof terrace as shown in the photographs. The separation distances between the roof terraces and existing dwellings were also all in line with the minimum distance of 30m as recommended in Creating Places.

In summary, the Planning Department considered that the proposal was contrary to the SPPS and Planning Policy Statement 7 Residential Extensions and Alterations, in that it would result in a dominant and incongruous feature on the existing building and would fail to be sympathetic to its built form and the character of the surrounding area. The Planning Department also did not accept that the stated need for the development would outweigh the visual harm that would be caused. On this basis it was recommended that planning permission should be refused.

The Chair invited questions to the Officer for clarification.

Alderman McIlveen asked for confirmation that the reasons for refusal related solely to the visual appearance of the staircase rather than amenity use. He asked if there was deemed to be any adverse impact on neighbouring properties.

The Officer confirmed the refusal reasons related to scale, location, massing and visual impact – not amenity. The existing amenity use had been highlighted to demonstrate there was not a lack of existing space, and the proposal was an addition. She confirmed that, despite the objections, there was not deemed to be any impact such as overlooking on neighbouring properties.

In a further query, Alderman McIlveen queried the alternative options for roof access to the air conditioning unit, solar panels and chimneys etc.

The Officer advised that fixed ladders or the use of cherry picker vehicles would be feasible options. She added that no other building she was aware of had such an elaborate staircase and walkway for maintenance access.

Alderman Graham asked what the visibility of the staircase would be like on approach at street level and the Officer returned to a previous slide which showed a visual of its prominent appearance and reiterated that the staircase would be five metres high, above the highest point of the building.

In a final query, Alderman Graham asked about the nature of the objections and the Officer confirmed that they had included concerns about overlooking from neighbours, but the main issue related to visual impact, again from neighbouring residents.

The Chair introduced Mr Alan Mains who was speaking in support of the application. His address to the Committee was summarised as follows:

- The proposal was developed due to the need for routine ongoing safe access to the roof area over the 2nd floor apartment. The access would be mainly used by the residents of the property and occasionally by contractors as required for general amenity use within the amenity deck area; frequent cleaning of a number of large areas of roof-mounted glazing which were visible from various rooms within the property; maintaining and replacement of air conditioning units; maintaining and replacement of solar panels; cleaning and maintaining chimneys; maintenance of roof lighting; and cleaning and maintaining roof coverings.
- The design was developed to integrate a small amenity deck area neatly housed within the existing chimneys. The amenity deck comprised glazed balustrading to blend seamlessly into the existing roof area. The access staircase was designed to integrate curved painted steelwork. Painted steelwork was used extensively on the apartment building as balustrading on extensive open balconies to the first-floor apartments, as well as decorative steelwork detailing on bay windows to ground floor apartments.
- The proposal took into account the privacy and amenity of adjacent properties and complied with distance rules. The distance between the proposed roof development and the nearest neighbouring dwelling/window was approximately 26m. Creating Places guidance did not cover terraces or decks at the height of this proposal; however, it was noted that there was already an external terrace wrapping around the building at 2nd floor level, which was 11m closer than the proposed deck to neighbouring dwellings, and the proposed deck area was well

screened on all four sides due to being positioned within extensive chimneys, in particular on the southwest elevation facing the courtyard properties.

- It was not considered that this proposed deck would pose any greater concerns in relation to the privacy of the residents of the closest neighbouring dwelling. This equally applied to the other townhouses in this part of the development. The neighbourhood already featured standard, mutual overlooking relationships between neighbouring properties, and this modest roof development did not introduce any novel or unprecedented impact on the area.
- To provide reassurance, the applicant was agreeable to a standard planning condition requiring obscure glazed balustrading, fixed and non-openable, to the southwest elevation facing the courtyard properties.

The Chair invited questions to the speaker and Councillor Hennessy asked when the apartment complex had been built and how long the existing residents had lived there. He also queried how the access and maintenance arrangements had been handled to date.

Mr Mains explained that the current residents of Apartment 2 had been there since the complex was built about two and a half to three years ago. Until recently the apartment had not been occupied as much but it was now occupied more frequently.

Alderman McIlveen asked for the speaker's view on the alternative access arrangements that the Officer had suggested and questioned the practicality of those. He asked if the proposed location was the most suitable for the proposed staircase and if there was any other suitable location for it.

Mr Mains considered the alternative methods – use of cherry pickers and ladders – to be impractical to meet the weekly cleaning requirements of the solar panels and windows on the roof.

He highlighted health and safety concerns, particularly in the use of ladders. He argued that the steel staircase, once painted, would be less obtrusive than what the Officer had suggested. It had been located at the rear of the building where it was screened by trees and he felt that anyone approaching the building would be focused on driving safely rather than the view.

Alderman Smith noted that the staircase appeared to be a prominent feature, particularly from the northeast and southwest elevations. He asked why the applicant required such an elaborate, large staircase for accessing a plant room.

Mr Mains argued that the description of the plant room understated the area and that the development was well designed and highly regarded by Planners. The staircase had a purpose for maintenance and the safety of moving items up and down. He added that it was positioned on the roof of the apartment owner.

Alderman Smith asked if the staircase's primary use would be for those accessing for maintenance purposes or for the apartment owner's functional use. Mr Mains advised that it would be a mixture of both and for the comfort and safety of being able to get up and down from the area.

Alderman Graham asked how the area would be accessed safely if the Council rejected planning permission and Mr Mains felt that it would be difficult to find a safe alternative. He added that considerable thought had gone into the proposal and it brought value to what most people would agree was a highly regarded development. Alternatives had been considered but it was felt that the painted steel staircase would blend in and be the safest option.

Mr Mains returned to the public gallery.

The Chair invited questions to the Officer for clarification and Alderman Graham referred to the planning approval which was granted for the existing development and if there was a requirement for it to reflect the characteristics of the original property.

The Officer recalled that there was considerable negotiation during that planning application process to create a design that was reflective of the original character, although there was no planning condition in place.

Councillor Morgan proposed, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted and that planning permission be refused.

Councillor Morgan agreed with the Planning Department's reasons for its opinion to refuse and felt that the design was strange and inappropriate for that building. She believed that there were other ways to access the roof for maintenance requirements.

Alderman Smith accepted there was a need for access but had concerns about the prominence of the staircase, particularly from the northeast and southwest perspectives.

He felt that the staircase was an item 'in its own right' and not sympathetic to the building's design. He pointed to other comments heard in the debate or referenced in the report which referred to the proposal as dominant, visually harmful and poorly designed. He felt this justified refusal of the application.

Alderman McIlveen was concerned that the alternative suggestions for access, particularly the hire of cherry pickers, which could be costly, had not been considered adequately. He had further concerns that a refusal on the basis of appearance alone was overlooking the necessity and functionality aspects for the staircase's stated purpose.

Alderman Graham took a similar view, pointing to health and safety concerns of accessing without a permanent staircase. He accepted that until now there had not

been a need for frequent service of the solar panels and the air conditioning unit and he felt a ladder was not the safest way to access those on a regular basis. He suspected that scaffolding might be required and that would be unsightly. While the proposed structure was unusual, he accepted that the staircase was needed for practical reasons.

Councillor Hennessy disagreed with that view and felt that the occupants had managed to access the area successfully for the last two and a half to three years, which demonstrated that suitable access already existed.

On being put to the meeting, with 8 voting FOR, 3 voting AGAINST, 2 ABSTAINING, and 3 ABSENT, the proposal was CARRIED.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (8) Aldermen Smith	AGAINST (3) Aldermen Graham McIlveen	ABSTAINED (2) Aldermen McAlpine	ABSENT (3) Aldermen McDowell
Councillors Hennessy Harbinson Kendall McClellan McKee Morgan Smart	Councillor Cathcart	Councillors McCollum	Councillor Kerr Wray

Alderman McAlpine advised that she would abstain from the vote having joined the meeting late.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted and that planning permission be refused.

4.2 LA06/2026/0137/S54 – PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF 95 DWELLINGS TO INCLUDE ROADS, PARKING, INFRASTRUCTURE, LANDSCAPING AND RETENTION OF BAWN WALL – VARIATION OF CONDITION 5 REGARDING LANDSCAPING
(Appendix II – III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer’s report.

DEA: Newtownards

Committee Interest: – Major planning application.

Proposal: Variation of Condition 5 relating to landscaping for residential development of 95 dwellings (including roads, parking, infrastructure, landscaping and retention of bawn wall)

Site Location: Lands south of Nos. 37–77 Court Street and Nos. 1–11 Canal Row, Newtownards

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Senior Planner (A Todd) outlined the Case Officer's Report, explaining that Item 4.2 sought planning permission for the variation of condition 5 relating to the landscaping of planning permission LA06/2019/0603/F for the erection of 95 dwellings at lands south of 37-77 Court Street and 1-11 Canal Row, Newtownards.

The application fell within the major category of development and was previously presented to Committee at the meeting of 5th May with a recommendation to approve. At that meeting, Committee decided that it was minded to refuse the proposal and the application was deferred to seek further justification from the applicant.

This site was located in Newtownards just outside the town centre south of Court Street and north of Castlebawn Retail Park.

Construction of the development was already well under way on the site in line with the previous permission with a number of houses nearing completion.

As the site was subject to an extant planning permission for 95 dwellings, the principle of development was established and the only matter to be considered under this current application was the proposed variation to the wording of condition 5. The proposed variation allowed for an amended landscaping scheme along with the approval of the submitted phasing plan for the implementation of the landscaping.

The amendment to the approved landscaping scheme involved the removal of 36 of the proposed trees. These were indicated in red on the plan and as could be seen, were primarily located around the site's boundaries. The Planning Agent had previously advised that the removal of these trees from the scheme was required to meet the long-term management requirements of Radius Housing Association as they were considered to be located too close to buildings and the historic Bawn Wall.

The Planning Department did not consider that the proposed reduction in the overall tree provision would result in any adverse impact on the character of the area, any loss of a landscaped buffer required for screening or any impact on the overall environmental quality of the scheme. The development still incorporated the planting of over 133 new trees along with hedgerows and shrubs throughout. However, at the meeting of 5th May, Committee did not consider that sufficient justification had been provided by the applicant to allow the removal of the proposed trees from the landscaping scheme.

The agent submitted a further supporting statement on 7th May which outlined that:

- A significant number of the proposed trees were positioned close to the Bawn Wall which was a scheduled monument. Further to discussions with HED Historic Monuments in December 2025, it was advised that 36 of the proposed trees could potentially risk the stability of the wall. The revised planting plan was prepared and submitted on the basis of this advice from HED.
- It had also been identified that some of the trees which were proposed close to the perimeter path could create unsupervised areas which would be overshadowed and could result in potential risk to public safety.

The Planning Department remained of the opinion that the proposal was compliant with PPS7 and that the application should be approved. The scheme would continue to contribute to a quality residential environment incorporating the planting of over 100 new trees along with other hedges and shrubs on a site which was previously devoid of any vegetation.

Condition 5 of the original permission also required the submission of details of the proposed phased implementation of hard and soft landscaping works for approval prior to occupation of any dwelling. These details had now been submitted under the current application for approval. The submitted phasing plan showed the site divided into 7 phases for the implementation of planting, confirming that planting would be completed during the first available planting season after the occupation of the first dwelling in each phase. Condition 5 had been amended accordingly to require the landscaping works to be implemented in accordance with the details of this phasing plan.

In summary, no objections had been received to this proposal and the Planning Department was content that the proposed development would continue to meet all the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 7 Quality Residential Environments. It was therefore recommended that planning permission should be granted for the proposed variation of condition.

The Chair invited questions to the Officer for clarification.

Alderman McIlveen appreciated the clarification provided by the applicant following the previous discussion of the application. He felt that the Council should no longer proceed with refusal and that the Council should accept the amendment and associated condition as recommended.

Alderman McIlveen proposed, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the Officer's recommendation be adopted and that Council grants planning permission.

The seconder, Councillor Smart added that he felt the plans were sympathetic to the relevant concerns and welcomed the clarification from the agent.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council grants planning permission.

4.3 LA06/2026/0135/F – USE OF EXISTING UNIT FOR RETAIL (CLASS A1) (CONVENIENCE AND COMPARISON GOODS), INCLUDING ELEVATION CHANGES AND RETROSPECTIVE EXTENSION FOR STORAGE

(Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor Central

Committee Interest: – Major application.

Proposal: Use of existing unit for retail (Class A1), including elevation changes and retrospective extension for storage

Site Location: Retail Warehouse Unit 1, Lesley Bloomfield Shopping Centre and Retail Park, South Circular Road, Bangor

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Principal Planner (G Kerr) presented the Case Officer's Report, explaining that Item 4.3 was for the use of an existing unit for Retail (Class A1) (convenience and comparison goods), including elevation changes and retrospective extension for storage at Retail Warehouse Unit 1, Lesley Bloomfield Shopping Centre and Retail Park, South Circular Road, Bangor.

The application was before Members as it was a major application.

The recommendation was to grant planning permission.

The site was an end unit, currently vacant within the Retail Park complex which lay adjacent to Bloomfield Shopping Complex which extended to approximately 15ha approximately 1.5 kilometres to the south of Bangor city centre.

The site was shown with the extension already constructed to the rear of the unit.

With regard to the proposal which sought a change of retail space within the building to allow for convenience and comparison goods, the application also sought retrospective permission for a rear extension for storage purposes only as it currently had no designated storage area.

The extension was completed in August 2025. The footprint of the extension was 26.5m x 15m with a flat roof to match the height of the existing roof. Minor elevational changes to the overall unit were also proposed. Members who may have been familiar with the

area would have recalled the unit previously housed Reids sofa shop and a previous tenant occupied the unit for non-retail uses such as recreational (Archery); however, this was without benefit of planning permission.

Regarding the design of the proposal the front elevation of the unit would be comparable in appearance to the existing facade whilst two window openings were added on the upper wall to either side of the existing signage display area. The design was acceptable given the context of the area. The extension was subordinate to the existing building, and the design was replicated and would not detract from the character of the area. It adopted a complementary design with vertical cladding panels and a brick plinth to match existing finishes at the rear of the unit. It had a brick plinth to match the brick on the existing side elevation.

With regard to policy requirements, the SPPS 2 explained at Paragraph 6.277 that “The aim of the SPPS is to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions, consistent with the RDS”.

Paragraph 6.278 stated planning authorities must adopt a town centre first approach for retail and main town centre uses.

Paragraph 6.286 of the SPPS2 stated that “All policies and proposals must ensure there will be no unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of an existing centre within the catchment and meet the requirements of policy elsewhere in the SPPS.” All required assessments as required by the SPPS were undertaken by the agent with the Planning Department appointing an independent retail consultant Nexus to assess the relevant areas as required by policy.

As the proposal included a 317 sqm extension to the unit for storage purposes which would be ancillary to the use of the main unit to allow the sale of convenience and comparison goods, it had to be assessed holistically, particularly in respect of the out-of-town location as the gross floorspace would increase to in excess of 1000 sqm. The advice provided considered the proposed development on the site and was material in the consideration of this application. Within this it proposed the use of the existing Unit 1 providing 825 sqm of ground floorspace for the sale of convenience goods, with no more than 165 sqm for the sale of comparison goods.

In considering the sequential approach, the seminal case was *Tesco Stores v Dundee City Council* [2012] UKSC 13 where the Supreme Court found that a sequential approach required flexibility and realism from developers and the planning authority. The Council had to consider the applicant’s proposal. As Lord Hope stated at paragraph 38 of the Judgment “the whole exercise is directed to what the developer is proposing, not some other proposal which the planning authority might seek to substitute for it which is for something less than that sought by the developer”.

The tenant for the building, Iceland Food Warehouse, had detailed its requirements to support day to day operations which were a c.10,000 sqft store (conversion only) to be on a single floorplate with a dedicated servicing area with a significant level of car parking with dedicated trolley bays; and visibility from key transport corridors (with limited obstruction).

Findings of the review concluded that there were no sequentially preferable sites within the Primary Retail Core, or in the Town Centre or Edge of Centre locations of any of the towns, that were possible alternative sites, as any sites that existed would not meet the size or operational requirements of the proposal as listed above. The approach taken within the retail impact assessment was reviewed by planning officers and the external retail consultant, who were content that the approach, including the methodology and accompanying information, was appropriate and sound.

In terms of economic benefit, a core principle of the SPPS was to “support sustainable economic growth” with a requirement for planning authorities to take a positive approach to appropriate economic development proposals and proactively support and enable growth generating activities. Large scale investment proposals with job creation potential should be given particular priority. The Iceland Food Warehouse proposal would result in economic benefits in Bangor. The RIA stated that it would:

- Result in an estimated £1.5million investment in Bangor in the fit out (construction phase) of the new food store.
- Support approximately 15 gross FTE jobs during the construction phase, equating to £1.1million in GVA over the construction period.
- Create approximately 40-50 FTE gross new jobs at the store, equating to £4.2 million in GVA per annum.
- Result in the re-use of a currently vacant unit in an established retail park location.
- Introduce a new discount retail offer to Bangor which would further strengthen the attraction of the town as a shopping destination.

The proposal would help ensure the competitive supply of additional discount convenience goods for Bangor and would ensure variety in the number and format of retailers in the town.

It would add to the choice of food retailers in Bangor and broaden the retail offer to enhance value and increase competition in the local market.

With regard to amenity, as the proposal included plant and equipment used for refrigeration and air conditioning for the new Iceland store which would be located in an external plant compound, Environmental Health requested that a Noise Impact Assessment was undertaken to demonstrate that the associated plant and equipment would not cause an adverse noise impact to nearby residential properties.

The results received confirmed no impact on daytime amenity or quality of sleep at the closest noise-sensitive receptors and recommended conditions to be included on any permission granted.

DfI Roads was consulted and had no concerns regarding the proposal. Existing parking would be used. Space remained for delivery vehicles within curtilage turning despite the extension to the rear. Parking Standards Guidance indicated different levels of parking provision required from “Non-Food Retail” to “Food Retail”.

For the current proposal this required an additional provision of 27 spaces. Whilst a parking statement had been provided for the development, it was noted that the statement related to the wider Retail Park and had been prepared to support other proposals within the Bloomfield District Centre. It was also considered that visitors to the new retail store would involve stops at multiple stores that already existed within the immediate vicinity.

One objection had been received from the occupant of 13 Upritchard Gardens behind the development, which was a three storey, end terrace property located within the adjacent housing development on land to the southwest and separated from the site by approximately 47 metres. The objection specifically related to a potential loss of light into both the rear garden and back of the property. It was considered however that there was sufficient separation distance to ensure that the retrospective extension would not be of detriment to the amenity of the objector’s property.

In summary, all material planning considerations had been thoroughly assessed during the processing of this proposal with an independent consultant reviewing the supporting information and providing comment. All consultees were content and material objections raised had been addressed.

The Chair invited questions to the Officer and Councillor Cathcart queried the two recorded objections, noting that only one had been referred to in the report. The Officer advised that only one objection had been received but it had been lodged twice on the system.

Alderman McAlpine noted that this related to a retrospective application for an extension and noted the building render being different. She asked if it would be possible to require that that render matched the surrounding buildings and if the appearance had formed part of the neighbour’s complaint.

The Officer advised that a requirement for alternative render would be unreasonable as the building was in a retail park with varied finishes on different units. The Planning Department was satisfied that the finished appearance aligned with the surrounding area and would not result in loss of amenity or negative views. She confirmed that there were no objections received that specifically related to the look or the finish of the extension.

Alderman Smith raised a query around car parking issues, noting that the change of use from non-food to food retail at the site required an additional 27 parking spaces. He noted general business of the area and pressure on parking spaces due to wider layout changes at Bloomfield Shopping Centre. He queried whether there was sufficient parking to accommodate the proposed new unit.

The Officer advised that car parking had been thoroughly investigated due to the area's known high usage. Customers typically visited multiple units which affected parking demand and patterns. Through site visits at various times, Officers had noted that parking was always available despite how busy the centre was. She confirmed that 27 spaces had been deemed a reasonable requirement based on the anticipated demand, and it was felt that number could be accommodated at any given time. She highlighted that units had varying opening hours which affected car parking availability. The assessment had concluded that parking provision was therefore acceptable.

Alderman Graham, while not objecting to the proposal, expressed concern about the impacts on Bangor city centre, pointing to broader 'sea change' with regard to retail. He understood that there had previously been an Iceland store in the Flagship Centre and sought the Officer's view of its relocation away from the city centre. He was concerned about the public's perception of this development and the decline in retail in the city centre.

He noted the Lidl store application had included a condition that its previous retail unit remained empty to avoid negative impacts from the relocation. He felt that local residents might struggle to understand or accept this decision.

He asked how the Council could justify it to the public and the Officer explained the importance of policy consideration of town and city centres for each retail application including impact assessments. She advised of requirements to demonstrate why other sites in the town centre were not suitable or available. Sites like the Flagship Centre were not available to the applicant and the unit it had occupied there previously was much smaller. Its current business needs required a bigger space.

It was advised that a Retail Impact Assessment had estimated there would be a 2% impact on the city centre's retail, which had to be considered alongside significant current investment in the city centre such as the Queen's Parade development and interest in the Flagship Centre.

It was identified that principal direct impact would be on ASDA with negligible effects on the city centre overall.

The Chair introduced Mr Jason Carlisle (Applicant, Herbert Property), Mr Philip Stinson (Turley) and Mrs Donna Lyle (Agent, Turley). An address was delivered by Mr Stinson and summarised as follows:

- The applicant welcomed the officer recommendation to approve and was grateful to officers for bringing the application forward to Committee within four months. It was noted that there were no objections from any statutory consultees.
- Since acquiring Lesley Bloomfield Shopping Centre and Retail Park in 2024, Herbert Property Group had invested in the centre, securing tenants for vacant units to support the role of the centre as a District Centre.
- The occupation of Unit 1 by Iceland Food Warehouse would bring a long-vacant unit back into use and introduce a well-established national retailer to the centre. The public consultation had shown strong local support for the proposal, with residents welcoming the additional retail choice.
- The application was supported by a Retail Impact Assessment, which had been independently reviewed by Nexus Planning on behalf of the Council. The independent review had concluded that there would be no significant adverse impact on the vitality and viability of Bangor City Centre and that there were no sequentially preferable sites. The review also confirmed that the proposal would not undermine ongoing investment or regeneration but would complement shopping within the area.
- The development represented an investment of £1.5 million, would provide 15 construction jobs, and 40 to 50 jobs once operational. It would also generate rateable income from the currently vacant unit.
- There were no objections from any consultees.

The Chair invited questions to the speakers and Councillor Cathcart noted that the upper car park at Bloomfield Shopping Centre remained closed. He asked if the centre had any plans to reopen that to help meet parking demand.

The speaker referred to parking assessments which had confirmed that there was already sufficient parking during peak periods even without the upper level. It could be reopened however if future parking demands increased. The centre monitored parking closely and was prepared to act if required.

The speakers were returned to the virtual gallery.

The Chair invited further questions to the Officer for clarification and Councillor Cathcart asked if the parking assessment had accounted for the closure of the upper-level car park. The Officer confirmed that it had, adding that surveys indicated that 235 parking spaces were free in the centre during the survey period.

Councillor Cathcart proposed, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the recommendation be adopted and that Council grants planning permission.

Councillor Cathcart explained that he had previously opposed the Lidl application and had concerns regarding the approval of B&M and Pound Stretcher in the same area, feeling that they could have been located in the city centre.

He acknowledged that the Iceland store had previously operated in the Flagship Centre but had closed and had been absent from Bangor for considerable time. He also felt that Iceland's business which focused on frozen foods was better suited to sites with nearby car parking, due to the nature of those products.

He noted that the expansion was for storage purposes and not new retail space and felt that a precedent had already been set due to approvals for similar stores and therefore saw no reason to refuse the application.

In closing, he felt that the Iceland store would increase shopper choice in Bangor and create job opportunities.

The seconder, Councillor Harbinson, admitted he normally had a dislike towards retrospective planning applications but in this case felt that the unit was well suited for the Iceland store and agreed with the reasoning in the Officer's report.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Harbinson, that the recommendation be adopted and that Council grants planning permission.

4.4 LA06/2025/0953/F – VARIATION OF CONDITION 9 OF PLANNING PERMISSION REF: W/2007/1028/F – TO AMALGAMATE UNITS 4 & 5 OF SPRINGHILL SHOPPING CENTRE
(Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor Central

Committee Interest: – Major Planning application.

Proposal: Variation of condition to permit amalgamation of Units 4 & 5 at Springhill Shopping Centre

Site Location: Springhill Shopping Centre, Killeen Avenue, Bangor

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Principal Planner (G Kerr) presented the Case Officer's Report, advising Planning ref LA06/2025/0953/F was for the variation of condition 9 of a previous planning approval for Springhill Shopping Centre to amalgamate units 4 and 5 to provide a total floorspace of 2051 sqm rather than the two separate units currently on site.

The application was before Members as it was a major application. There were no objections to the proposal, and the recommendation was to grant planning permission.

Given this was a Section 54 application which sought to amend a condition of the original permission for the centre, the Council had to consider only the 'question of the conditions' subject to which planning permission should be granted. The application therefore could not revisit the original approval and could only consider the variation of condition 3.

The site was located within the development limits of Bangor within a well-known district centre known as Springhill Shopping Centre. The site was located within the settlement limit of Bangor as per the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 (dBMAP) and North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984–1995 (NDAAP) and was designated as a District Shopping Centre in draft BMAP.

The wider area within the Springhill Shopping Centre was shown. Members familiar with the area would have recalled that the retailer Next previously retailed from the unit adjacent to Sports Direct – since the relocation of Next to Bloomfield Shopping Centre the unit had lain vacant in addition to a narrow unit adjacent which had yet to acquire any retailer.

To provide context to the application, Matalan was to open 10 new stores across the UK. Springhill Shopping Centre had been identified as a suitable location for Matalan's new NI store subject to the amalgamation of the two identified vacant premises/units, nos. 4 and 5, to give the required floorspace of circa 2,000 sqm.

The proposal to amalgamate these two units into one resulted in a more useable space suitable for the retail model characteristic of such a retailer. Given there were no changes proposed to what was currently able to be sold within the units nor was the overall retail floorspace increasing, this was given considerable weight in the consideration of the application.

The planning agent acting on behalf of the applicant submitted all of the required supporting statement which was assessed against prevailing planning policy including an assessment on any potential impact on the vitality and viability of Bangor City Centre which had been detailed in the case officer report.

In conclusion, this application represented an investment opportunity for the retail offer for Bangor which was, in the round, acceptable in policy with material weight being afforded to the previous use and the recommendation was to grant planning permission.

The Chair invited questions to the Officer and Councillor Cathcart queried why the initial size restriction on retail units was imposed, noting that larger units were lacking in the city centre and might be needed. He noted that the city centre mainly contained smaller units and questioned the rationale for favouring that approach.

The Officer advised the original restriction was from an old Department of Environment permission, and she was unsure of the exact reasoning. She suspected that restriction was likely for additional controls to limit unit sizes. This application however had to be

assessed on its own merits and there was no negative impact on the city centre, according to findings of a recent assessment. She pointed out that this proposal was considered acceptable.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council grants planning permission.

4.5 LA06/2025/0616/A – 2NO. SPONSORSHIP SIGNAGE (Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Holywood & Clandeboye

Committee Interest:

Proposal: 2 no. sponsorship signage

Site Location: Roadside verge adjoining Belfast Road and A2 Belfast Road, Holywood

Recommendation: Grant Consent

The Senior Planner (J Hanna) explained that Item 4.5 was an application for advertising consent on behalf of the Council for 2x Sponsorship Signage.

No objections had been received in relation to the application.

The site was located on a roadside verge connecting the A2 with the Belfast Road within the settlement limit of Holywood. The site was comprised mainly of grass with some shrubbery and medium sized trees toward the rear of the verge.

A filling station and shop were located immediately behind the verge to the north. The site contained existing signage including a welcome sign, a best kept town sign and two signs currently displaying a business name, this application was to serve as a retrospective application for the latter two signs.

The elevations of the sign and its layout along the road were shown. The signs would measure 0.4m x 0.75m with a height of 0.6m above ground.

Images of the location were shown. The proposal was in accordance with the SPPS2 and AD1 of PPS17 in that it would respect the general characteristics of the area, would not impact amenity and would not prejudice public safety. DFI Roads had no objections.

In summary, officers were content it met policy and recommended the proposal for approval.

The Chair invited questions to the Officer and Councillor Cathcart asked whether planning permission for the sponsorship sign was granted in perpetuity, allowing the sponsor's name to change over time without new permission for each change.

The Officer confirmed that permission was in perpetuity, in line with the Council's sponsorship policy. While the sign's approval was ongoing, business logos could change over time. The Council retained control over what appeared on the signs.

Councillor Morgan was concerned that the signs could detract from the roundabout's natural features, suspecting that sponsors would expect to be noticed. She queried the number of signs and if there was potential for additional signs and how any future requests would be handled.

The Officer explained that this application was for two signs, and numbers for each roundabout were specified within each application. He added that the Council had to consider each location individually and the size of the signs was relatively small. The signs were designed to blend with the natural features and offer only fleeting visibility for passing motorists. Any unauthorised additional signage would be subject to enforcement action.

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

4.6 LA06/2025/0617/A – 1NO. SPONSORSHIP SIGNAGE (Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Holywood & Clandeboye

Committee Interest:

Proposal: 1 no. sponsorship signage

Site Location: Roadside verge adjoining Jacksons Road and Belfast Road, Holywood

Recommendation: Grant Consent

The Senior Planner (J Hanna) advised that Item 4.6 was an application for advertising consent on behalf of the Council for 1 No. Sponsorship Signage.

No objections had been received in relation to the application.

The application site was located on a roadside verge adjoining Jacksons Road and Belfast Road within the settlement limit of Holywood. The verge consisted of areas of grass, a planter containing plants and shrubs, with a pedestrian path through the centre. The verge had a slight gradient gently sloping to the east.

The elevations of the sign and its layout along the road were shown. The sign would measure 0.4m x 0.75m with a height of 0.6m above ground.

Images of the location were shown. The proposal was in accordance with the SPPS2 and AD1 of PPS17 in that it would respect the general characteristics of the area, would not impact amenity and would not prejudice public safety. DFI Roads had no objections.

In summary, officers were content it met policy and recommended the proposal for approval.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Graham, seconded by Councillor Hennessy, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council grants consent.

4.7 LA06/2025/0620/A – 4NO. SPONSORSHIP SIGNAGE (Appendix VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Comber

Committee Interest:

Proposal: 4 no. sponsorship signage

Site Location: A21 Roundabout adjoining Newtownards Road and Little Enler Road, Comber

Recommendation: Grant Consent

The Senior Planner (J Hanna) explained that Item 4.7 was an application for advertising consent on behalf of the Council for 4 No. Sponsorship Signage.

No objections had been received in relation to the application.

The application site was a roundabout located adjoining Newtownards Road and Little Enler Road. The roundabout contained medium sized trees. Vegetation within the roundabout was limited in height and density, ensuring unobstructed visibility.

The surrounding area was primarily residential development, with Comber Free Presbyterian Church located to the northeast. The site was within the development limit of Comber as per the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015.

The elevations of the sign and its layout along the road were shown. The signs would measure 0.4m x 0.75m with a height of 0.6m above ground.

Images of the location were shown. The proposal was in accordance with the SPPS2 and AD1 of PPS17 in that it would respect the general characteristics of the area, would not impact amenity and would not prejudice public safety. DFI Roads had no objections.

In summary, officers were content it met policy and recommended the proposal for approval.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council grants consent.

4.8 LA06/2025/0621/A – 4NO. SPONSORSHIP SIGNAGE

(Appendix IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Newtownards

Committee Interest:

Proposal: 4 no. sponsorship signage

Site Location: Roundabout adjoining Kempe Stones Road, Blair Mayne Road South and Nursery Road, Newtownards

Recommendation: Grant Consent

The Senior Planner (J Hanna) explained that Item 4.8 was an application for advertising consent on behalf of the Council for 4 No. Sponsorship Signage.

No objections had been received in relation to the application.

The proposal site consisted of a roundabout located within Newtownards, adjoining Kempe Stones Road, Blair Mayne Road South, and Nursery Road. The central portion of the roundabout had medium sized trees encircled by vegetation. The outer portion of the roundabout consisted of mowed grass which sloped slightly toward the centre. The roundabout currently contained directional signage printed on metal poles as shown.

The elevations of the sign and its layout along the road were shown. The signs would measure 0.4m x 0.75m with a height of 0.6m above ground.

Images of the location were shown. The proposal was in accordance with the SPSS2 and AD1 of PPS17 in that it would respect the general characteristics of the area, would not impact amenity and would not prejudice public safety. DFI Roads had no objections.

In summary, officers were content it met policy and recommended the proposal for approval.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Alderman Smith, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council grants consent.

4.9 LA06/2025/0622/A – 4NO. SPONSORSHIP SIGNAGE

(Appendix X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Bangor Central

Committee Interest:

Proposal: 4 no. sponsorship signage

Site Location: Roundabout adjoining A21 Newtownards Road and A2 West Circular Road, Bangor

Recommendation: Grant Consent

The Senior Planner (J Hanna) explained that Item 4.9 was an application for advertising consent on behalf of the Council for 4 No. Sponsorship Signage.

No objections had been received in relation to the application.

The application site was the Newtownards roundabout adjoining the A21 Newtownards Road and A2 West Circular Road. The central portion of the roundabout was landscaped with mid-sized trees and shrubbery, bordered by mown grass. The surrounding area was mixed use containing residential development, a church to the north and businesses to the south of the roundabout. The roundabout could be seen on approach from the West Circular Road when travelling east and west, and the Newtownards Road when travelling north and south.

The elevations of the sign and its layout along the road were shown. The signs would measure 0.4m x 0.75m with a height of 0.6m above ground.

Images of the location were shown. The proposal was in accordance with the SPPS2 and AD1 of PPS17 in that it would respect the general characteristics of the area, would not impact amenity and would not prejudice public safety. DFI Roads had no objections.

In summary, officers were content it met policy and recommended the proposal for approval.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Hennessy, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council grants consent.

4.10 LA06/2025/0614/A – 4NO. SPONSORSHIP SIGNAGE

(Appendix XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Newtownards

Committee Interest:

Proposal: 4 no. sponsorship signage

Site Location: DFI roundabout adjoining Bangor Road, East Street, Zion Place and Donaghadee Road, Newtownards

Recommendation: Grant Consent

The Senior Planner (J Hanna) explained that Item 4.10 was an application for advertising consent on behalf of the Council for 4 No. Sponsorship Signage.

No objections had been received in relation to the application.

The application site was Zion Place roundabout located adjoining Zion Place, Donaghadee Road, Bangor Road and East Street, Newtownards. The roundabout contained three mature trees within the centre of the site, with mowed grass and planting soil. The surrounding area was primarily residential development.

The elevations of the sign and its layout along the road were shown. The signs would measure 0.4m x 0.75m with a height of 0.6m above ground.

Images of the location were shown. The proposal was in accordance with the SPPS2 and AD1 of PPS17 in that it would respect the general characteristics of the area, would not impact amenity and would not prejudice public safety. DFI Roads had no objections. In summary, officers were content it met policy and recommended the proposal for approval.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Council grants consent.

4.11 LA06/2024/0483/F – ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDING REPURPOSING THE DISUSED PADDLING POOL TO CREATE A TIERED AMENITY SPACE; PROVISION OF MODULAR CUBE FLOATING PONTOONS; NEW CONCRETE STEPS TO BEACH, NEW GRANITE PLANTERS WITH TIMBER TOP SEATING, 6NO. NEW FEATURE LIGHTING COLUMNS (5M HIGH), 2NO. NEW EXTERNAL SHOWER UNITS WITH TIMBER SCREEN; A PORTABLE TOILET; AND ALL ASSOCIATED WORKS.

(Appendix XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's report.

DEA: Ards Peninsula

Committee Interest: Council is applicant (implicit from context of scheme)

Proposal: Environmental improvements including repurposing disused paddling pool, tiered amenity space, floating pontoons, steps to beach, seating, lighting, showers, toilet and associated works

Site Location: Millisle Lagoon Park & Garden (approx. 30m NE of 7 Shore Road, Millisle)

Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission

The Senior Planner (J Hanna) outlined the Case Officer's Report, explaining that Item 4.11 was a full application for environmental improvements including repurposing the disused paddling pool to create a tiered amenity space; provision of modular cube floating pontoons; new concrete steps to beach, new granite planters with timber top seating, 6 no. new feature lighting columns (5m high), 2 no. new external shower units with timber screen; a portable toilet; and all associated works. The application was before Committee as the Council was the applicant.

No objections had been received in relation to the application and statutory consultees were content. Officers recommended approval of the application.

The site was located on land to the east of Main Street in Millisle and directly adjacent to Shore Road. As existing, it was an integral feature of a larger seaside recreational area which included an existing promenade, jetty and slipway alongside a saltwater lagoon and enclosed by a seawall to the north and east to provide a sheltered body of water which was used seasonally for water sports such as swimming and paddle boarding.

The site lay outside of the settlement limit of Millisle as defined by the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 with part of the site falling within a Local Landscape Policy Area designation.

An aerial view of the site was shown for context. The lagoon itself was bounded by the seawall with the beach to the west. The application site largely related to the disused paddling pool area to the south. The site sat within the North Channel SAC and was adjacent to the Outer Ards Ramsar, SPA and ASSI sites. A shadow HRA was provided and SES had no reason to disagree with its findings.

The site was shown as viewed from Shore Road and the existing car park.

The images illustrated the areas pertaining to the application site.

Members were shown the existing site layout.

The proposed site layout was shown. As noted, the development comprised several elements including the filling in of the paddling pool area to create the amenity area with seating as well as the installation of planters with seating and pontoons.

The design of the seating to be installed in the paddling pool area was shown. The lighting and pontoon details were demonstrated.

The timber screening and shower facility were indicated.

The planter and seating details were shown. Overall, it was considered that the various elements would result in a high quality built environment and would improve the visual amenity of the existing facility.

Longer distance views of the site were indicated. It was considered that there would not be an adverse visual impact of the proposal. As the proposal was also to complement an existing use on site and coupled with the separation distances from neighbouring properties, there was not considered to be an adverse impact on amenity.

In terms of policy, the proposal fully accorded with the provisions set out under PPS8 relating to open space, PPS16 relating to Tourism and PPS21. There was an existing car park to the south of the site which would adequately service the development.

In conclusion, Officers were content that the proposal would not have a significant adverse effect and met the relevant policy requirements and, on this basis, recommended the application for approval.

The Chair invited questions to the Officer and Councillor Hennessy queried the timeframe for the project.

The Director of Place and Prosperity advised that the project had been ongoing over three years and that the Council had closely collaborated with the community association throughout that time. The Council had allocated money to the Regeneration team to develop projects to an 'oven ready' stage and once planning approval was granted the Council would focus on securing funding. He clarified that there was no funding in place to begin the work, but if approved tonight the next step would be to seek funding.

Councillor Morgan proposed, seconded by Alderman McAlpine, that the recommendation be adopted and that Council grants planning permission.

Councillor Morgan praised what would be substantial improvement and looked forward to the project completing. Alderman McAlpine shared that view and hoped that funding could be secured as soon as possible.

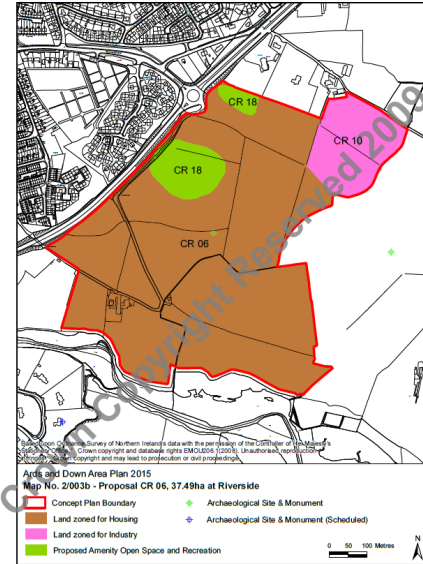
RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Alderman McAlpine, that the recommendation be adopted and that Council grants planning permission.

5. SPD/2024/0076/F - DFI CONSULTATION ON APPLICATION TO REMOVE CONDITION 10 OF X/2009/0858/O
(Appendix XIII – XIV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Planning permission was granted on 22 December 2016 for the overall Enler Village site under X/2009/0858/O under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 as a regionally significant development. All applications for reserved matters had since been dealt with by DFI Strategic Planning.

The site was zoned for Housing (ref CR 06) and Employment (ref CR 10) within the Ards and Down Plan 2015.

The Council had been consulted by DFI Strategic Planning Group in relation to a planning application submitted to it under reference SPD/2024/0076/F. The application was submitted to DFI Strategic Planning on 05 July 2024; however, the Council was consulted on 07 May 2025.



Proposal

Permission to develop land without compliance with condition 10 (which restricted the occupation of no more than 200 dwellings until a minimum of 2000sqm of industrial floorspace was completed and required the construction of the remainder of the Business Park within 3 years of the disposal of Phase 2) previously attached to X/2009/0858/O (which granted permission for Mixed use development involving residential, retail, nursing home, sheltered accommodation, creche, business park and extension to salt marsh). The proposal sought to permit the ongoing delivery of the residential development without the requirement to construct the remainder of the Business Park.

Outline Planning Permission

The Outline planning permission was for a proposed mixed use development involving residential (up to 900 units), retail (up to 464sqm), a nursing home (up to 37000sqm), sheltered accommodation (up to 3700sqm), a crèche (up to 210sqm), and business park made up of A1 (100sqm), B1 (up to 7000sqm), B2 (up to 5082sqm) and B4 (up to 2000sqm) use classes and extension to the existing salt marsh on lands south east of the Comber by pass.

[Class A1: Shops

Class B1: Business Use

as an office other than a use within Class A2 (Financial, professional and other services);

as a call centre; or

for research and development which can be carried out without detriment to amenity by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, soot, ash, dust or grit.

Class B2: Light Industrial - Use for any industrial process which can be carried out without detriment to amenity by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, soot,

ash, dust or grit.

Class B4: Storage or distribution - Use for storage or as a distribution centre.]

Condition 10 of the Outline planning permission stated:

“No more than 200 residential units hereby approved shall be occupied until no less than 2000sqm of the Class B1 (B) and/or Class B1 (c) and/or Class B2 and or Class B4 uses hereby approved are completed to a stage where they are capable of occupation and the access, servicing and car parking for these units shall be completed prior to any of the remaining uses becoming operational. Construction of the remainder of the Business Park shall commence no later than 3 years following the freehold or leasehold disposal of all of the second phases required by this condition.”

Reason: To ensure the orderly and consistent development of the site.

Proposed Removal of Condition 10 of Outline Planning Permission

The reasoning for the proposed removal of Condition 10 as provided in the statements supplied by TSA Planning and McKibben Commercial (attached at Items 5a & 5b) was that the application site was currently on the market and had been actively marketed by both Osborne King and McKibben Commercial since July 2017 following the grant of Outline planning permission. While there had been several expressions of interests in respect of the site during this period, no official offers had been forthcoming due to the restrictive nature of the Use Class approved and the demand for such business at this location.

Given the situation, the requirement to construct a second commercial unit controlled by the occupation of housing numbers without having regard to the market demand for need of such business uses at this location was considered by the applicant to be unreasonable and unnecessary. The conditions linked the construction of the Business Units with the construction and occupation of the housing units rather than the market demand for business units.

Furthermore, as set out by the submission, it was asserted that, as demonstrated by the current marketing of ‘Business Unit 1’, the developers had speculatively constructed the current business unit without any market demand, which was considered to be unsustainable given the building may lie vacant for an indeterminate time.

The conclusion of the McKibben Report summaries the complexities with the requirements of Condition 10 imposed on X/2009/0858/O, which stated on a simple level that the cost of developing Business Unit 2, when relative to no interest in Business Unit 1 having been received, would be a significant barrier for any developer returns. In short, the bringing forward of Business Unit 2 would not be considered commercially viable due to the lack of demand coupled with the low rental/capital return.

Council Local Development Plan – draft Plan Strategy

Council published its draft Plan Strategy in Autumn 2025 which included a Spatial Growth Strategy, to provide a strategic framework for promoting sustainable housing and economic growth throughout the Borough.

Policy SGS 3: Strategic Allocation of Economic and Industrial Development Land highlighted the requirement to ‘support and promote zoned employment sites to provide opportunities for a range of economic development needs and businesses, including business startups and Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs).’

The Ards and Down Plan zoned 90.94 hectares of land for employment/industrial purposes in the settlements of Newtownards (75.63ha), Comber (5.98ha) and Donaghadee (9.33ha). In the legacy North Down borough, Draft BMAP zoned 112.2ha of land, all within Bangor. This amounted to a total of 203.23ha of zoned employment lands in Ards and North Down Borough.

In 2019, the Council commissioned an Employment Land Review Report (ELRR) to provide an assessment of the current employment land in the Borough and to consider how future needs for new and/or additional employment land could be delivered through the LDP process. This found that 62.28ha of zoned employment land remained undeveloped within the Borough.

The Council’s ambitious growth aspirations were set out in the Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy and outlined a ‘strategy success’ scenario of 9375 jobs in the Borough by 2030. The ELRR calculated that this equated to a land requirement of 20.5ha. The ELRR concluded that there was adequate existing undeveloped zoned land available to accommodate both future employment growth up to 2030, and also to the end of the Plan period (2032), given the significant oversupply. The oversupply could be justified as it would allow for unexpected growth over the Plan period, ensured flexibility of choice, and provided a flexibility allowance for the non-delivery of certain sites due to unforeseen circumstances (such as Kiltonga).

Specifically, in relation to the settlement of Comber, the ELRR calculations excluded the 4.66ha CR10 zoning in Comber as, at the time of writing, approval for a business park had been granted. The ELRR did, however, acknowledge that in 2019 1.4ha of land at Riverside Business Park (within Enler Village development) was on the market with Osborne King.

Economic Scoping Study for Ards and North Down September 2025

Members should be aware of Item 19 presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee of September 2025, which detailed results of an Economic Scoping Study on the future

economic development sectors within the Borough. The report assessed and set out, inter alia:

- how the Council had performed against the quantitative economic targets as set within the Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy
- an overview of the current economic strengths and weaknesses of the Borough
- findings of a detailed consultation exercise which gathered the views of key stakeholders in the business community in the Borough, and
- key recommendations.

It was found that the demand for flexible office space was expected to continue to rise, and that the lack of flexible working accommodation in the Borough was a likely impediment to the under performance to date of the Borough in terms of Productivity growth.

Through work on the Local Economic Partnership, it was also acknowledged that there was demand for additional business accommodation within the Borough, with both Business Centres at full capacity.

Consideration

The Committee was requested to determine whether, further to being consulted by DFI, that it was content for removal of Condition 10, insofar as it would permit the developer to construct further housing on the site, in line with the area plan zoning, ahead of construction of the second Business Unit as approved and required by the parent condition.

It should be acknowledged that were DFI to refuse the application, the developer had the right of appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission.

The matter of financial viability in respect of whether there was current market demand for either the existing unit or the other approved unit, should not be a matter for planning to be concerned with. Were Condition 10 removed, there would remain no requirement for the current owner/developer of the site to construct Business Unit 2, rather it would be down to a future owner/operator to determine if construction were palatable in the market conditions at some future point.

The apparent tension between the reports of attempted marketing of Business Unit 1, and the finding of the report referenced above as presented to Place and Prosperity Committee, raised some concern and merited further consideration.

Any decisions about future economic development ought to be taken through the local development plan process.

It should be noted that both existing planning policy and the draft economic development policies in the draft Plan Strategy operated a presumption against the loss of zoned economic development land.

Whilst this proposal did not necessarily result in the loss of zoned economic development land, its future development had to be monitored closely, cognisant that any change of use from the approved economic development use of Business Unit 1 would require planning permission, as would any proposal to development the site of proposed Business Unit 2 to a different use in the future.

Conclusion

As detailed within this report and the submissions to the application, removal of condition 10 did not prevent the Business Unit 1 (as built) from being occupied (further to being fitted out appropriately in relation to occupier needs), and Business Unit 2 from being constructed at some point in future. Rather, it allowed the developer to continue with the other elements of the approval as detailed in the supporting information, specifically delivery of housing units for the Borough, in line with the Housing Zoning. It was recommended that the Council should consider carefully the consultation request in light of this report and attachments, and determine the approach to be taken by officers in responding to DFI accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of the Report and attachments, and considers the appropriate response for officers to issue to DFI SPD.

The Head of Planning and Building Control outlined the report advising that the consultation concerned the removal of Condition 10 – the housing development threshold before related business buildings could be completed. She explained that:

- Business Unit 1 had had been built to shell stage but not fitted out.
- Business Unit 2 had planning approval but was not yet constructed.
- Supporting statements showed attempts had been made to market the building.
- The Officer was concerned about losing the employment zoning but there was no desire to hold up the development of much needed housing.

The Officer recommended any response that indicated 'no objection' should be caveated that Council did not wish Unit 1 to be repurposed by way of a planning application and that the employment zoning be protected. The developer may not choose to construct Unit 2, but planning approval remained in perpetuity, allowing it to be completed in the future, potentially by another developer, depending on market and financial conditions.

Councillor Morgan sought clarification on the type of use restrictions and wondered if there was an alternative 'use class' that could be agreed by way of a compromise to help market the site.

The Head of Planning and Building Control advised that this was an approval granted by the then Minister – an old Article 31 case – prior to the transfer of powers. The approvals included classes B1 (business office), B2 (light industrial) and B4 (storage or distribution). These classes were not overly restrictive and offered a wide range of permitted uses.

Alderman Smith agreed that the uses covered a broad spectrum and referred to the available industrial land with 20 hectares required to meet the 2030 employment targets outlined in the report. Whilst supportive of housing development, he was reluctant to lose industrial capacity and asked if there was any way of binding the developer to build the second business unit and avoid its loss.

The Officer clarified that planning approval for Business Unit 2 existed in perpetuity and could be built at any time by any developer for the public or private sector.

She added that the Council could not require the developer to build the second business unit under the current application; only the removal of the housing threshold was under consideration.

Any repurposing would require a new planning application where the Council could object if the employment zoning was threatened. The Officer reassured Members that there would be opportunity for the development of Business Unit 2 once market conditions were more favourable.

Alderman Smith asked if it was common practice for developers to construct only to shell standard due to lack of commercial interest. The Officer advised that it was not unusual due to the high upfront costs / lack of viable return and uncertain demand from potential tenants. The end user demand was crucial, and units were generally finished to full specification once a tenant was secured.

The Director of Place and Prosperity reported that he and Alderman McDowell had recently visited the site to meet with the agent. The building was basic inside and required significant investment and realistically an anchor tenant plus other occupants would be required to make the fit-out financially viable. He said the building was attractive from the outside and had good potential if someone was able to undertake the work.

Councillor McClean referred to the broader Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) concerns about the lack of available commercial and industrial space and recognised that this could have a significant impact on those strategic aims. He asked for the Director's view on maintaining the stipulations versus relaxing them in light of local

need. He wondered how it would affect the Council's economic development goals of preventing the loss of business from the Borough.

The Director advised that purchasing and delivering the building to specification would go beyond the financial resources and remit of the LEP. It could offer grants to assist with the development but from an economic development perspective, it would prefer the developer to continue marketing the unit due to the clear demand for this type of facility. He referred to further support that the LEP could consider and highlighted his intent to consult with the agent to improve marketing and potential partnership opportunities.

The Head of Planning and Building Control reminded the Committee that the consultation was solely about removing the condition on timing for building out the second business unit. Business Unit 1 remained and could be completed for its approved use unless a change of use application was made in future. Approval for Business Unit 2 still existed and could be built in future.

She sought guidance on whether the Committee wanted to strongly object to the removal of the condition or state no objection with the caveat of resisting future repurposing for non-employment use.

The Chair added that removing the condition would only permit further housing development which was currently restricted.

Councillor Morgan noted that a developer's profits were higher for housing development than commercial uses and there was a risk of removing the incentive for commercial development if the condition was removed. She was concerned that permitting further housing development would weaken the Council's leverage to secure business and industrial units.

Councillor Morgan was not opposed to more housing being developed but wondered if there could be a compromise as she was wary about the Council losing its negotiating position. She suggested that the Council response could express strong concern about removing the condition and encourage DFI to consider alternatives or compromises.

The Head of Planning and Building Control advised that the Council could express strong concern however the decision was the Department's and the developer could still appeal it if refused.

Alderman Smith recognised the difficulty and was supportive of the response suggested by the Head of Planning and Building Control with a 'no objection' caveated approach. While he did not want to lose industrial units, he noted the housing development's success – 200 additional houses were helping to meet significant local need, and he did not want the Council to obstruct that.

The Head of Planning and Building Control clarified, in response to a query from Alderman Graham, that the term repurposing, in this context, would mean a future change of use application for the business units to another use.

Alderman Graham was concerned about relying on planning conditions if market demand was not there. He felt less inclined to add caveats and felt that perhaps the market no longer reflected what was previously agreed. He was supportive of further housing and did not want to block that.

Alderman McAlpine raised concerns about the potential loss of industrial units and pointed to a shortage of available commercial land throughout the Ards region, and the loss of more facilities would have a negative impact in terms of economy and job growth. She referred to the importance of housing but felt it was also important to create local jobs for residents of new housing. She pointed to a decline of business infrastructure with mention of Sketrick House in Newtownards along with Portaferry.

The Head of Planning and Building Control provided a final clarification on the consultation and what was being asked from the Council.

Alderman Smith proposed, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the Council responds to DfI with no negative comment apart from the caveat suggested by the Head of Planning and Building Control with regard to Unit 1.

Councillor McClean added his support, explaining that this was not about losing commercial space but about balancing much needed housing with economic and business goals.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the Council responds to DfI with no negative comment apart from the caveat suggested by the Head of Planning and Building Control with regard to Unit 1.

6. PLANNING APPEALS UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailed as follows:-

Appeal Decisions

1. There had been no appeal decisions published since the date of the last report.

New Appeals

2. The following appeal was lodged on 25 April 2026

PAC Ref	2026/E0006
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Council Ref	LA06/2022/0179/CA
Appellant	Samual Townsley
Subject of Appeal	Appeal against Enforcement Notice Alleged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three No unauthorised buildings with unauthorised decking; • Unauthorised tourism use, known as Cuan Mor Lodges, including reception area and 5 No buildings providing tourism accommodation
Location	Land at 86 Ballydrain Road, Comber

3. The following appeal was lodged on 24 April 2026

PAC Ref	2026/A0009
Council Ref	LA06/2023/1863/F
Appellant	Cornerstone Hive 2
Subject of Appeal	Refusal of planning permission for: 17.5m telecommunications column, with 6No. antennae, 3No. radio units and 2No. radio dishes. Proposal includes the provision of 2No. equipment cabinets
Location	16m East of 26 Church Road, Holywood

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

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report

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

7. NIAO REPORT - STRATEGIC REVIEW ON THE PLANNING APPEALS COMMISSION (Appendix XV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the Northern Ireland Audit Office had carried out a Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) and the findings were contained within the attached report.

Dorinnia Carville's report on 'A Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals Commission' examined PAC delivery over recent years and the impact this had had on planning outcomes.

It set out the important role of the PAC, which was responsible for hearing and deciding on planning appeals, conducting public inquiries and hearings, and reporting on some of the most complex and economically significant development proposals.

The report noted delays across all PAC workstreams, particularly in relation to regionally significant applications referred to the PAC for public local inquiry or hearing (known as Hear and Report) and which were typically the most complex and significant developments in Northern Ireland. As of August 2025, there were 20 live major cases of which almost half had been referred to PAC more than two years earlier.

The report also identified substantial weaknesses in governance and accountability arrangements. The PAC had no statutory or formal targets for processing times and had no direct accountability for its performance to the Assembly given its status as a tribunal non-departmental public body. This differed from other jurisdictions, where planning bodies operate within clear accountability frameworks.

The report concluded that, while the PAC's operational independence of decision making must be respected, it was essential that this was balanced with the introduction of specific and measurable time-bound key performance indicators and improved oversight and accountability arrangements.

In addition, the review found that strained relationships and limited effective engagement with other parts of the planning system, including the Department for Infrastructure and local councils, had contributed to avoidable delays.

The Report published 21 May 2026 acknowledged some recent improvements in the speed of PAC decision-making on planning appeals, while also highlighting the impact that resourcing challenges had had on delivery. The PAC had experienced significant staff turnover in recent years, including the loss of experienced commissioners alongside a high number of new appointments. This, it advised, had affected its capacity to progress more complex Hear and Report cases. The report also identified limitations in current cost-recovery arrangements and recommended a review of the current appeal fees and charging regime.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report and the attached NIAO report.

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

8. HALF YEARLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025/2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council had in place a Performance Management Policy and

Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to the 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 16 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 were 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 H2 (cumulative for the year) was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to 4 outcomes, via determination of Building Control and Planning applications, alongside other Service-related work, as follows:

Outcome 1

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

Outcome 2

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

Outcome 3

A thriving and sustainable economy

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements

Draft Plan Strategy had been published in September 2025 for public consultation Continued work had taken place at Head of Service level across councils with DFI Planning in respect of NI Planning Improvement Programme.

Key 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 key issues and agree any actions required as detailed below:
 4no. applications in the major category of development had been determined during the 2025/2026 year as follows:

- LA06/2021/1477/f – Royal Hotel & Windsor Bar – required ongoing liaison between developer and NIW, and execution of legal agreement
- LA06/2023/2314/F – Park and Ride at former Ards Leisure Centre site – held up by discussion with Council over relocation of playpark and required execution of legal agreement.
- LA06/2024/0623/F – Relocation of Lidl store from Bloomfield Road to Skippingstone Road with extinguishment of existing use – required independent consultancy input on retailing, execution of a legal agreement, and was on Committee schedule but removed due to submission of late objections
- LA06/2019/0104/F – Tullynagardy Avenue – 62no. dwellings – significant amendments made to proposal since submission

It was anticipated that introduction of statutory Validation Checklist in January 2026 would ensure frontloading planning applications to assist in reduction in processing times (both Majors and Locals), subject to resourcing within statutory consultee departments, and assessment of all material planning considerations including representations.

Local government was currently working with central government in respect of drafting of a Protocol to discourage practice of submission of amendments late in process, submission of additional information later in process, or late objections.

Next Steps

Staffing resource within Planning continued to present a major concern in respect of processing of planning applications, as did resourcing and capability within central government departments, and the Shared Environmental Service, in respect of continued and increased environmental governance and scrutiny. These issues continued to be kept under review and monitored regularly.

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Major applications – 30 weeks	4 applications all with significant issues during processing, including NIW infrastructure issues to be	Majors Unit set up during year – however affected by staff movement/absence Initial review of validation at submission date and	SUM over Development Management	End of H1 2026

	resolved and submission of further objections	regular grouping to ensure on track		
Local application – 15 weeks	Staff absences (including secondment with difficulty in backfilling) and issues with statutory consultees (including NIEA, and NIW infrastructure restrictions)	NIEA publication of Standing Advice to avoid need for consultation, particularly on single houses in countryside; Continued management of officer caseload and oversight through regular grouping	SUM over Development Management	End of H1 2026
Enforcement	Continued vacancy over year, recently filled, and backlog from C-19 where only Priority 1 cases progressed	Vacancy now addressed; Only one and final warning letter being issued to bring cases to conclusion ASAP	SUM over Enforcement	End of H1 2026

Summary

All officers within the Service continued to carry out their duties against statutory performance indicators accordingly, whilst managing parallel, non-fee attracting work to the best of their ability, alongside provision of professional advice to Directorate colleagues and cross-Council as far as practicable.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9pm.

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 10 June 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Cathcart

Aldermen:	Adair	McAlpine (Zoom)
	Armstrong-Cotter	McRandal
	Cummings	

Councillors:	Boyle (Zoom)	Edmund
	Blaney (Zoom)	Kendall (Zoom)
	Brady	Newman
	Douglas	Wray

Officers in Attendance: Director of Environmental Services (G Bannister), Head of Estates (P Caldwell), Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager (D Pearson), Waste Resource and Contracts Manager (J Frazer), Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager (J Bettes) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau).

CHAIRS REMARKS

The incoming Chair of the Environment Committee, Councillor Cathcart, opened the meeting by congratulating the outgoing Chair, Councillor Kendall, on her service and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to take on the role having been a long standing member of this Committee. He also welcomed the Waste Resources and Contracts Manager to her first meeting.

Councillor Cathcart then addressed the recent violent incident in Belfast on Monday evening and described it as shocking. He expressed gratitude that demonstrations within the Borough had remained peaceful and encouraged that sense of calm to continue, noting that violence would only undermine the sentiments that had been expressed in the days following the attack. He concluded by extending his thoughts to the victim and to those who had subsequently suffered as a result of related criminal behaviour.

1. APOLOGIES

The Chair sought apologies and those were noted from Councillors Ashe and Harbinson.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest and none were given.

NOTED.

3. FROM WASTE TO WORTH – NORTHERN IRELAND WASTE PREVENTION PROGRAMME CONSULTATION – DRAFT RESPONSE

(Appendices I – III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) had launched a public consultation to seek views on its draft Waste Prevention Programme. The draft Waste Prevention Programme followed on from the 2019 ‘Stopping Waste in its Tracks’ programme.

Waste prevention was defined in the draft Programme as ‘stopping waste from being created in the first place’. Regulation 17 of the revised Waste Framework Directive 2011 introduced a legal duty to apply the Waste Hierarchy.



Figure 1: The Waste Hierarchy

Waste prevention was at the top of the Waste Hierarchy because prevention avoided the environmental impacts, costs, and resources used that came with collecting, processing, or disposing of packaging and products.

A public consultation opened on 20 April 2026 and would close on 10 July 2026.

Measures proposed in the draft Programme included incentives to design out waste, measures to reduce consumption, and nudges to change behaviours through education and awareness raising.

Waste Prevention Programme

The draft Programme's 7 objectives were:

1. Reduce Resource Use - Encourage efficient use of materials in manufacturing, packaging, and service delivery.
2. Promote Reuse and Repair - Support systems and networks that extend the life of products (e.g. reuse centres, repair cafés).
3. Influence Consumer Behaviour - Raise awareness and educate the public on sustainable choices and waste reduction.
4. Support Circular Economy Principles - Encourage product design that enables reuse, repair, remanufacturing, recycling, and minimal waste.
5. Engage Businesses and Public Sector - Promote waste audits, sustainable procurement, and prevention strategies in organisations.
6. Monitor and Report Progress - Track waste generation trends and evaluate the effectiveness of prevention measures.
7. Reduce Environmental Impact - Lower greenhouse gas emissions and pollution associated with waste production and disposal.

The draft programme proposed 21 actions. A draft response had been prepared and was attached as an appendix. The draft response text was italicised.

Key response points were:

- This Council supports the publication of the draft Waste Prevention Programme and many of the proposed actions.
- Council welcomes the shift of responsibility to producers, and the proposal to develop eco-labelling to support consumers in making more sustainable choices.
- Council welcomes support for increased reuse, repair, and the circular economy through third sector projects and engagement with schools.
- Call for more of the Carrier Bag Levy revenues to be targeted to waste prevention and recycling projects and campaigns.
- Strong support for measures which reduce avoidable food waste and tackle unnecessary plastics.
- Notes that some proposed actions relate to recycling or tackling litter and are unlikely to have an impact on waste production.
- Some actions appear to duplicate the work of existing programmes and campaigns.

Next Steps

An agreed Ards and North Down Borough Council response to the consultation must be submitted through the Department's Citizen Space online consultation website by 10 July 2026.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the draft consultation response, attached at Appendix 1.

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

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Alderman McRandal began by offering his congratulations to the new Chair of the Committee and raised a question relating to the Draft Response, specifically about the recommendation referring to the proposed Deposit Return Scheme and why that would not reduce waste at the point of production. The Waste Resource and Contracts Manager addressed the Alderman's point in that such measures proposed could reduce litter and increase recycling but clarified that they would not reduce overall waste being produced in the first instance which was what the consultation was about. The Alderman thanked officers for the work that had gone into preparing the draft response.

Councillor Kendall welcomed Councillor Cathcart to the role of Chair and wished him well for the year ahead. She welcomed the Draft Response, considering it well thought out. She noted that while the Council, residents and businesses were working hard to prevent waste, the programmes proposed were, in her view, downstream interventions rather than measures that would reduce waste and pollution at source. She welcomed ongoing collaborative work and expressed hope that greater responsibility would be placed on producers, particularly in relation to microplastics and litter, which had significant health and financial impacts on residents and consumers. She felt the Council had been thoughtfully critical in its response but expressed disappointment that the Department's proposals had not gone further.

Councillor Newman asked how the Council could support groups to establish repair cafés. The Waste Resource and Contracts Manager explained that the recycling team had been working to expand such programmes and referred to a bicycle repair peddler who had been invited by the Council to provide free repairs as part of efforts to promote sustainability and prevent waste. It was noted that plans were in place to extend that initiative.

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

4. PROPERTY MAINTENANCE STRATEGY 2026-2036 (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Council's new Corporate Plan set a clear direction for delivering high-quality, sustainable and resilient services that met the needs of residents, businesses and visitors. The Property Maintenance Strategy 2026–2036 had been developed to support those priorities by ensuring that the Council's estate, comprising almost 200 diverse assets across the Borough, was managed in a proactive, efficient and financially responsible manner.

The 2016 Property Maintenance Strategy identified the need for a fundamental shift away from the predominantly reactive maintenance practices operated by the legacy Councils. At that time, approximately 75% of maintenance expenditure was reactive, creating financial uncertainty, increased downtime and reduced service quality. Over the past decade, the Council had successfully transitioned to a planned and preventative maintenance model, with 78% of expenditure now directed to planned works. That shift had materially improved the condition, reliability and sustainability

of the estate and established strong foundations for the next phase of strategic development.

The new strategy built upon that progress and aligned maintenance activity with wider Council objectives, including environmental sustainability, statutory compliance, good governance and continuous improvement. It reflected emerging legislative requirements; most notably the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and the need to further enhance the resilience, energy performance and long-term value of the Council's property portfolio.

Key Issues

1. Modernising and Strengthening Maintenance Practices

Significant progress had been made in embedding planned preventative maintenance across the estate. The strategy outlined the continued use of cyclical condition surveys, structured refurbishment planning, statutory compliance regimes, and the integration of AssetHQ to monitor performance and prioritise works.

2. Growing Sustainability and Net-Zero Obligations

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 required a 48% reduction in emissions by 2030 and net-zero by 2050. Meeting those targets would necessitate a substantial and sustained programme of energy-saving initiatives, integration of low-carbon technologies, and enhanced cross-departmental working. The improved condition of the estate now enabled increased investment in Energy Saving Initiatives (ESIs) as reactive pressures continued to fall.

3. Long-Term Financial Planning

The current annual maintenance budget of approximately £3.4 million reflected the Council's commitment to proactive asset management. However, the ongoing replacement of mechanical and electrical assets, refurbishment of play areas, enhancements to public-realm assets, and harbour and car-park works would require careful long-term financial planning and prioritisation. The strategy clearly set out the expected investment levels required over the next decade, including a £5 million rolling programme for M&E replacements and growing allocations for energy-efficiency work.

4. Ensuring Compliance and Governance

Statutory obligations relating to electrical safety, fire safety, lifting equipment, legionella and other regulated systems continued to expand. The strategy strengthened governance arrangements and outlined improved oversight of third-party operated buildings, alongside greater technical involvement in new capital projects to ensure long-term affordability and maintainability.

5. Supporting Service Delivery and Community Outcomes

Well-maintained assets were essential for providing safe, reliable and fit-for-purpose facilities. The strategy included targeted approaches to high-risk and high-use asset groups such as play parks, public conveniences, leisure centres, administrative buildings and public-realm spaces.

Next Steps

The following actions would support implementation of the strategy:

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- Embed the new 10-year maintenance and refurbishment planning cycle, ensuring surveys, reporting and budget-setting processes were synchronised and transparent.
- Progressively scale investment in energy-saving measures, in line with statutory climate obligations and the long-term transition to a low-carbon estate.
- Deliver annual condition-survey programmes, ensuring that each building was surveyed on a three-year cycle, enabling data-driven prioritisation of works.
- Apply the agreed thresholds for refurbishment and replacement, ensuring investment was aligned with asset condition, statutory compliance and long-term strategic value.
- Strengthen cross-departmental collaboration, particularly around future capital planning, sustainability programmes and service transformation initiatives.
- Maintain a strong focus on public-realm and harbour assets, ensuring high-profile areas continued to meet public expectations and support the Borough's attractiveness.
- Monitor performance and report progress, with flexibility to adapt the strategy in response to budgetary, legislative or organisational changes.

Summary

The Property Maintenance Strategy 2026–2036 represented a major step forward in the strategic management of the Council's estate. It built on a decade of transformation that successfully shifted the organisation from reactive to planned maintenance, significantly improved the condition and reliability of its buildings and assets, and placed the Council on a stronger footing to meet future challenges.

The strategy responded directly to the priorities of the new Corporate Plan and acknowledged the scale of the Council's obligations under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. It set out clear priorities for planned maintenance, refurbishment, statutory compliance, sustainability and long-term financial stewardship.

By adopting a structured, data-driven and proactive approach, the Council would ensure that its estate remained safe, compliant, resilient and aligned with community needs. The strategy provided a clear framework for future investment, supported long-term budget predictability and underpinned the Council's broader ambition to deliver sustainable and high-quality services across the Borough.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the implementation of the attached Property Maintenance Strategy 2026-2036.

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

Alderman Adair praised the Head of Estates for a thorough report, stressing the importance of maintaining Council assets. He welcomed the new scoring approach for playparks and community centres, calling it a strong investment. He asked when scoring plans would reach Committee and was advised they were underway and would be presented in the Autumn before rates setting. He closed by thanking the team.

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Councillor Wray congratulated the new Chair and seconded the recommendation, highlighting the achievement of moving from reactive to planned maintenance. He supported the seven actions and the renewed focus on the public realm. While pleased with maintenance of playparks and community halls, he said a broader strategy for public realm assets, including car parks, would be needed to support non-domestic rate growth.

Councillor Kendall sought more detail on the “social adjustment” element referenced in the report. The Head of Estates explained it allowed for score adjustments in closed or poorly used assets, but noted most Council assets were well used, which she found reassuring. She asked about third-party contractors and technical governance, and was told compliance would be built into operating agreements. She also queried decisions on refurbishment versus replacement and was advised that assets would be replaced when refurbishment exceeded 85% of rebuild cost.

Alderman McAlpine welcome work on public realm assets but asked when updates for the years after 2022/23 would be provided. The officer said the table simply illustrated the cyclical programme and the commitment to maximise available funding. The years heading could be read as years 1 to 5.

The Chair said he would like more detail on the schemes delivered but overall viewed the report as positive.

Councillor Brady congratulated the new Chair and welcomed the Council’s proactive approach, thanking the Estates team. He asked for clarification on compliance maintenance, and the Head of Estates explained it covered the legal requirements and routine tasks such as boiler servicing. When asked about climate-related building hardening, the officer confirmed climate resilience was referred to in the report as part of the cyclical surveys.

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

5. OFF STREET PARKING ACTIVITY

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Members would be aware that the Council had a vast car park estate, currently operating 22 pay and display car parks in Bangor, Holywood and Newtownards, and managing further car parks across the Borough.

The report aimed to update Members on expenditure, income and PCNs generated at each of the relevant car parks in the period 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026. It would also provide Members with an update following some associated decisions related to the approval of a new car park order made at the February 2026 Council meeting, and general off-street parking information.

Key Issues

Off Street Parking Activity 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026.

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Table 1: Income from Ticket Sales

	1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026	Previous year 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025
Income from ticket sales	£449,086	£450,854

Table 2: PCN's Issued

	1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026	Previous year 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026
Total	2090	2587

Officers continued to monitor compliance with Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2024 and work with our enforcement partner to ensure compliance across the car park estate, introducing enforcement in additional car parks. The next car parks to progress to enforcement would be Spafield, Holywood and Newtownards Road/ Church Street, Bangor.

Table 3: Expenditure

	1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026
Enforcement Contract	£77,179.35
Maintenance	£187,140.15
Grounds Maintenance	£2147.63
Signage	-
Total	£266,467.13

Update from 4 February 2026 meeting

At its meeting on 4 February 2026, the Environment Committee agreed the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025 subject to additional decisions which included the following:

- That a parking app which set a time limit on parking (rather than stop/start) was introduced as soon as possible.
- That the Chambers of Commerce and city/town advisory groups were consulted on their views on the introduction of 2 hour waiting restrictions (instead of one hour) for Department for Infrastructure managed on-street parking spaces, to inform the Committee before the Council lobbied the Department on any potential changes.

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Officers were continuing to liaise with DfI Transport Legislation Branch through the Regional Off Street Parking Group to agree a date for the revocation of the Off-Street Parking Order 2000 and implementation of Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2025, and a further update would be brought to the Council as soon as possible.

Car Parking App Update

Officers liaised with the Council's parking app provider RingGo and initiated a change from their "Start/Stop" model to their "Buy Time" model effective from 1 May 2026.

That meant that users now choose how long they wished to stay on arrival and pay up front for their parking in the same way as they did at the pay and display terminal.

A communications strategy to ensure app users were aware of the change was implemented, including posts on the Council's social media channels, signage in all 22 charged car parks and an updated webpage with a user video.

The model continued to provide flexibility by allowing users to extend their parking period without having to return to the car park which was assisted by a timer and removed the need to remember to stop your session on return to your vehicle; ensuring that users were not overpaying for their parking session.

Data from the first two weeks of 'Buy-Time' showed an increased uptake in app usage and an average saving per transaction for app users.

Consultation on 2 Hour waiting Restriction for on street parking.

Officers met with Ards and North Down Business Forum, who represented the five Chambers of Commerce of Bangor, Newtownards, Holywood, Comber, and Donaghadee, and with each of the Local Action Groups to discuss a possibility of lobbying the Department for Infrastructure and ask it to amend the current legislation which permitted up to 1 hour on-street parking, to allow instead up to 2 hours on-street parking across the Borough.

The Newtownards Local Action Group was in support of the Council lobbying the Department for Infrastructure to amend the current legislation which permitted 1 hour on-street parking to allow 2 hours on-street parking.

The Local Action Group also requested that Council lobby the Department to resolve an anomaly in the legislation regarding the return within 1 hour clause which was leading to some vehicles parking all day, whereby the 'no return' was interpreted as no return to the exact same parking spot.

Donaghadee Local Action Group was in support of Council lobbying the Department for Infrastructure to amend the current legislation which permitted 1 hour on-street parking to allow 2 hours on-street parking.

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The Local Action Group also requested that Council lobby the Department to introduce a 2 hour on-street parking restriction on part of Shore Street and The Parade and echoed the request regarding the anomaly in the legislation regarding the return within 1 hour clause.

Comber Local Action Group highlighted the restricted on-street parking was more limited within Comber and that was not something they had previously considered. Following discussion and further consultation with the Chamber, they agreed to support the Council lobbying the Department for Infrastructure to trial extending 1 hour on-street parking to 2 hours on-street parking, with the exception of the spaces in Castle Street and Mill Street.

Holywood Local Action Group discussed the matter and could see the benefits to both 1 hour and 2 hour on-street parking restrictions. It was noted that 1 hour assisted turnover in Holywood town centre, and the town centre car parks were easily accessible for longer stays. The voluntary sector noted that a 2 hour on-street period would be beneficial for clients who attended counselling sessions, and discussion took place around the possibility of a trial period. Further consultation with the Chamber showed support for the extension but also concerns regarding extending the length of stay in the already limited number of available spaces.

The Local Action Group also requested that the Council highlight to the Department its support for a Residents' On-Street Parking Permit Scheme in Holywood, and further lobby the Department to address on-pavement obstructions outside commercial premises, which extended beyond the current pavement café licensing scheme.

Bangor Local Action Group was in support of the Council lobbying the Department for Infrastructure to amend the current legislation which permitted 1 hour on-street parking to allow 2 hours on-street parking.

The Bangor Local Action Group also requested that the Council lobby the Department to resolve the anomaly in the legislation regarding the return within 1 hour clause.

Next Steps

1. Lobbying

Council to give consideration to lobby the DFI on behalf of the groups consulted, as per the recommendations contained in this report

2. Replacement of car park machines

As part of the rate setting process, budget was allocated to replacement of the current pay and display machines across the charged car park estate, which transferred from Dfl in 2015.

Officers were beginning to see increased machine failures as those approached the end of their lifespan, causing difficulties for car park users and a loss of revenue for the Council. New machines would encompass a keypad and contactless payment

technology which allowed for future ticketless parking and supported the overall modernisation of the car park estate.

Those new machines also provided an opportunity for the Council to make savings on cash collection costs and physical tickets, as well as supporting the Council's net zero targets. The current machines required non-recyclable printed tickets to be issued for display with 672,662 non-recyclable paper tickets issued in 24/25 and 617,503 in 25/26, which ended up in landfill or as litter on streets, and a future campaign would be launched to remove the need to use that method.

Members had previously raised concerns about ticket transfers and the ability of car park users to transfer tickets, that would be resolved with the new machines, ensuring that all car park users paid for the service as they used it.

The replacement programme was expected to be completed over the coming months. New signage and a full communications strategy would be implemented by officers ensuring minimal disruption for car park users.

3. Grounds maintenance

A grounds maintenance programme had been initiated across the car park estate and would continue throughout the 26/27 financial year, enhancing the visual appeal of the car park estate and overall experience of those who used it.

Summary

Following consultation with the Local Action Groups as outlined in the report, officers proposed that the Council writes to the Department for Infrastructure in respect of On-Street Parking.

A further activity report would be brought to the Council in the Autumn, outlining activity for the first half of 2026/27 and providing a further update on the ongoing work to enhance the car park estate.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the information in this report and agrees to:

1. Lobby the Department for Infrastructure to extend the on-street parking waiting restriction to 2 hours in Bangor, Newtownards and Donaghadee.
2. Lobby the Department for Infrastructure to address the no return within 1 hour anomaly with on-street parking waiting legislation.
3. Lobby the Department for Infrastructure to extend the 2-hour on-street parking waiting restriction to include part of Shore Street and The Parade in Donaghadee.
4. Lobby the Department for Infrastructure to trial an extension of the on-street parking waiting restriction to 2 hours in Holywood and Comber, with the exception of Castle Street and Mill Street.

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5. Lobby the Department for Infrastructure to address pavement obstructions outside commercial premises generally caused by inconsiderate parking.
6. Write to the Department for Infrastructure to support a Resident's On-Street Parking Permit Scheme in Holywood.

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

The Chair thanked the Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager for the work that had been done in relation to off-street car parking acknowledging that different towns had differing priorities.

Councillor Edmund was delighted with the report and the effort that had gone in to producing it and thought it was a step in the right direction and he was happy to see it progress. As seconder Councillor Brady shared that view.

Councillor Kendall also welcomed the report and found the recommendations to be very good. She referred to supporting residents parking schemes in Holywood and thought that it would have been helpful to have a meeting with the Department to support residents in their work to address congestion around the town. She had been made aware that communities were being asked to do much work on behalf of the Department that in her opinion they should not have to do and that barrier was a little preventative to reaching solutions. The problems around parking for residents of Holywood were obvious and had been ongoing for many years. She thought that Councils could be a little more proactive in helping residents of these areas and not put all the onus on them to come to solutions since it was a reasonable requirement to be able to park outside one's home.

The Chair asked if the Member was making the proposal that the Committee invite the Department to speak to the Committee and Councillor Kendall welcomed any position that would help. It was suggested instead that the Council include that in its communication with the Department and the proposer and seconder were in agreement with that. It was noted that some roads and car parks were also in a poor state of repair and resurfacing had been delayed and it was hoped that that work would be carried out during this financial year.

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

**6. ROLLO GILLESPIE MONUMENT, COMBER – PHASE 2
WORKS UPDATE**
(Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that a report was presented to the Environment Committee in February 2024 outlining the condition of the Rollo Gillespie Monument in Comber and the works required to address deterioration identified through a specialist conservation survey. At that time, officers recommended a two-stage approach, with the initial

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phase addressing urgent health and safety issues and essential repairs, together with investigative works to inform the scope and cost of the second phase.

Key Issues

Since the earlier report, officers had explored potential external funding opportunities to assist with delivery of Phase 2 works. No suitable external funding source had been identified for the project. In light of that position, a sum of £90,000 had been included in the rates for 2026/27 to provide for delivery of the Phase 2 works and to allow the required conservation repairs to progress.

Next Steps

Subject to Council approval, officers would proceed with the necessary actions to carry out the Phase 2 works. That would include progressing the required approvals, procuring the specialist conservation contractor input as necessary, and programming the works for delivery from the 2026/27 budget provision. The works to be carried out were detailed in the attached report.

Summary

The Phase 2 works to the Rollo Gillespie Monument remained necessary to protect the structure and address the issues identified through the condition survey. As no suitable external funding had been secured, provision had been made through the 2026/27 rates process. Officers therefore requested permission to proceed with the Phase 2 works.

RECOMMENDED that the grants approval for officers to proceed to carry out the Phase 2 works to the Rollo Gillespie Monument, Comber, funded from the £90,000 included in the rates for 2026/27.

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

Alderman Cummings thanked officers for working diligently on the monument and thought that the report was comprehensive. She referred to the vulnerability of the sandstone on the monument and the need to restore that but asked about the inscription to the east side and asked was the intention to replace it with like stone or if a plate would be attached with the inscription. The Head of Estates apologised that he was unaware of that detail but would follow up on that while recognising that the cost could be quite significant.

It was enquired if there had been any feedback on heritage lottery funding or from the masonic in Dublin and it was noted that had been sought without success. The Committee was informed that a report would be brought back before the work commenced properly.

The Chair sought assurances that the local war memorials were in a good condition before the Remembrance Day commemorations and Members were assured that assessment would take place in the later part of the summer as every year.

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

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7. **NOTICE OF MOTION 629 CLANDEBOYE PARK AND PITCH UPDATE**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in September 2024 the Council agreed a Notice of Motion stating:

“That this council notes that significant investment was previously made to deliver a play park, MUGA and amateur league sized football pitch on the Clandeboye road. Notes with regret there have been ongoing issues with the pitch. Instructs officers to reinstate the goalposts and mark out the pitch so that it can be played on by the local community. Furthermore, following consultation with the local community, that a report is brought back regarding the longer-term maintenance and enhancement of the site, to ensure any necessary provisions can be considered during the rate setting process to ensure that the football pitch is fit for purpose and can be used as previously agreed.”

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

A programme of works was approved in June 2025 to prepare the pitch for the 2025 season. The following had been delivered as a result:

- Installation of full-size goalposts and ball stop fencing
- Overseeding, sand dressing and pitch aeration
- Weed treatment and fertiliser programme
- Line marking and inclusion in the annual maintenance programme
- Independent turf assessment and maintenance plan

Those works had reinstated the pitch for community use. The current pitch measures 88m x 46m, below intermediate standards, initially requested by the local community. Constraints to widening included:

- Underground water infrastructure
- Sloping ground levels
- Proximity to the MUGA and paths

A feasibility study confirmed that widening would require significant works, including regrading, a retaining wall, and infrastructure adjustments (subject to external approvals). Estimated costs:

- Construction: £98,500
- Additional costs (fees, approvals, access changes etc.): approx. £30,000

The pitch would also be unavailable for approximately twelve months during establishment.

Engagement was undertaken with local stakeholders, including schools, community groups and sports clubs.

Key priorities identified:

- Toilet provision
- Dog exercise area to reduce fouling
- Outdoor learning and biodiversity spaces
- Intermediate football use would require 90m x 55m pitch dimensions
- Youth football requires smaller formats
- Changing, storage and toilet facilities would be needed

As reported to the Environment Committee in December 2025 the report considered that:

- The cost and scale of works were significant for an informal community facility
- There was no current strategic need for intermediate-level provision at this location
- The proposal did not represent value for money
- The upcoming Leisure Strategy audit should inform any future decision

It was recommended to the Environment Committee in December 2025 that Council:

1. Notes the reinstatement and ongoing maintenance of the pitch
2. Notes the engagement outcomes and current constraints; and
3. Agrees not to progress pitch widening at this time, pending the Leisure Strategy facilities audit.

Key Issues

At the Environment Committee meeting in December 2025 an alternative recommendation was agreed: "That the Item be deferred to allow officers to set up a meeting as soon as possible between:

- Council Officers,
- Clandeboye Village Community Association, and
- interested environment committee & Bangor West DEA elected reps."

An on-site meeting was held on Monday 16 March 2026 which was attended by Council Officers, Clandeboye Village Community Association and Elected Representatives. The meeting was productive with views from all sides heard. It was agreed that a further report would be brought to the Council outlining the findings.

On 23 March 2026 officers received communication from Elected Members asking if the dimensions of the pitch could be extended, not to the previously requested intermediate dimensions of 90m by 55m, but to at least 90m by 50m.

Officers investigated this request and agreed it was achievable. That was agreed as acceptable by Clandeboye Village Community Association. During those communications, a request to increase the pitch length to between 95m and 100m was made by the Community Association. The request also included installation of stanchions in the corners of the existing posts to aid hanging of nets. Both those requests were investigated by officers and were deemed to be achievable.

Next Steps

The following works were proposed:

1. Increase the pitch width to 50m
2. Increase the pitch length to 96m
3. Install corner stanchions on both sets of goalposts.

This approach was agreed in writing by Clandeboye Village Community Association on 13 May 2026. If the report was agreed, works would be progressed through the Summer months of 2026.

Summary

The Council reinstated the football pitch at Clandeboye Road during 2025, including new goalposts, pitch improvements and ongoing maintenance, enabling continued community use. The pitch remained below the intermediate size initially requested, due to site constraints and the significant works required to achieve those dimensions were not recommended in December 2025.

Following further engagement with local stakeholders and Elected Members in early 2026, a revised and more achievable enhancement option had been agreed. That included extension of the pitch to 96m x 50m and installation of corner stanchions.

Those works had been agreed with the Clandeboye Village Community Association and were proposed for delivery during Summer 2026, subject to Council approval

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees to the progression of the proposed works as outlined in this report.

The Chair informed the Committee that Councillor Gilmour had been given speaking rights for this item.

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

Councillor Brady was pleased to see that a compromise had been reached and the contractor would carry out the work for the teams in advance of the new season. Councillor Newman said that finally the community could see light at the end of the tunnel. The compromise had been given full support and the Association had waited too long for this outcome. The facility could be used by Bangor Football Club as a pitch for training. She asked if a commitment could be made to the community that the work would be done before the end of the summer to reach a swift and satisfactory conclusion and that was confirmed with a start being made following the approval of the full Council.

Councillor Gilmour thanked the Committee for the opportunity to speak and welcomed the Chair to his new role. She explained that she had previously brought this as a Notice of Motion and the issue had been ongoing for that community over many years. She pointed out that the report did not recognise that the pitch had not been built to the correct size at the outset but to get it to full size would be costly and

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would add years to the delivery time. She thought the compromise would be to make the pitch as wide as possible on the site to make it as versatile as possible.

She had two questions referring to pre-season intentions to have the Village Association work with Bangor Football Club and if the Association could be kept up to date when the works would be progressing. It was evident that dog fouling occurred in the area so she called for additional signage to make the land a useable football pitch that would benefit the community going forward. The Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager agreed that the community would be kept up to date on progress.

Councillor Kendall thanked officers and also relaying thanks on behalf of Councillor McKee, shared the same view in respect of what Councillor Gilmour had said. She was grateful to the community for its advocacy for driving the project forward and thanked them for agreeing to the compromise. She agreed that it was not what had been promised but hoped it could be delivered and used by the community as soon as possible.

The Chair added his support and had been pleased that a compromise had been found.

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

8. LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE 2026 (Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Biodiversity was supported through a statutory duty under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Act required public bodies to take reasonable steps to further the conservation of priority habitats and species and to encourage others to do so. The development and delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) helped to demonstrate the Council's compliance with this duty. In line with the Act, the Council's responsibilities related to five key aspects of biodiversity:

- Protection of Biodiversity
- Maintenance of Biodiversity
- Enhancing Biodiversity
- Restoring Biodiversity
- Promoting Biodiversity

The Borough's second Biodiversity Action Plan was approved and adopted in April 2023. Since then, it had provided a framework for coordinating activity to protect and enhance biodiversity across the Borough. The preparation of the Plan marked an important step in recognising the value of local biodiversity and ensuring that international, national, regional, and local objectives were progressed through partnership working.

Key Issues

The LBAP set out 84 actions across four themes. Those actions were intended to protect, conserve and enhance the priority habitats and species identified through the Borough audit. For ease of reference, actions were grouped under the following themes:

- Theme 1: Education and Awareness
- Theme 2: Research and Monitoring
- Theme 3: Land Management
- Theme 4: Building Partnerships

The LBAP was embedded within the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan 2026–27 and supported delivery of the Plan's agreed strategic objectives and operational priorities. It reinforced the Council's wider commitment to environmental sustainability, climate resilience and community involvement by evidencing activity underway and progress achieved in improving local biodiversity. In particular, the LBAP aligned strongly with the Service Plan objectives for climate recovery and biodiversity gain.

The report highlighted the Council's contribution to those aims through actions such as protecting and enhancing habitats, delivering education and engagement activity, and working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to support LBAP delivery. Collectively, those interventions could support carbon sequestration, improve air quality and strengthen biodiversity. Continued monitoring, through formal surveys and bioblitz events, alongside community-led and incidental records, would help build an increasingly robust understanding of the condition of local biodiversity and the Borough's green spaces over time.

The LBAP contributed to a number of Service Plan performance measures, including the management of 154,002m² of rewilded Council land. It also supported achievement within wider quality and place-making programmes, including Bloom/Best Kept Awards, and the maintenance of seven Green Flag Award sites.

In addition to environmental and climate benefits, the LBAP supported community wellbeing and aligned with the Five Steps to Wellbeing framework. Outdoor initiatives, such as birdwatching sessions, bioblitzes, Bug ID activities and wider engagement events encouraging residents to spend time in green spaces and to value, enjoy and help safeguard the local environment. That could contribute to physical and mental health benefits associated with time outdoors, while also providing opportunities for social connection and helping to reduce isolation through shared participation.

Next Steps

Over the coming year, work would continue to progress and refine LBAP delivery by building on actions already underway, initiating actions that had not yet advanced, and prioritising activity where it could deliver the greatest benefit for priority habitats and species. The Council would also seek to strengthen and expand partnership working with key stakeholders to support coordinated delivery, share expertise and leverage resources. Community involvement would remain a key focus, with continued engagement through events, volunteering, education and citizen science

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initiatives to increase awareness, encourage positive behaviours and improve the evidence base through ongoing recording and monitoring.

Summary

The report provided an update on delivery of Ards and North Down Borough Council's Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), which supported the Council's statutory duty under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and provided a framework for coordinated action following adoption of the Borough's second plan in April 2023. It outlined progress across the LBAP's 84 actions under four themes, Education and Awareness, Research and Monitoring, Land Management, and Building Partnerships, and highlighted how the work was embedded within the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan 2026–27, to support agreed strategic objectives, including climate recovery and biodiversity gain.

The report also noted the wider benefits of LBAP activity, including habitat enhancement, engagement and partnership working, improved evidence through surveys and citizen science, contributions to performance measures (including rewilded Council land and Green Flag sites) and positive impacts for community wellbeing through nature-based participation. Next steps focused on progressing and prioritising outstanding actions, strengthening collaboration with stakeholders, and maintaining community involvement to build the evidence base and maximise benefits for priority habitats and species.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Alderman McRandal always welcomed this report and the involvement of engaging with community groups. He asked if work was being done that was not in the report and the officer said that more detail could be provided if required but the report would then be very large.

Alderman Adair thanked the Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager on the eighty-four actions but thought that the sand dunes around the Borough's coastline also needed to be protected. He noted that on the Ards Peninsula there had been a lot of erosion of sand dunes and it was important that that did not continue or the Council could lose its beaches. He asked for that to be prioritised going forward. A little progress had been seen but great care was needed and the officer indicated that the dunes were being given priority and, since they were complex areas, the Council was being given help by outside sources. It was planned to bring back a report in September in relation to the work on sand dunes. Alderman Adair said he would look forward to that and referred to the Strangford Lough and Lecale partnership and hoped to see change on the ground in the near future.

Councillor Douglas asked if there was work planned for the river which flowed through Comber and the officer agreed to come back with further information on that directly to the Member.

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

9. NORTH DOWN COASTAL PATH WORKING GROUP

(Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the North Down Coastal Path Task and Finish Working Group was established in September 2023 to address issues of connectivity, access and maintenance along the North Down Coastal Path. That followed a decision to withdraw the planning application for the proposed Kinnegar to Donaghadee Greenway Scheme. The Working Group met quarterly and was attended by Elected Members, community and business groups.

Key Issues

A meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group was held on 5 January 2026 and the minutes of the meeting were agreed by the Working Group at the 27 April 2026 meeting.

Next Steps

Council to note the minutes and note the progress of the North Down Coastal Path Task and Finish Working Group. Meetings would continue quarterly with the next meeting due on 29 June 2026. The minutes of the last meeting (27 April 2026) would be considered at that meeting, and a proposal made to agree future minutes by email to allow earlier reporting to Council and publication.

Summary

The North Down Coastal Path Task and Finish Working Group, formed in September 2023 to address maintenance and connectivity, had ratified minutes from its 5 January 2026 meeting. The Council was asked to note the progress made by the group, which held quarterly meetings to oversee improvements along the North Down Coastal Path.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the attached minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group held on 5 January 2026.

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

Alderman McRandal and Councillor Newman pointed out that they had been present at the meeting but that had not been recorded in the minutes.

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

10. TREE AND WOODLAND UPDATE REPORT 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of this report was to update Members on the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy that was agreed in March 2021. The purpose of the

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Tree and Woodland Strategy was to recognise the importance of trees, the many benefits they afforded and the increasingly important role they could play in mitigating the effects of climate change. The strategy was required to ensure the Council's limited budget was focused on positive planting programmes and managing tree care and risks.

Residents of the Borough were rightly proud of the greenness around but it was something that was not static and which could not be taken for granted. Trees played a significant role in improving environmental conditions and people's quality of life. Trees acted as carbon sinks and absorbed carbon dioxide (the main greenhouse gas) and produced oxygen. In addition, trees filtered, absorbed and reduce pollutants. Trees could make the Borough a healthier, more attractive and more comfortable place to live and work. Trees provided food and shelter for wildlife such as birds, squirrels and insects, as well as for people. Trees had been proven to increase property value and to help relax people by lowering heart rates and reducing stress.

The Council was committed to conserving and retaining existing trees and other features where it was considered that they had landscape or amenity value and would use its powers to protect trees where necessary. The Council was also committed to ensuring improved tree cover within the Borough, and to promote the importance of trees to ensure a number of Corporate and Community Plan objectives were met. The Council had a legal 'duty of care' and would provide appropriate levels of management arrangements to ensure that users and neighbours of its land were reasonably safe.

The Tree and Woodland Report played a vital role in supporting the strategic objectives and operational priorities set out in the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan for 2025–2026. It strengthened the Council's overarching commitment to environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and active community engagement by providing clear evidence of ongoing work and measurable progress in tree and woodland management.

A key area of alignment was with the strategic objectives of climate recovery and biodiversity gain. The report demonstrated significant contributions to those goals through large-scale tree planting, over 15,000 trees annually and the expansion of the urban tree canopy. Those efforts contributed directly to carbon sequestration, improved air quality, and enhanced biodiversity. Notably, the **STAND4TREES** initiative, which aimed to plant 160,000 trees by 2032, was a clear example of how the report's content supported the Council's net-zero and climate mitigation targets set out in the Corporate Plan.

In terms of community engagement and volunteering, the report highlighted active partnerships with schools, community organisations, and volunteer groups. Initiatives such as Seed2Leaf nurseries and commemorative tree plantings fostered a sense of ownership and inclusion within local communities. That was closely aligned with the Service Plan's objective to strengthen and grow Friends Groups and other volunteer-led programmes, enhancing the social value of parks and green spaces.

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The Tree and Woodland Report contributed directly to several Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the Service Plan. Those included the annual planting of 15,000 trees in line with the **STAND4TREES** target, the delivery of over 70 community-focused projects such as orchard plantings and mindfulness sessions, a marked reduction in herbicide use through sustainable practices, and the expansion of rewilded land to a target of 130,000 square metres.

Environmental sustainability remained a core priority of the Service Plan, and the Tree and Woodland Report complemented that through its promotion of native species, improved urban canopy equity, and increased resilience to storms. It also demonstrated economic and social value, with a Tree Asset Valuation estimating £277 million in amenity value and £7.6 million in carbon storage, figures that supported the Service Plan's focus on income generation through green infrastructure.

The Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy not only advanced environmental and climate goals but also significantly contributed to community wellbeing, aligning closely with the Five Steps to Wellbeing framework. Initiatives such as mindfulness sessions in Bangor Walled Garden, guided tree tours, and community planting events improved connections by bringing people together, while outdoor activities like orchard clean-ups and tree planting promoted being active. Events like National Tree Week encouraged participants to take notice of nature's beauty, and educational programs like Seed2Leaf nurseries and Forest Schools supported continuous learning. Finally, volunteering opportunities and community-led projects embodied the spirit of giving, strengthening social bonds and collective pride in local green spaces. By integrating those principles, the Strategy ensured that trees and woodlands served as vital assets for both planetary and human health.

Key Issues

2025/2026 Tree Plantings

The Council undertook to replace trees in numbers in excess of those that needed to be felled and had an annual tree-planting programme which saw many trees of both native and interesting varieties planted over each Autumn/Winter season.

For example, our **STAND4TREES** initiative aimed to plant a tree for every person in the Borough, that was approximately 160,000 trees. Through planting season 2025-2026 in excess of 15,000 new trees were planting in the Borough. To date, the Council had planted over 77,206 new trees, the yearly breakdown is:

- 2021/22 – 12,435
- 2022/23 – 15,223
- 2023/24 – 18,269
- 2024/25 – 15,532
- 2025-26 – 15,747

In general, trees planted would be native species such as oak, elder, hazel, hawthorn and birch, in line with Council's Local Biodiversity Action Plan, unless there was a specific ornamental scheme which required cultivated species. An example of that was Castle Park (Bangor) and Ballymenoch Park (Holywood) which were

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regarded as historic tree arboretums and would require rare and unusual trees as replacements. That was intended to ensure that there was a diverse collection of tree colonies across the Borough.

Location	Standard (large trees)	Whip (small trees)	Orchard (fruit trees)	Total Trees
Castle Park, Bangor			15	15
Ward Park, Bangor	10			10
Smelt Bay, Bangor		500		500
Kerrs Wood, Bangor	100			100
Killaire Woods, Bangor		300		300
Lisnabreen Church, Bangor	10			10
Coastline, Groomsport	5			5
Playpark, Conlig	2			2
Jacks Cut, Newtownards		7,000	30	7,030
Frances Street, Newtownards	7			7
Regent Street, Newtownards	2			2
Conway Square, Newtownards	6			6
Greyabbey Cemetery, Greyabbey		800		800
Hunts Park, Donaghadee		500		500
Lawson Gardens Community Orchard, Portavogie		1500		1500
Football Pitch, Cloughey			10	10
Portaferry Community Orchard, Portaferry		451		450
Kircubbin Rewilding Site		3000		3000
Moss Road Football Pitch, Ballygowan		1500		1500
Overall Total	142	15,550	55	15,747

The Council planted 15,748 young trees (whips) between November 2025 and March 2026. Local schools, volunteers, and community groups led the way, helping install most of the new trees, hedgerows, and orchards.

Community Engagement

Community engagement was vital for successful tree and woodland initiatives. Involving residents, schools, and volunteer groups fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility for green spaces. Engaged communities were more likely to protect those areas, ensuring long-term sustainability. Furthermore, participating in planting and maintenance strengthened social bonds, promoted environmental awareness, and enhanced well-being.

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The Events Calendar was the foundation for the Council's engagement activities. Each year would feature new initiatives alongside core activities to support our **STAND4TREES** goal: planting 160,000 trees by 2032, one for every resident in the Borough.

2025/2026 Tree and Woodland Calendar of Events

Tree and Woodland events were scheduled up to 31 March each year, aligning with the tree planting season (November–March). That timing allowed Parks Officers to maximise engagement and deliver a wide range of activities for the local community. Below was a month-by-month engagement calendar highlighting major events from the past year. The template would guide future years' programming, with new activities introduced annually to keep engagement dynamic and inclusive.

April	Awake the Garden – Tree Officer hosted a tree tour of Castle Park, Bangor Groomsport Play Park – Community orchard planted with help from the local community.
May	National Hedgerow Week – Council promoted the beneficial impact of hedgerows. Linear Park, Bangor – an orchard clean-up was organised in which the local community came out to help clean and mulch around the fruit trees.
June	Each Thursday in June, Bangor Walled Garden hosted a Mindfulness Session which proved to be a massive hit.
July	Each Thursday in July, Bangor Walled Garden hosted a Mindfulness Session Tree officer hosted a tree tour of Castle Park, Bangor
Love Parks Week 25 July – 1 August	Love Parks Week is an annual campaign that celebrates parks, green spaces, and the dedicated volunteers and workers that look after them all year round. Parks are vibrant, living spaces bring communities together and provide an opportunity to connect with nature in the heart of our cities, towns, and neighbourhoods. Ards and North Down Borough Council ran a number of family-friendly events such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bird Walk • Bat Night • Kids Park Art • Volunteering Promo and experience • Nature Skills for families • Tree and Plant ID
August	Wild Days Out – August saw a variety of child friendly outdoor events: Feasts for Feathers Location: Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Newtownards Get your binoculars ready! We'll go on a gentle guided walk to spot and identify native birds. Kids will also get to make eco-friendly bird

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	<p>treats using natural and recycled materials a fun way to support our feathered friends!</p> <p>Coastline Biodiversity Location: Coastal Playpark, Millisle Explore the shoreline and learn all about the animals and plants that call our coast home. This hands-on session will have kids discovering shells, seaweed, and even tiny sea creatures!</p> <p>Tremendous Trees and Plants Location: Walled Garden (Playpark), Bangor Learn how to identify native trees and wildflowers, then try 'Hapa Zome' a creative Japanese technique of leaf dyeing. Kids can make their own natural artwork to take home!</p>
September	Tree Seed Gathering Season: Council welcomed Orchardville Community to Castle Park, Bangor for a tree seed gathering event.
October	Tree officer hosted a tree tour of Castle Park, Bangor for students from Greenmount Campus.
National Tree Week	<p>National Tree Week, the UK's largest annual celebration of trees, is here! Each year, tree-lovers come together to kick off the tree planting season, and our Borough is taking huge strides to build a greener future with the STAND4TREES initiative. Since its launch in 2021, our goal has been to plant one tree for every person in the Borough – that's 160,000 trees by 2032! Ards and North Down Borough Council ran a number of family-friendly events such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community orchard and hedgerow planting with Cloughey P.S and members from the Health and Social Trust. • Tree planting with TCV and local Scots group in Castle Park, Bangor • Tree Tour of Carin Wood
January	<p>Tree planting event at Kerrs Wood, Bangor. This saw 40 standard trees being planted with the help of the local community.</p> <p>Tree planting event at Killaire Wood, Bangor. In association with Choice Housing, Council supplied and helped plant 300 tree whips in there new housing development.</p>
February	<p>Tree and hedgerow planting event at Smelt Mill Bay, Bangor. This saw 40 standard trees being planted with the help of the local community.</p> <p>Community orchard and tree planting event at Jacks Cut, Newtownards. Over two days, students from Bangor Assessment came out to help plant a new community orchard and 3,000 tree whips.</p>
March	<p>Tree planting event at Hunts Park, Donaghadee. In association with the local community of Donaghadee, parks officer helped organise a tree planting event which saw 500 tree whips being planted.</p> <p>Woodland Wellness Walks: Thursday 5 and Thursday 19 March saw the first Woodland Wellness Walks hosted in Stricklands Glen,</p>

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	Bangor. This event allows participants to unwind in amongst woodlands via a guided walk and mindfulness sessions.
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Community Orchard Plantings

As part of the Council's commitment to the Tree and Woodland Strategy, Park Officers had identified potential sites for new community orchards. The selection followed a process of community engagement and internal site management, with the goal of planting three new orchards every year.

Community orchards were excellent places for people to connect, providing a space for celebrations and a local source of fresh food. They served as an educational resource for schools and community groups. More broadly, trees helped reduce stress and improve wellbeing by providing "psychological refreshment" and a sense of permanence.

Beyond encouraging healthy eating and outdoor activity, orchards made our neighbourhoods more pleasant places to live. Those plantations served as community focal points, offering aesthetic and historic value while acting as landmark features in both towns and the open countryside.

Ards and North Down had reached its latest Tree and Woodland Strategy milestone with the addition of several new community orchards. Those sites, planted by local groups and schools, included recent additions at Cloughey Playing Fields, Jacks Cut in Newtownards, and Castle Park in Bangor.

Ards and North Down Orchard Locations:

- Ann Street, Portaferry
- Lawson Gardens, Portavogie
- Village Hall, Greyabbey
- Brice Park, Bangor
- Londonderry Park, Newtownards
- Cottown Open Space, Six Roads Ends
- Kerr Park, Holywood
- Holywood Nature Park, Holywood
- The Green, Kircubbin
- Laurel Bank Lane, Comber
- Hunts Park, Donaghadee
- Springwell Crescent Playpark, Groomsport
- Linear Park, Bangor
- Helens Bay Playpark, Helens Bay
- Ward Park, Bangor
- Clifton School, Bangor
- Football Pitch, Cloughey
- Jacks Cut, Newtownards
- Castle Park, Bangor

Recently, the Council had approved proposals to allow Peninsula Healthy Living (PHL) to expand its current premises at Kircubbin Community Centre. As a result,

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the community orchard that was planted on the site in February 2024 would need to be relocated.

Council officers had proposed contacting PHL to arrange for the orchard trees to be lifted and replanted by local residents who wished to have a fruit tree in their own garden. In addition, as part of Council's aim to provide a community orchard in every city, town, and village across the Borough, a new community orchard would be established at the recently developed Kircubbin Railway Site, located adjacent to Kircubbin Cemetery.

Seed2Leaf: Community Tree Nursery

The Seed2Leaf initiative was a cornerstone of the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy. It directly supported the **STAND4TREES** target: planting 160,000 trees across the Borough by 2032. The programme invited residents to lead the full growth cycle, from gathering seeds to nurturing saplings. By doing so, it built long-term environmental responsibility and local pride. Following a successful debut year with Portaferry In Bloom and Missile Youth Forum, the report outlined the programme's impact.

The primary objective of Seed2Leaf was to create a sustainable network of community-managed tree nurseries that served multiple purposes. Those nurseries increased the availability of locally sourced native tree stock for Council planting schemes while simultaneously strengthening community involvement in environmental initiatives. The programme provided valuable educational opportunities for schools and youth groups and offered a cost-effective approach to tree procurement through local seed collection and propagation.

The initiative moved through four key phases. The seed gathering phase involved Council officers and volunteers collecting locally adapted tree species such as oak, hazel, and rowan. Selected community groups then established nurseries using Council-provided funding, materials such as raised beds and soil, and comprehensive training. Volunteers subsequently nurtured the seeds into viable saplings over a one-to-three-year period. Finally, the mature saplings were replanted across the Borough in public parks, school grounds and housing estates, directly contributing to the **STAND4TREES** planting targets.

The programme had seen the successful establishment of three community nurseries through a competitive application process. Portaferry In Bloom created a fully operational nursery with Council-supported infrastructure and partnered with Portaferry Primary School to conduct seed-gathering activities, resulting in over 200 native saplings currently in propagation. Missile Youth Forum engaged young participants in urban greening projects with a particular focus on planting hedgerow species to enhance local biodiversity. Orchardville Community came to Castle Park, Bangor in September 2025 to collect tree seeds for their new community tree nursery.

Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA)

The Council was expanding environmental education through a formal partnership with the Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA). That collaboration

aimed to establish three new Forest Schools annually, reinforcing our commitment to nature-based learning and community stewardship.

At its core, the initiative integrated outdoor education into the daily lives of residents. Those structured experiences provided a unique environment for children to explore and connect with nature, boosting physical health, creativity, and social skills. To ensure high standards, NIFSA provided the only nationally recognised Forest School qualification in Northern Ireland. To date, they had trained hundreds of accredited Level 3 Leaders, supporting over 5,000 pupils monthly across 200 official sites.

Sustainability was the partnership's primary focus. Rather than simply launching schools, the Council's Parks and Cemeteries Service ensured their longevity by funding five new Forest Schools per year at a cost of £1,000 each. By empowering teachers and pupils to become lifelong guardians of their local environment, Ards and North Down Borough Council was securing a greener, more interconnected future for the community.

Over the past two years, six schools had joined the programme:

- Andrews Memorial Primary School, Comber
- Camphill Community, Holywood
- Portavogie Primary School, Portavogie
- Clifton School, Bangor
- Kilmoody Playgroup, Killinchy
- St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin

Partnership with DfI Roads: Expanding Street Trees

Recognising the importance of urban forestry, Council officers had established a collaborative partnership with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Roads to identify suitable locations for future street tree planting across the Borough. The partnership created a strategic approach to urban greening that aligned with both organisations' environmental objectives while addressing the practicalities of long-term maintenance.

Through that collaboration, officers were developing a systematic methodology to identify planting opportunities along urban streets. The process considered factors such as existing canopy coverage, soil conditions, underground utilities, and pedestrian safety. Particular attention was being given to areas that benefitted most from increased cover, such as urban heat islands and neighbourhoods with limited access to green space.

Recent Tree Planting Successes: Hibernia Street – 2 x standard street trees planted; Frances Street – 7 x standard street trees planted; Regent Street – 2 x standard street trees planted; Conway Square – 6 x standard street trees planted.

Those projects marked the first set of street tree initiatives delivered through this collaborative approach, providing a practical example of how coordinated planning could deliver high-quality urban greening. Initial discussions had identified additional locations for potential pilot schemes, with several sites in Bangor and Newtownards

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currently being assessed. Those early projects established a replicable framework for future initiatives that could be expanded across the Borough in the coming years.

Overall, that cooperative approach ensured that street tree planting complemented existing infrastructure, remained deliverable within highway constraints, and maximised environmental and social benefits. Officers would continue to develop this partnership and pursue further opportunities to strategically expand the Borough's urban tree canopy, in line with the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy.

Opportunities for Land Acquisition to Support Canopy Expansion

In delivering the Tree and Woodland Strategy (2021–2032), Ards and North Down Borough Council was actively seeking to increase woodland cover, tree canopy, and biodiversity across the Borough. While the Council continued to maximise planting on its own land, the current estate was insufficient to meet long-term expansion targets or offset losses caused by storms, pests, diseases, and natural decline.

To address that, the Council was exploring land acquisition through targeted purchases, long-term leases, and partnership-based access. Securing new sites would enable the Council to:

- **Boost Biodiversity:** Establish larger woodland areas capable of delivering landscape-scale environmental benefits.
- **Climate Resilience:** Expand urban canopy to reduce heat-island effects and improve air quality.
- **Support Carbon Goals:** Increase long-term carbon sequestration / storage to meet climate-action commitments.
- **Public Wellbeing:** Improve access to green space in line with Community Plan priorities.
- **Habitat Connectivity:** Strengthen ecological networks by linking fragmented habitats and supporting species movement across the Borough.

Tree Works

Ards and North Down Borough Council managed its tree stock through a proactive, evidence-based, and responsible framework. In accordance with the Tree and Woodland Strategy (2021–2032), the Council maintained a legal duty of care to ensure public safety.

To manage risks as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP), the Council employed qualified arboricultural consultants and trained officers. Those specialists conducted routine inspections to national standards, specifically Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) and BS 3998:2010 – Tree Work: Recommendations.

Scheduled Works during 2025/26

During the 2025/26 reporting period, the Council completed across the Borough:

- 51 scheduled tree fells
- 18 scheduled pruning operations

Those works were recommended following routine inspections that identified foreseeable defects such as decay, structural weakness, or declining vitality. The

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Council currently had 6,028 trees recorded on the GIS Tree Map, representing approximately 80% of the Council's known tree stock. As surveying continued year-on-year, that figure would increase until full coverage was achieved.

The number of scheduled fells recorded for the year represented less than 1% of the overall tree population. In arboriculture, that was widely regarded as a healthy and expected proportion for a responsibly managed tree population. A well-balanced urban forest undergoes natural attrition as trees aged, declined, or became unsafe; removing up to 1% of the stock annually was typical across well-managed estates and ensured that long-term risks were controlled while maintaining overall canopy health. The level of removals reflected normal population dynamics, allowing for gradual replacement, improved species diversity, and increased resilience against pests, diseases, and storm events.

Unscheduled Works during 2025/26

While the Council aimed to schedule as much essential tree work as possible, tree management was dynamic. Unscheduled, reactive works were regularly required in response to:

- Storm events, where trees or large branches had failed or become unstable.
- Public reports and house-call inspections, where trees had been identified as dangerous, dead, or structurally compromised.
- Emergency situations, where immediate intervention was required to maintain public safety.

Those works were undertaken promptly, particularly in high-use public areas such as footpaths, play parks, town centres, and transport corridors. All reactive interventions followed the same professional standards as scheduled works: defects were assessed using QTRA, interventions were proportionate and justified, and all works complied with BS 3998 to support long-term tree health wherever practicable.

To support openness and community understanding, the Council provided a publicly accessible Tree Map on its website. That interactive tool enabled residents to:

- View trees that had been inspected,
- Identify those scheduled for pruning, monitoring, or removal, and
- Access up-to-date information on location, condition, and required works.

By making this data available, the Council ensured residents could clearly see why works were being carried out and how decisions were made, balancing public safety, biodiversity protection, and the long-term sustainability of the Borough's urban forest.

Impact of Weather Conditions on Tree Works

Between April 2025 and March 2026, the UK and Ireland experienced a series of significant storm events that placed increased pressure on the Council's tree-risk management and maintenance operations. Notable storms during this period included Storm Floris (4–6 August 2025), one of the most severe summer windstorms on record for the wider UK; Storm Amy (3–4 October 2025), which brought wind gusts exceeding 80 kt (92 mph) to north-western regions; Storm Claudia (14 November 2025), producing widespread heavy rainfall and soil

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saturation; and Storm Bram (9–10 December 2025), which delivered strong winds and heavy rain across western and northern parts of the UK. In early 2026, Storm Goretti (8–9 January 2026) brought damaging winds to areas including Northern Ireland, followed later that month by Storm Chandra (26–27 January 2026), which resulted in exceptionally wet conditions affecting the east of Northern Ireland and further weakening root stability in saturated soils.

Although outside the main reporting window, residual impacts from Storm Éowyn (January 2025) continued to be evident, with the event recorded as the UK's most powerful windstorm in over a decade and the most significant for Northern Ireland since 1998, contributing to ongoing structural weaknesses in susceptible trees. Across the year, those combined storms led to repeated occurrences of uprooting, branch failure, and destabilisation, particularly following periods of prolonged rainfall and sequential storm cycles.

The Council's response had continued to be guided by the Tree and Woodland Strategy (2021–2032), which set out a robust framework for managing storm-related risks. Proactive inspections, carried out using the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) methodology, enabled identification of high-risk trees prior to and following significant weather events, ensuring that interventions were proportionate and compliant with BS 3998:2010. Reactive works were prioritised in high-use public areas following major storms such as Bram, Amy and Chandra. Species diversification, with a focus on resilient native species, continued to strengthen long-term storm resilience across the Borough, contrasting the performance of storm-prone conifer blocks in areas like Cairn Wood.

Overall, the 2025/26 storm period reinforced the importance of sustained investment in proactive inspection regimes, species-resilient planting, rapid response capability, and ongoing public communication as climate-driven weather volatility continued to increase.

Tree Inspections

Ards and North Down Borough Council had a legal duty of care to take reasonable steps to ensure that people using Council-owned land were not exposed to unacceptable tree-related risks. That required the identification of foreseeable hazards and the management of associated risks so far as was reasonably practicable, balancing public safety with the significant environmental, social and climate benefits provided by trees. Liability may arise where a defect or hazard was reasonably foreseeable and proportionate management action was not taken.

To meet that duty, the Council operated a structured, risk-based tree inspection programme aligned with industry best practice and the objectives of the Tree and Woodland Strategy (2021–2032). Inspections were undertaken using the Visual Tree Assessment (VTA) methodology, which evaluated tree health, vitality and structural condition through visual indicators. That approach supported informed, evidence-based decision-making and allowed officers to distinguish between tolerable defects and those requiring intervention.

Tree-related risks were assessed in accordance with the National Tree Safety Group's Common Sense Risk Management of Trees (2011) and the International

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Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Tree Risk Assessment Best Practice Guidance. Risk management decisions were guided by the principle of ALARP (As Low As Reasonably Practicable), ensuring that risks were reduced to a level that was proportionate to both the likelihood of harm and the cost, practicality and environmental impact of mitigation.

The Council also applied Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) to support decision-making in higher-risk or more complex situations. QTRA provided a transparent and defensible framework for assessing tree risk by combining the probability of failure, the likelihood of impact and the severity of consequences into a quantified assessment. That enabled officers to prioritise works effectively while avoiding unnecessary tree removal or excessive intervention.

Recent investment in digital inspection tools had further strengthened that approach. Integrating VTA observations with ArcGIS-based mapping, photographic records and quantitative risk ratings allowed inspections to be prioritised intelligently and managed consistently across the estate. That ensured that safety risks were addressed while retaining trees wherever possible and maximising long-term environmental value.

Through the combined application of VTA, structured risk assessment, ALARP principles and QTRA where appropriate, the Council maintained a proportionate, defensible and sustainable approach to tree safety management. That framework enabled Ards and North Down Borough Council to meet its statutory responsibilities while supporting the resilience, biodiversity and climate-adaptation benefits of the Borough's tree stock.

Next Steps

New Woodland and Hedgerow Plantings 2026/2027

A total of 15,130 tree whips would be ordered this year for the next tree and hedgerow planting season, which ran from November 2026 through March 2027. The locations of the new tree and hedgerow plantings were outlined below. For many of the sites, tree and hedgerow planting events would be held in partnership with local community groups, volunteer days and local schools.

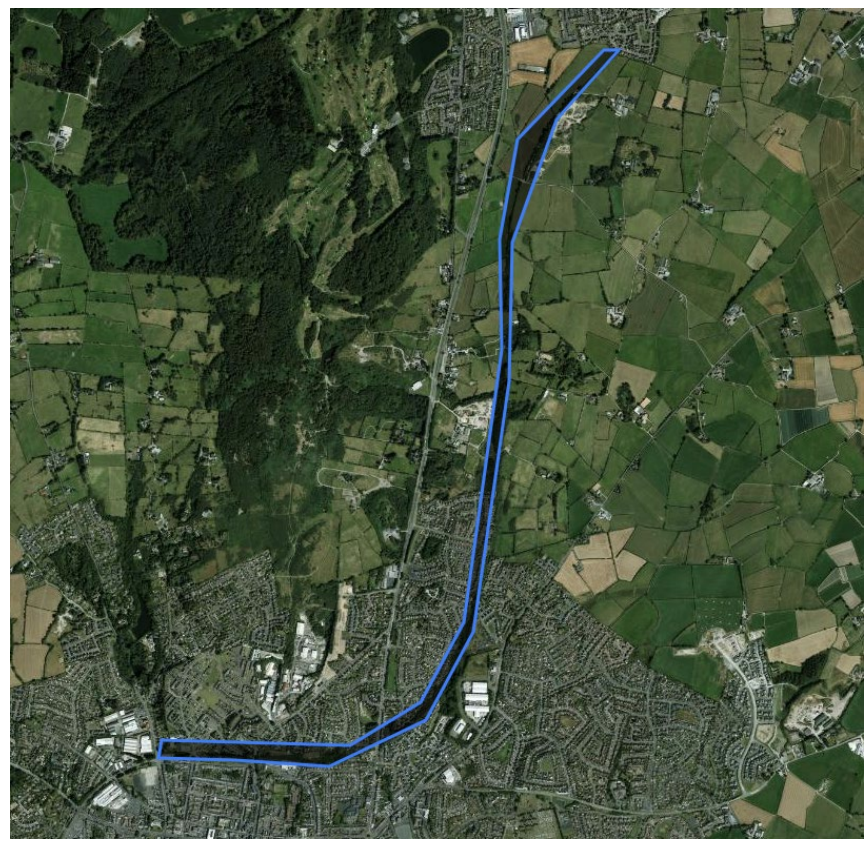
Bloomfield Playing Pitches, Bangor (Woodland Planting - 6,000 whips)



Stricklands Glen, Bangor (Hedgerow Planting – 1,250 whips)



Greenway, Newtownards/Bangor (Hedgerow Planting - 4,000 whips)



King John Walk (Right of Way), Holywood (Hedgerow Planting – 350 whips)



Ballymenoch Park, Holywood (Woodland Planting - 30 Light/Heavy Standards)



Moss Road Football Playing Pitches, Ballygowan (Woodland Planting - 2,500 whips)



Second Commons, Donaghadee (Woodland Planting – 1,000 whips)



Upcoming Community Orchard Plantings 2026/2027

For each of the proposed community orchard sites, Council officers conducted an onsite visit to determine the feasibility of the orchard. Where possible, officers would also invite local community group representatives who would provide feedback on the orchard site. While on site, officers and local community reps would assess the ground condition, usage and proximity of local schools and community groups who could potentially help plant and maintain the orchard. All the below community orchard sites had been identified as viable locations. Once approved, Council officers would begin to engage local schools and community groups regarding possible planting dates.

Ballymenoch Park, Holywood (30 mixed fruit trees)



Ards Blair Mayne, Newtownards (15 mixed fruit trees)



Bridge Street, Comber (15 mixed fruit trees)



Seed2Leaf: Community Tree Nursery

To build on that success, the programme would reopen for applications on 1 June 2026, with the aim of establishing additional nurseries in the coming year. Eligibility would extend to schools, residents' associations, environmental groups and youth organisations, prioritising areas with low tree canopy cover or higher levels of social deprivation. Each selected group would receive a comprehensive support package including grants for essential equipment such as raised beds and tools, specialised training in seed stratification and nursery maintenance, and ongoing mentorship from Council officers. The expansion would seek to develop new partnerships with local businesses for potential sponsorship opportunities and explore collaborations with health trusts to incorporate therapeutic horticulture elements.

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Northern Ireland Forest School Association: Revised Application Timeline

Unlike previous years when applications opened in January, the window to apply for Forest School status would now reopen at the start of May. That change gave schools the opportunity to begin the programme at the start of the new academic year in September 2026.

Partnership with DFI Roads: Expanding Urban Street Trees

Initial discussions identifying additional sites for pilot schemes in Bangor and Newtownards, currently undergoing feasibility assessments. The partnership aimed to create a replicable framework for future collaborative planting initiatives that could be expanded across the Borough in coming years.

That cooperative approach ensured that street tree planting complemented existing infrastructure while maximising the environmental and social benefits of urban trees. By working closely with DFI Roads, the Council could strategically expand the urban tree canopy in locations where it would have the greatest positive impact on local communities and the wider environment.

Opportunities for Land Acquisition to Support Canopy Expansion

To build on current progress, officers proposed further development of a structured land-search and site-suitability framework. That would assist in identifying potential sites based on ecological value, soil conditions, planting capacity, habitat connectivity and long-term management feasibility.

Tree Canopy Partnership Scheme

Alongside targeted land acquisition, Council officers were further developing a Tree Canopy Partnership Scheme to support wider canopy expansion across privately owned land within Ards and North Down Borough. That programme built on existing engagement with residents and landowners and provided a structured mechanism to extend woodland cover, hedgerows and ecological connectivity beyond the Council estate.

The programme enabled eligible residents and landowners within the Borough to apply for free native tree whips, supported by professional advice and aftercare guidance. Planting proposals must meet minimum thresholds to ensure meaningful environmental outcomes, specifically:

- The creation of a new native woodland block of at least 0.1 hectares; or
- The establishment of a new native hedgerow of at least 20 metres in length.

Species supplied through the programme would be predominantly native and selected in line with the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy and Local Biodiversity Action Plan, ensuring planting contributed to habitat creation, climate resilience and long-term ecological value. Species mixes would be tailored to site conditions where possible, supporting successful establishment and climate adaptability.

To ensure public investment delivered lasting benefit, participation would be subject to agreed conditions, including the retention and appropriate management of planted

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trees. Council officers would undertake follow-up site checks over a three-year period to assess establishment success, offer practical aftercare advice and identify any issues affecting survival. That approach supported best-practice tree establishment while maintaining positive engagement with participants.

Summary

The report outlined the continued implementation of the Tree and Woodland Strategy 2021–2032 and associated Action Plan. The strategy formalised the Council's commitment to enhancing local biodiversity and mitigating climate change. It provided a vital framework for prioritising limited budgets toward proactive planting, essential maintenance, and effective risk management across the Council's tree stock.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Councillor Kendall was happy to support and thought there was a lot of great content in the report. She referred to the tree and woodland calendar of events and thought much of that was focused on Bangor and she suggested that it would be welcomed to have that extended more widely throughout the Borough.

It was thought that Members would not be too surprised to see the plans on this in respect of the King John Walk, where there would be some cutting back of Ash trees and there would be some hedgerows being planted as well as more mature trees.

Alderman Adair thought this was a good report and he was pleased to see that the Council was engaging with local schools. He referred to The Green in Kircubbin where the Cherry Blossom had been very welcomed by local people and asked if more of those trees could be planted in that area.

The Chair of the Committee also welcomed the extensive tree planting being undertaken in the Borough and referring to the planting at Bloomfield hoped the path around the sports pitch as a way to immerse people in trees would be retained.

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

11. REWILDING – 2026 PROGRESS REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that this report provided Members with an update on the Council's Rewilding Initiative and the progress made in recent months. Rewilding focused on restoring natural ecosystems and supporting a healthier balance between people and nature, enabling both to thrive.

Across the UK, public open spaces were increasingly being managed to create and maintain meadow grasslands. The Council's vision for the Rewilding Initiative was to manage our natural assets in a way that supported nature's recovery. Amenity

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grassland represented the Council's largest landholding, but it was also the least biodiverse. Changing how the land was managed therefore had the potential to make the greatest impact on local biodiversity. Promoting biodiversity was also a statutory requirement under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The sites currently being managed for rewilding covered a total of 154,002m², following the addition of a further 21,700m² last year (reported in May 2025). Those sites would continue under an updated maintenance programme aimed at increasing the diversity and abundance of flowering plants, benefitting pollinators and enhancing overall biodiversity. Alongside routine maintenance, schedules would be adjusted to accommodate occasional event use at certain locations.

It was important that the rewilding initiative complemented the wider use of parks, ensuring a balanced offer across the portfolio. Events and community use would therefore continue to be supported through an integrated grassland management approach tailored to each site. At this stage, there had been no further increase in the total area rewilded. The focus had instead been on transitioning each site, in turn, to a management approach that reflected its specific ground conditions and local climate.

Key Issues

Key updates 2025-2026

Rewilding Signage

Additional rewilding signs had been delivered ahead of installation across rewilding locations. The signs mirrored the Brompton design and included information on rewilding, together with a QR code linking to the Council website.



Rewilding Through the Seasons: Staff from Parks and Cemeteries had engaged a local photographer to visually capture the rewilding process across sites managed under the initiative throughout the year. That would help us monitor seasonal landscape changes and track the evolution of those sites over time.

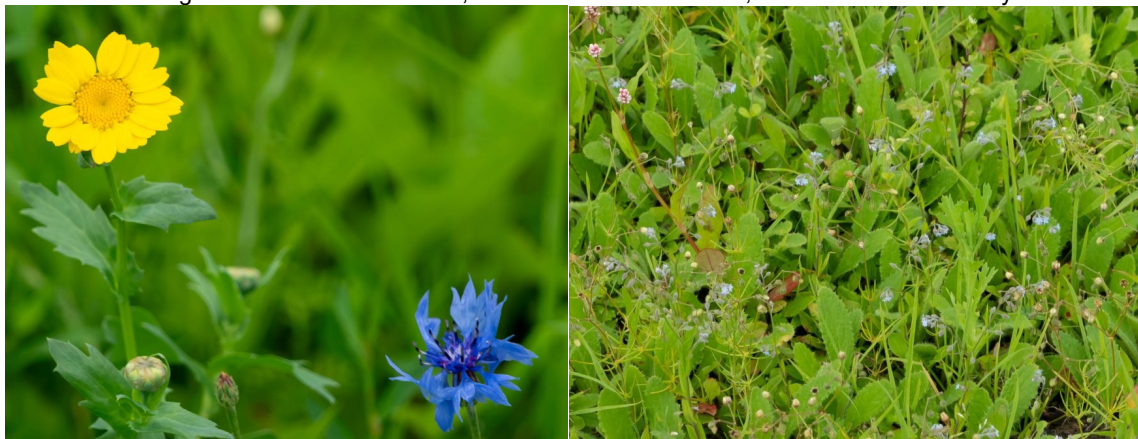
As an example, the Bowtown Rewilding Site was surveyed by the RSPB in 2023. It was recorded as a mix of poor semi-improved grassland, scrub, hedgerow, and a small number of trees. Species such as ragwort, dock, and spear thistle were found across the site, suggesting it had previously been managed intensively.



Following implementation of the site management plan, the ragwort, dock and thistle sward had been reduced, and a native wildflower meadow had been established. The images below showed some of the new species recorded on site over the past twelve months.



Images above – bee on radish, bumblebee on cornflower, meadow brown butterfly



Images above – corn marigold, cornflower and forget-me-not

In the longer term, parts of the site would be transitioned to a wild bird cover crop to help support farmland bird species. The plan also included developing other habitats by strengthening and extending native hedgerows, managing existing trees, and working in partnership with Castle Gardens Primary School and local community groups to install bird and hedgehog boxes. That approach helped build a community that was invested not just in using the site, but in looking after it for years to come.

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The Council would continue to manage and monitor the site and would regularly engage with the local community to ensure it was used in a way that worked for both people and nature.

Rewilding Workshop

On 18 March 2026, frontline Parks and Cemeteries staff participated in a rewilding workshop delivered by Buglife and True Harvest Seeds. Buglife, a UK charity dedicated to the conservation of invertebrates, provided an overview of the critical role insects played in supporting resilient and healthy ecosystems. The session highlighted practical actions that could be implemented locally to enhance habitats and support biodiversity across the Borough.

True Harvest Seeds, based in Strangford, outlined their work in the collection and preservation of native seed stocks, contributing to the long-term protection and restoration of indigenous plant species.

The workshop also included an update on the Council's current rewilding sites, demonstrating the positive impact those initiatives were having in improving biodiversity and ecological value within managed green spaces.

Feedback from staff was very positive, with strong engagement and interest in developing further knowledge and skills, particularly in insect identification and seed collection. In response, additional training opportunities were being planned to support ongoing capacity building within the service.

Seapark - In partnership with Buglife Northern Ireland, Seapark had been selected as a coastal rewilding pilot to enhance habitat and increase invertebrate diversity. Ground preparation was completed by EcoSeeds (cutting, lifting and scarifying to support locally sourced yellow rattle). The site would be sown in Autumn (September/October, weather dependent) with locally sourced brush-harvested seed; in the interim, Parks staff would leave vegetation uncut, keep pathways clear and undertake litter picking as required. Staff training, new signage and ongoing monitoring would support delivery and evaluation.

Next Steps

There had been no increase in the area rewilded at this stage, as the focus had been and would continue to be on moving each site, one by one, to a management approach that suited the site and its specific ground conditions and local climate. The Council would continue to monitor these sites in terms of species and habitats whilst engaging with local communities to ensure sites were used and protected for people and for nature.

Summary

The report updated Members on the Council's Rewilding Initiative, which was enhancing biodiversity by adapting the management of amenity grassland in line with statutory duties. The programme currently covered 154,002 m² across identified sites (Appendix 1) and was being delivered on a site-by-site basis to increase flowering plant diversity for pollinators while maintaining provision for events and community use.

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During 2025–2026, progress had included the installation of new public signage and the introduction of seasonal photography to monitor change; implementation of the Bowtown plan (including weed reduction, establishment of native meadow areas, and wider habitat improvements); staff training through a workshop delivered in partnership with Buglife and True Harvest Seeds; and advancement of Seapark as a coastal rewilding pilot, where ground preparation had been completed and Autumn seeding was planned.

Next steps included continued phased delivery across sites, ongoing monitoring, and further community engagement.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Alderman McRandal welcomed the report and referred to Seapark and Buglife and wondered if the plan was to include the community. The Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager informed the Committee that communities were always involved in rewilding location identification and Buglife had been brought in to help the Council increase rewilding in particular.

The Chair had a question in relation to rewilding in areas where it did not appear to be suitable and in response the officer said that the Council would look at other options and that was one of the reasons for taking advice from Buglife.

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

12. QUARTERLY SUSTAINABLE ENERGY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE 2025-2026 QUARTER 4 (Appendix VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in June 2024 Council agreed the Sustainable Energy Management Strategy and Action Plan. One of the actions within the Plan was to “Improve governance arrangements to ensure that energy management has effective oversight and accountability within the Council.”

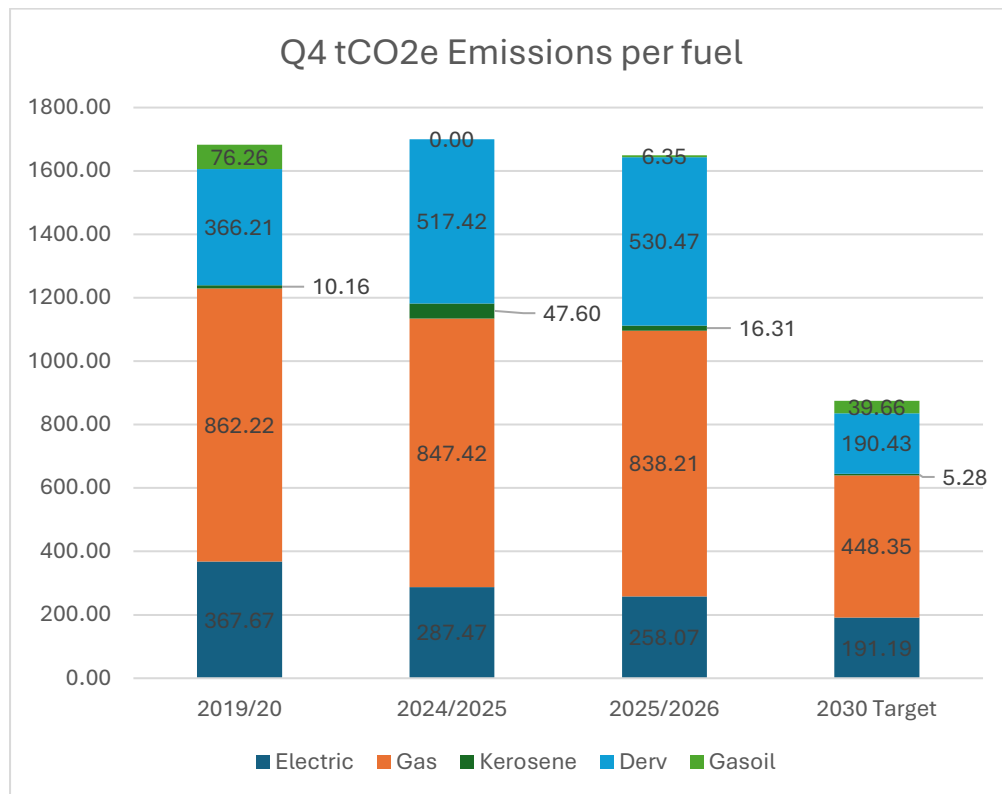
Improving oversight and accountability within the Council for energy management would ensure that consumption performance and the implementation of the Strategy and this action plan would be continuously monitored. Improved monitoring and governance would improve energy performance by ensuring actions were effectively implemented and consumption trends routinely monitored, which should result in reduced consumption, costs, and emissions.

Key Issues

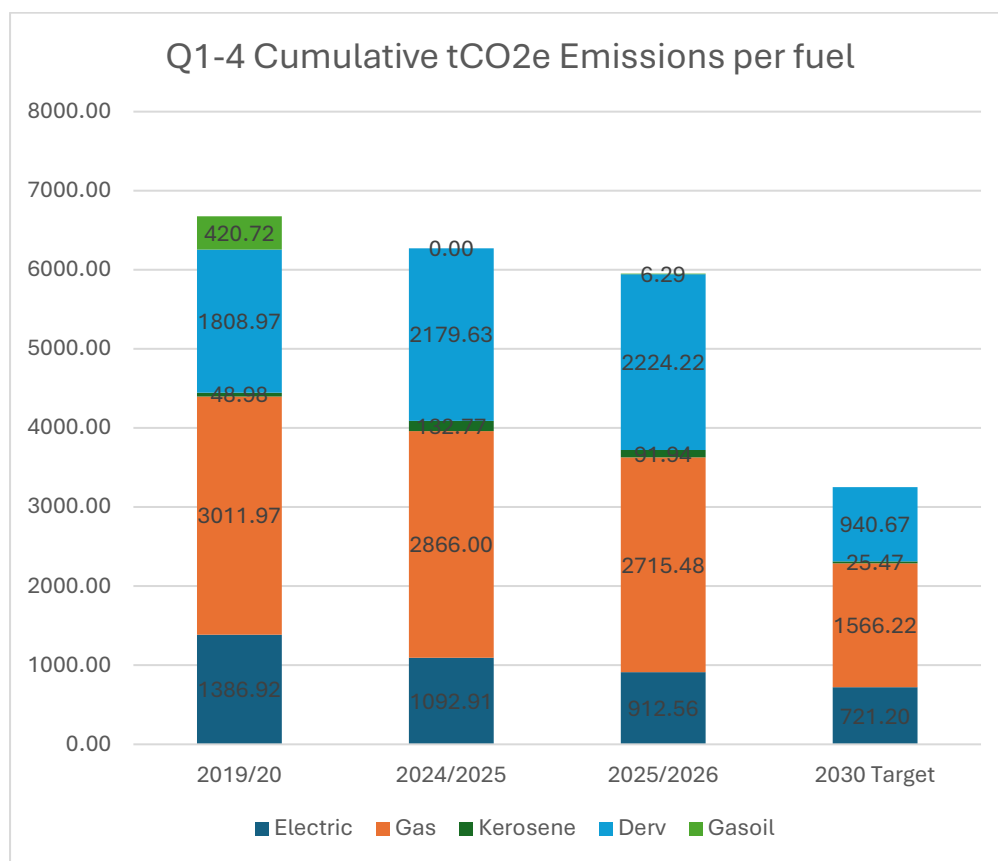
The report was part of our ongoing quarterly series, tracking energy consumption against our 2019/20 baseline and highlighting current and upcoming energy-saving initiatives.

Period:	Reported in:
Quarter 1: April to June	September
Quarter 2: July to September	December
Quarter 3: October to December	March
Quarter 4: January to March	June

Energy Consumption for this Period



Total Energy Consumption for 2025-2026



Electricity

As shown in the graphs above, electricity consumption increased in Q4, rising by 5% compared with the same period in the 2024/25 financial year. Despite that increase, the impact on emissions was mitigated by the use of green energy supply, resulting in a net reduction of 29.4 tCO₂.

When measured against our baseline year, Q4 also demonstrated a notable improvement, delivering a 29% reduction in carbon emissions, equivalent to 109.6 tCO₂. That reflected continued progress towards our emissions reduction objectives. We remained committed to building on this momentum through the implementation of additional energy-saving measures and by strengthening staff engagement across both new and existing initiatives, in support of our 2030 target.

Electricity consumption had continued to trend downward, with a cumulative reduction in carbon emissions of 16.5% across Q1–Q4, resulting in a 180.35 tCO₂ reduction compared to the 2024/2025 financial year.

Carbon emissions from electricity consumption had reduced overall by 34% equating to 474.36 tCO₂ reduction from the 2019/2020 baseline year.

Top 4 sites with the most significant decrease in electricity consumption in 2025-26

- Aurora Leisure Centre
- North Road Depot Waste Transfer Station

- Queens Leisure Centre
- Bangor City Hall

Top 4 sites with the most significant increase in electricity consumption in 2025-26

- Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre
- Londonderry Park
- Comber Leisure Centre
- Environmental Resource Centre/Waste Transfer Station

The increase in electricity consumption across the three leisure facilities appeared primarily driven by increased membership from the previous year, resulting in higher occupancy and demand.

The waste transfer station had had its third compactor and 'cyclovent' re-commissioned following recent accommodation works. The equipment represented a significant electrical load on the site. Wind turbine generation remained consistent with the previous year, however export to grid reduced due to higher on-site electrical demand.

Gas

Natural gas carbon emissions decreased by 1.1% in Q4, compared to the same period in the 2024/25 financial year, resulting in an estimated 9.2 tCO₂ reduction in emissions.

Relative to our baseline year, Q4 also showed continued progress, with a 2.8% decrease in gas carbon emissions equivalent to a 24.01 tCO₂ reduction.

Gas carbon emissions had continued to trend downward, with a cumulative reduction of 5.5% across Q1–Q4, resulting in a 150.52 tCO₂ emissions reduction compared to the 2024/2025 financial year.

A comparison of weather trend data for 2024/25 and 2025/26 indicated broadly similar temperature and climate conditions.

Carbon emissions from gas consumption had reduced overall by 9.8% equating to 296.49 tCO₂ reduction from the 2019/2020 baseline year.

Top 4 sites with the most significant decrease in gas consumption in 2025-26

- Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre
- Aurora Leisure Centre
- Queens Leisure Centre
- Londonderry Park

Top 4 sites with the most significant increase in gas consumption in 2025-26

- Comber Leisure Centre
- Environmental Resource Centre/Waste Transfer Station

- North Road Depot Waste Transfer Station
- Spafield Pavilion

The increase in gas consumption across the two leisure facilities appeared primarily driven by increased occupancy and demand.

The Environmental Resource Centre/Waste Transfer Station experienced a major boiler failure during the height of winter. To maintain continuity of service, a temporary solution was implemented. However, the replacement boiler currently in use was slightly undersized compared to the original fixed installation, as it was the most suitable unit available at short notice. As a result, it was operating under greater demand to achieve ambient temperatures than the previous larger capacity system.

The North Road Depot Waste Transfer Station had an electric boiler installed last year to operate alongside a new gas boiler. Further optimisation was required to achieve the most effective balance between reducing carbon emission and managing operating costs, as the electric system offered lower emissions but higher running costs compared with the gas boiler.

Looking ahead, further action would be required to reduce gas consumption across the estate. Gas remained the Council's second-largest source of carbon emissions and addressing that was critical to achieving our 2030 emissions reduction targets. Planned measures included:

- Council Building Heating Policy - Reviewing and lowering existing heating control set-point temperatures to optimise energy use. Automating heating controls and expanding remote management capabilities to enhance control and consistency.
- Assessing the operational efficiencies of leisure centres with swimming pools. Those were the Council's largest gas consumers and carbon emitters. The assessment should identify opportunities for further savings through behavioural change and system optimisation.
- Reviewing and lowering swimming pool temperatures where operationally feasible.
- Optimising and transitioning to electric heating systems, supported by solar PV and other low-carbon generation technologies, to support long-term decarbonisation.

Kerosene

Historical data from 2019/20 suggested that six community centre central heating systems were previously operating on Gas Oil (red diesel). Those systems had since been upgraded to use Kerosene, which had contributed to an apparent increase in reported consumption. As such, caution should be exercised when comparing Kerosene usage data between 2025/26 and the baseline year, as the fuel switch impacted the comparability of figures.

As a result, the data showed an apparent increase in kerosene consumption compared to the baseline 2019/20 year, for the reasons outlined above.

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Kerosene carbon emissions had seen a reduction of 65.8% in Q4 compared to the same period in 2024/25 financial year, resulting in a 31.29 tCO₂ emissions reduction.

Kerosene carbon emissions had continued to trend downward, with a cumulative reduction of 31.8% across Q1–Q4, resulting in a 40.83 tCO₂ emissions reduction compared to the 2024/2025 financial year.

Diesel

Carbon emissions figures for gas oil (red diesel) used in small plant and Derv (diesel) used in the road fleet had been combined to provide a cumulative total for 2019/20 Q4 diesel emission, in line with the 2022 reform on red diesel usage.

Considering the combined reporting of diesel consumption, overall usage had increased by 21.3% in Q4 compared to the 2019/20 baseline year, leading to an increase of 94.35 tCO₂ emissions.

Diesel consumption in Q4 was also higher than in the same reporting period in 2024/25. That increase was primarily attributable to reduced operating efficiency across several vehicle categories, including rear-end loaders (RELs), refuse collection vehicles (RCVs), MacPac units, 4x4s and vans.

Total fleet mileage for this reporting period was 398,192 miles, representing a 4.5% reduction compared with the same reporting period in the previous financial year. Fleet diesel consumption totalled 194,365 litres, reflecting a 0.8% increase compared with the same reporting period in the previous financial year.

Diesel carbon emissions had demonstrated a minor increase of 2.1% across Q1–Q4, resulting in a 45 tCO₂ emissions increase compared to the 2024/2025 financial year.

A review comparing fleet performance data from this year compared to the 2024/25 reporting period identified an increase in fuel consumption of 23,307 litres, associated with a rise in vehicle usage of 199,847 miles.

A comparison with the previous financial year showed no increase in fleet vehicles.

Consumption Costs

The table below presents fuel consumption costs for each year, along with the corresponding unit prices. That allowed for a comparison of both usage and changes in market rates over time.

Quarter 4 Utility/Fuel Type	2019/20 Costs £(NET)	2019/ 20 Unit Rate £/unit (NET)	2025/26 Costs £(NET)	2025/26 Unit Rate £/unit (NET)
Electric	£223,293.85	£0.16	£426,752.72	£0.29
Gas	£187,824.39	£0.04	£304,892.85	£0.07
Kerosene	£1,539.07	£0.42	£4,020.26	£0.63
Derv	£136,267.76	£1.00	£224,115.85	£1.12
Gasoil	£14,282.96	£0.52	£1,867.17	£0.81

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TOTAL	£563,208.03	-	£959,781.68	-
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Highlights of Energy Saving Initiatives Delivered this Reporting Period

List below of recent energy saving initiatives in Q4:

Description	Annual energy saving estimate	Annual tCO ₂ e reduction estimate	Annual cost saving estimate £(NET)
Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre Solar PV	226,515 kWh	40	£67,107
TOTAL	226,515 kWh	40	£67,107

Refer to the attached updated Sustainable Energy Action Plan for comprehensive updates on all noted actions.

Next Steps

Future Measures Currently Under Consideration/Planning

- Fleet and Waste services would review the factor contributing to increased fuel consumption and identify opportunities to improve vehicle operational efficiency.
- Feasibility assessment into the trial of an Electric refuse collection vehicle (RCV)
- Use the Council's monthly newsletter to share energy-saving best practices with staff, encouraging their active participation in further reducing energy consumption.
- Develop and implement a Council-wide policy for the seasonal shutdown of heating systems during the summer months across the entire estate.
- Develop and implement an employee e-learning programme to promote awareness and best practices for energy conservation in the workplace.
- Replacement of boilers at various Council properties and upgrade of control systems.
- Survey and retrofit of LED lighting and lighting controls at various public toilets.
- Solar PV Installation at chosen compatible Council properties.
- Continuation of Car Park lighting LED installation.
- Walk-round surveys of properties to examine and review existing controls and settings.
- Surveys of existing buildings for insulation installation to be carried out and implemented.
- Energy targets & KPIs for service unit managers to be agreed for 2025/2026.
- Introduction of half-hourly Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) systems in highest energy consuming buildings.
- Installation of Building Management System (BMS) with Energy monitoring at various Council buildings. Further development opportunities for improved zoning, remote heating controls, heating automation and sub-metering of equipment to enable accurate scrutiny.
- Optimising existing electric heating systems.
- Installation of double-glazed windows at Church Street Offices.

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- Installation of double-glazed windows at Ballygowan Community Centre.
- Energy assessment and feasibility study of Ards Blair Mayne and Aurora Leisure Centres.

List below of future planned works

Description	Annual energy saving estimate	Annual tCO₂e reduction estimate	Annual cost saving estimate £(NET)
Queen's Leisure Centre – LED Lighting Upgrade	11,977 kWh	2.1	£3,114
Combers Leisure Centre – Dome Lighting	8,553 kWh	1.5	£2,224
Bangor Sportsplex LED Lighting (Outdoor Floodlights)	11,866 kWh	2.1	£3,085
Bangor Sportsplex LED Lighting (Car Park)	7854 kWh	1.4	£2,042
Signal Centre – LED Lighting Upgrade	5500 kWh	1.0	£1,430
Bangor Aurora Leisure Centre LED Lighting upgrade	37,739 kWh	6.6	£9,812
North Road Depot Waste Transfer Station LED lighting upgrade	17,860 kWh	3.2	£4,644
Environmental Resource Centre LED lighting upgrade	7,523 kWh	1.3	£1,956
Environmental Resource Centre Solar PV	81,358 kWh	14.4	£21,153
Londonderry Park Solar PV with Battery Storage	75,950 kWh	13.4	£19,747
Carrowdore Community Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080
Alderman George Green Community Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080
Glen Community Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080
Kilcooley Community Centre	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080

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Solar PV with Battery Storage			
Redburn Community Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080
West Winds Community Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080
Portavogie Community Centre – Battery Storage	~2,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	0.35	£520
Ballygowan Community Centre – Battery Storage	~2,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	0.35	£520
Green Road Community Centre – Battery Storage	~2,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	0.35	£520
Skipperstone Road Community Centre – Battery Storage	~2,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	0.35	£520
Donaghadee Parade – Public Toilets Refurb	2539 kWh	0.44	£660
Banks Lane – Public Toilet Refurb	1532 kWh	0.27	£398
Ballyholme – Public Toilet Refurb	1442 kWh	0.26	£375
TOTAL	327,693 kWh	57.77	£85,200

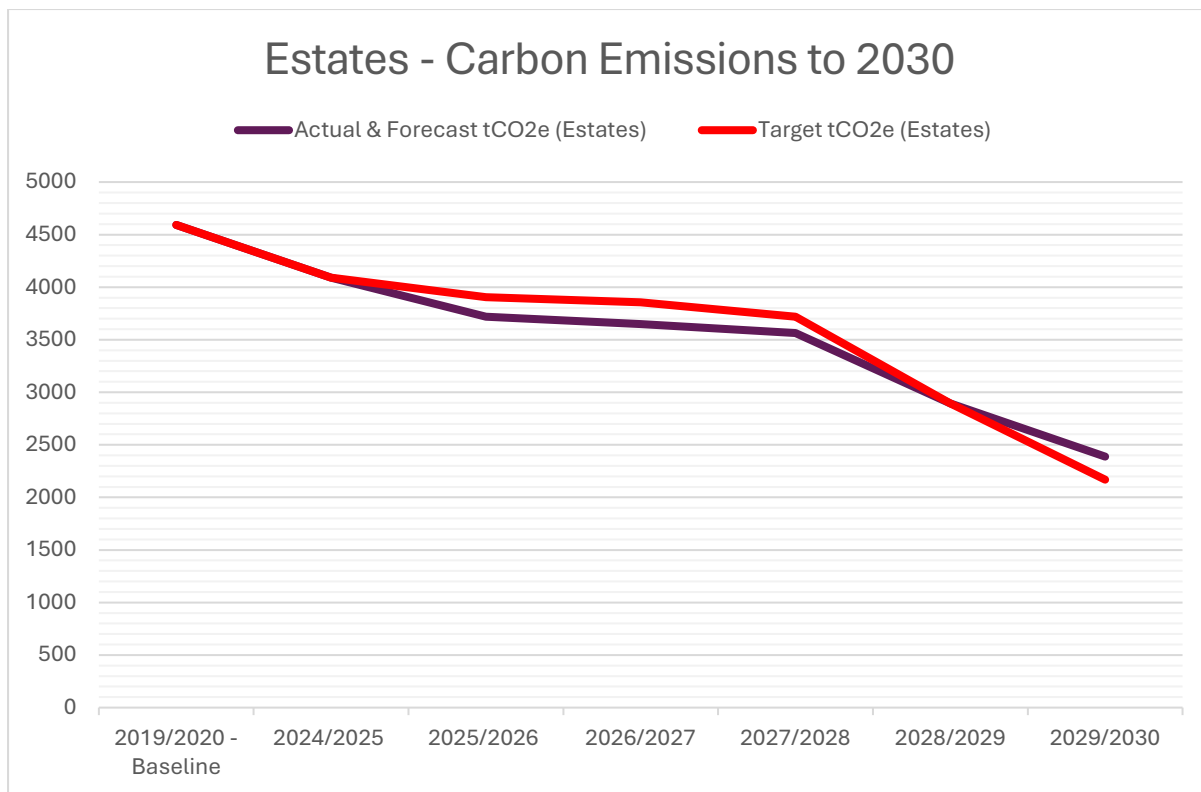
Summary

The graph below showed the overall reduction in energy-related emissions across the Estates assets since the 2019/20 baseline year.

The blue line represented the projected reduction pathway based on forecasted and actual savings achieved to date through planned works, while the red line showed the targets agreed within the Carbon Reduction Targets 2026–2030 framework.

Significant progress had been made towards achieving the Council's emissions reduction objectives. Current performance was ahead of the committed target trajectory and, with continued investment in resources and sustained delivery efforts, officers were confident that the long-term targets could be achieved.

Additional resource and forward planning would be required to develop feasible and practical energy saving initiatives from 2028/29 onwards, in order to recover the forecast variance and remained aligned with the target.



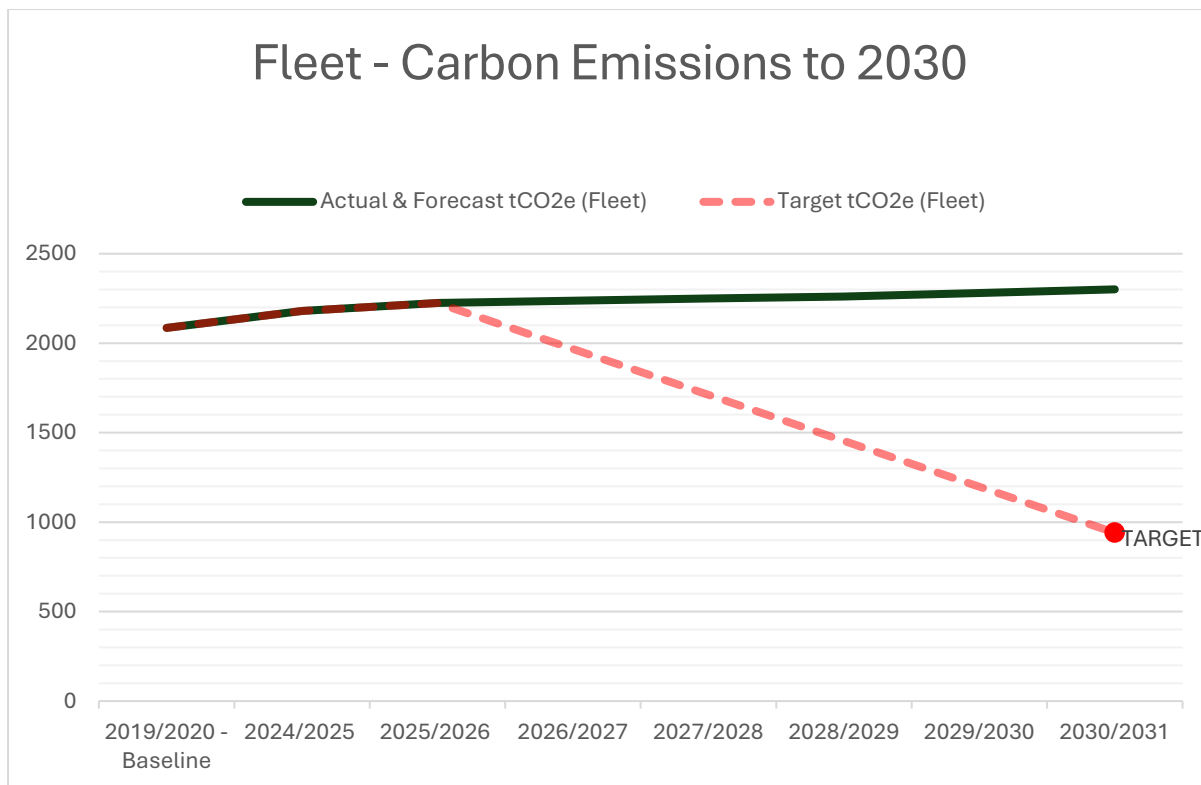
The graph below shows the overall change in fuel-related emissions across the Council’s fleet since the 2019/20 baseline year.

The blue line represented the projected emissions pathway based on forecast data, including the anticipated year-on-year increase associated with service delivery demands. Those projections also accounted for forecast emissions savings arising from the transition of the smaller fleet, including 4x4 vehicles and car-derived vans to electric vehicles (EVs).

The red line illustrated the emissions reduction targets and the incremental annual reductions required to achieve the Council’s 2030 target.

At present, there were no fully implemented solutions for decarbonising the heavy goods vehicle (HGV) fleet. The Council was currently exploring the feasibility of introducing electric refuse collection vehicles and electrifying other HGVs within the fleet. However, full electrification of the HGV fleet would require significant investment and would lead to a substantial increase in electricity demand and associated carbon emissions from grid electricity consumption unless supported by low-carbon energy sources.

Significant investment in renewable energy generation infrastructure and grid reinforcement would therefore be required to realise the full carbon reduction benefits of fleet electrification.



RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the latest quarterly energy consumption update.

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

Councillor Kendall was happy to propose what was a comprehensive report but she appreciated the actions to tackle the Council’s carbon contribution. Alderman McRandal was in agreement with that view and had nothing further to add.

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

13. NOTICE OF MOTION 595 BANGOR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE RESPONSE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Council had previously agreed the following Notice of Motion:

“This Council recognises the importance of Bangor’s early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council requests that officers bring back a report which evaluates how the physical link between two main sites, Bangor Abbey and the North Down Museum, could be improved, to include the renovation and potential remodelling of Bell’s Walk, with consideration for improved wayfinding and lighting. The motion also requests that officers consider how Bangor Castle Gardens and The Walled Garden could be better incorporated into the

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walking route, and how the overall attraction could be packaged to create a more complete tourism and placemaking experience.”

Key Issues

A multi-departmental site visit took place on 9 August 2024, attended by officers from Parks and Leisure, Tourism, and Community and Culture. A second site visit was held on 26 November 2024, attended by Councillor McCracken and officers from Parks and Leisure, Community and Culture, Tourism, and Assets and Property to further explore opportunities and constraints.

The first meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 7 April 2025, during which a series of actions were agreed. Progress against those actions was summarised below.

Uplighting has been repaired and is operational on Fluctus Angelorum.

Cleaning of three existing bell sculptures had been completed and continued to be monitored. Replacement signage requested for those bells would be considered within the wider signage review process and the ‘Castle Park Reimagined’ project.

Discussions were ongoing with Historic Environment Division (HED) regarding uplighting of the significantly historic St Malachi’s Wall Lighting structure.

The artist who originally created the bells had confirmed that they would have no issue with some bells being repositioned. Installation of a new path from the vicinity of bell ‘Bregenz’ toward Bangor Castle was currently being constructed. Once complete, bells ‘St Gallen’ and ‘Milan’ would be relocated on this new section of path creating a better flow of the trail and placing the bells in a more prominent position. Relocation of the ‘Bobbio’ bell would be considered as part of the wider park project when potential impact of visitors to North Down Museum could be considered.

Relocation of the bells would require redevelopment of the Bangor Bell Trail physical maps and heritage interpretation materials. That would be put in place following installation when exact locations would be known.

The new path currently being installed would also improve access directly to ‘Cross Hill.’ While that was welcome, officers had identified a significant amount of work required for this area of the Castle Park not only to reach its potential for promoting Christian Heritage, but also as a recreational offering for residents and visitors. Design of this area would be developed through the wider parks project.

Next Steps

Work to date was contributing towards a more cohesive and engaging visitor experience by strengthening physical and visual connections between Bangor Abbey, Bell’s Walk and North Down Museum, while also enhancing interpretation of Bangor’s early Christian heritage. However, much more could be done to integrate those areas as well as the wider Castle Park and Walled Garden footprint into a broader heritage and leisure offer. That could be achieved by improving accessibility and navigation through upgraded paths and wayfinding while also supporting the development of a packaged tourism and placemaking experience.

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To begin to achieve the full potential of Castle Park, a feasibility study would be commissioned through 2026/27 as part of the 'Castle Park Reimagined' project. The project aimed to create a major nature-inspired visitor destination, cultural and business opportunities, exceptional recreational and visitor facilities. Central to achieving that would be promoting and enhancing the heritage offering, building on the offering already in place within Castle Park and the great success of Bangor Castle Walled Garden.

Summary

The Council agreed to explore improvements to the links between Bangor Abbey, Bell's Walk and North Down Museum, including better paths, lighting, wayfinding, and integration with Castle Park and the Walled Garden to enhance the overall visitor experience.

Since then, works had progressed, including repairing lighting, cleaning, process of repositioning bell sculptures, constructing of new paths, and progressing discussions with heritage bodies. Further updates to signage and interpretation would follow once changes were complete.

While those works had improved connectivity and the visitor experience, further development was needed to fully realise the area's heritage and recreational potential. A feasibility study would be commissioned in 2026/27 as part of the '*Castle Park Reimagined*' project to develop a more integrated, high-quality tourism and placemaking offer.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Alderman McRandal thought the report was very positive and had referred many times to the Borough's very rich early Christian heritage. It was also welcomed by his colleague Councillor McCracken. He believed the initiative should be celebrated and used to promote tourism. He welcomed the plans and the enhancements to the Bell walk and the sculpture itself. As seconder, Councillor Wray echoed those words believing the initiative to be fantastic.

The Chair also welcomed the proposals and added that lighting up the area would be enhancing at night. He hoped that signage would also be added to explain the significance of the area to residents and visitors to the area.

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

14. DONAGHADEE FOOTBALL AND HOCKEY UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of the report was to update Members on the current

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position regarding an element of sports facility investment in Donaghadee, to outline the steps now being taken following the transfer of Outdoor Leisure responsibilities to the Parks and Cemeteries Service, and to confirm that an updated Outline Business Case would be progressed to assess options, affordability, deliverability and stakeholder requirements.

The Donaghadee Sports Project had been under development since the project was managed by Ards Borough Council, since then a number of feasibility studies, business cases and site options had been explored. In 2017, Strategic Leisure Limited (SLL) completed a Borough-wide facilities review on behalf of Sport NI which recommended the development of a single multi-sport hub to accommodate all four Donaghadee sports clubs (Rugby, Cricket, Football and Hockey) on one shared site. A subsequent Business Case and design process produced a shared site proposal estimated then at £7.6 million, aligned with Sport NI's recommendation at the time of strategic shared hubs. However, the proposal did not progress due to several factors, including planning advice indicating that development on designated Green Space was unlikely to be approved, not all clubs willing to co-operate sufficiently, and indicative costs of clubs booking and using new facilities. Further site investigations considered the potential expansion of Donaldson Park, including the purchase of adjacent land.

Council subsequently adopted the Treasury Green Book Business Case Model for projects of this size, and a review concluded that the original single site approach offered too narrow an options base in any case, and a new business case was commissioned.

That was completed in May 2022 by S3 Solutions. The new business case was approved by the Council which found that cricket, rugby and football were generally content to remain at their current locations but required major facility upgrades. Hockey, based in Bangor, wished to return to Donaghadee, and several location options were assessed. S3 Solutions presented options outlining potential layouts and management models. Following discussions with clubs and stakeholders, two options were recommended to be progressed for further Council consideration. Clubs were asked for their input into developing operating models and their preferred location options. Engagement with the clubs continued as a result in an attempt to determine that. Some progress was made in relation to cricket and rugby which led to the development of leasing models at their existing sites.

On 15 January 2025, a report was presented to the Community and Wellbeing Committee in response to a Notice of Motion acknowledging the considerable delays and frustration experienced by the football club. The Motion requested that officers engage meaningfully with all Donaghadee sports clubs and bring forward a report on external funding opportunities or, if necessary, options for direct Council investment. Football had not reciprocated the attempts by officers to obtain meaningful information that could be acted upon up to this time.

In 2025, the Council also established a Member Working Group to review the Council's overall capital ambition. While no firm recommendations had yet been made, it was anticipated that this work would deliver recommendations for the Council's consideration.

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Key Issues

In October 2025, a structural change in Council was agreed whereby responsibility for Outdoor Leisure facilities operated by Council transferred to the Parks and Cemeteries Service. That was significant in the context of the Donaghadee Sports Project, as Parks and Cemeteries now had operational responsibility for the management, maintenance and bookings of Crommelin Park, the location of Donaghadee Football Club.

Officers recognised that the clubs had experienced frustration due to the length of time the project had been under consideration. The project had been affected by a number of factors, including changes in stated preferences of delivery models by clubs, land availability, planning considerations, capital governance requirements and wider affordability pressures. However, the transfer of Outdoor Leisure to Parks and Cemeteries had provided an opportunity to reset the football club part of the project, establish a clearer operational lead and progress the next stage in a structured and evidence-based manner. Subsequent to the internal restructuring, the hockey club also confirmed its preference to relocate from Bangor to Crommelin Park, which allowed officers to re-engage on that basis.

Parks and Cemeteries Officers were currently therefore working with the hockey and football clubs regarding the Crommelin Park site, which was under Council management for maintenance and bookings. *(NB The Leisure Services Team under Active and healthy Communities continue to engage separately with Donaghadee Rugby Club regarding potential development of the leased arrangement at Donaldson Park, because that site is not Council Managed, and are working on developing the business case for that site.)*

Officers recently attended the Donaghadee Local Action Group meeting in April to provide an update on the current position. Further engagement would be undertaken as the Outline Business Cases progressed, including direct discussions with the relevant clubs to confirm current demand, facility requirements, programming needs, potential partnership arrangements and any club-led funding opportunities.

While the long-term project had been under development, the Council had continued to invest in Donaghadee's existing sports facilities. Crommelin Park had recently benefited from approximately £80,000 of drainage improvements to the grass pitches, and significant works had been undertaken in previous years to upgrade the changing pavilions.

Next Steps

For Crommelin Park, an updated Outline Business Case (OBC) was now required and would be developed by officers. The OBC would:

- Rigorously appraise all viable options
- Assess feasibility, affordability and sustainability
- Consider projected demand, programming requirements and partnership opportunities
- Identify a preferred delivery approach for Members' consideration.

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As part of the process, officers would implement a structured engagement plan with all clubs and stakeholders, including scheduled meetings, progress updates and opportunities for input into design and operational considerations.

The forthcoming regulatory changes relating to microplastic infill for synthetic pitches from 2031 would be factored into any future 3G development proposals at Crommelin Park. Officers would ensure that any recommended option was compliant, environmentally responsible and future-proofed. The site appraisal would also have to take into account DFI access requirements through a currently narrow entrance and any drainage infrastructure requirements from NIW.

Officers, as with all projects, would continue to support all clubs in identifying potential external funding opportunities, for example through the Sports Development team and the Borough's Sports Forum.

Parks and Cemeteries officers would maintain close engagement with the Donaghadee Local Action Group and with the relevant sports clubs as proposals for Crommelin Park and other sites progressed.

Summary

The Donaghadee Sports Project has been in development for over a decade, during which several feasibility studies, business cases and site options had been explored. Earlier proposals for a single shared multi-sport hub proved unviable due to planning constraints and land availability, leading to a renewed business case in 2022 that recommended upgrading existing club facilities and identifying a suitable location for hockey's return to Donaghadee.

The Council recognised the significant delays experienced by the clubs and acknowledged the frustration that had caused. Council officers were committed to communication, transparency and collaborative planning as the project moved into its next phase.

A key structural change in 2025 transferred responsibility for Outdoor Leisure to the Parks and Cemeteries Service. That provided a clearer operational pathway and would accelerate progress. Officers were working closely with stakeholders at Crommelin Park.

The next stage was the development of an updated Outline Business Case, which would rigorously assess all viable options, including feasibility, affordability, sustainability and compliance with forthcoming environmental regulations on synthetic pitch infill. Engagement with clubs and stakeholders would be central to the process, ensuring that needs, demand and partnership opportunities were fully reflected.

Officers would continue to report opportunities to members for decisions, while progressing the long-term development plan.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report update.

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

Councillor Wray had two brief questions, how long the Council envisaged this taking and what were the lessons learned that could speed this on. The Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager considered that it would normally take six months for the Outline Business Case.

Alderman Adair shared the frustrations of the people of Donaghadee, noting that the Council did not have a good record on such projects and that Portavogie had waited fifteen years and he hoped that the initiatives at Donaghadee would progress more quickly. He asked if there was an indicative timetable of when that would be presented to the Committee and the Director stated that officers were being as precise with the timeline stated as it was possible, in that it would take about six months to complete normally once all information had been obtained and a specification for the consultant to do the business case was appointed.

Alderman Adair said there was frustration being felt across the Chamber for the delay and lack of delivery and residents wanted to see projects progress.

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

15. CEMETERY MAINTENANCE SIX MONTHLY UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in September 2023, the following Notice of Motion was agreed by Council:

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

A response was tabled at the Community and Wellbeing Committee meeting in December 2023, at which Elected Members requested that a further report be brought forward setting out tangible options to improve cemetery maintenance. Further reports were subsequently submitted in June 2024, January 2025, June 2025 and December 2025.

At the above previous meetings, the Council agreed that six-monthly review reports would continue to be submitted. The report provided a further six-month update on cemetery maintenance activity and outlined the operational position since the previous report.

The Parks and Cemeteries Service was responsible for burials in twelve active cemeteries and for the maintenance of nineteen cemeteries across the Borough, alongside a wider portfolio of parks, open spaces and associated assets. Cemetery operations were delivered by skilled in-house teams working to established Standard

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Operating Procedures and in accordance with the Burial Grounds Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992.

During the reporting period, officers had continued to focus on maintaining safe, tidy and respectful cemetery facilities, progressing site improvements where possible, and responding to operational pressures including adverse weather, infrastructure issues, grave settlement and staffing constraints.

Routine inspections, supervisory oversight and ongoing improvement measures had supported the continued delivery of cemetery maintenance standards across the Borough.

Key Issues

Cemetery maintenance standards continued to be monitored through routine inspections, supervisory checks and issue reporting by operational staff. Priority continued to be given to burial operations, visitor safety, grass cutting, grave reinstatement, access routes, waste management, general appearance and the respectful upkeep of cemetery environments.

The reporting period had presented a number of operational challenges, particularly due to prolonged wet ground conditions at the beginning of 2026. Those conditions affected the delivery of some routine maintenance activities and increased the number of grave settlement issues requiring reactive attention.

Burial operations also had an impact on lawn areas due to necessary machinery access. Staff mitigated that where possible through the use of ground boards and by undertaking remedial repairs following works.

Staffing levels had reduced in recent months due in particular to vacant posts. Operational capacity had been kept up with use of agency staff, parks staff and contractors carrying out duties were possible. Despite those pressures, cemetery standards had continued to be maintained within available resources, with officers prioritising health and safety, burial operations, visitor access and site appearance. Cemetery maintenance standards continued to be monitored through routine inspections, supervisory checks and issue reporting by operational staff. Priority continued to be given to burial operations, visitor safety, grass cutting, grave reinstatement, access routes, waste management, general appearance and the respectful upkeep of cemetery environments.

The introduction of PSS Ultimate software had improved the recording and monitoring of those activities, supporting better visibility of service delivery and identifying areas for improvement. PSS Ultimate was implemented in September 2025. The Council was still at an early stage in the full utilisation of the system, with new sites, task types and asset details being added on an ongoing basis to build a more comprehensive dataset. Despite that, the system was already enabling us to monitor activity more effectively and provide clear, transparent information on service delivery.

The data captured was helping us to better understand where time and resources were predominantly being deployed, while also highlighting areas where service

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shortfalls may exist. That insight would support future decision-making and allow us to target resources more efficiently as the system continued to develop.

Adverse weather conditions and prolonged wet ground at the beginning of 2026 created operational challenges across cemetery sites. That affected routine grounds maintenance, machinery access and the condition of lawned areas. The wet conditions also contributed to increased grave settlement, requiring staff to respond reactively on a frequent basis. Grave settlement continued to be monitored and addressed in line with operational procedures and available resources.

Maintenance issues relating to roads, paths, potholes and other infrastructure continued to be identified and reported for repair. While those matters were being progressed through the appropriate channels, delays had been experienced due to contractor availability. Officers would continue to monitor infrastructure-related issues and escalate priority repairs where there were health and safety, access or visitor experience concerns.

Concerns were raised regarding the effectiveness of the one-way traffic management system at Movilla Cemetery, due to poor road markings and signage. Since those issues were reported, road markings were to be refreshed and additional signage had been installed. That had resulted in an improvement to site traffic management.

At Loughview Cemetery, issues were reported in relation to horses entering the site. Following engagement with horse owners, some progress was made by the adjoining landowner to repair boundary fencing. However, further reports were subsequently received. In response, officers installed Heras-style fencing as an interim measure. No further incidents had been reported to date. Officers would continue to monitor the effectiveness of those arrangements.

Complaints and service requests relating to cemetery maintenance continued to be monitored by officers. The majority of issues raised during the reporting period had related to weather-related ground conditions, grave settlement, infrastructure defects, grass cutting, access and site-specific maintenance matters.

Where issues were reported, they were reviewed and actioned where appropriate within available resources. Priority was given to matters involving health and safety, burial operations, visitor access, grave reinstatement and the appearance of all cemetery sites.

Officers would continue to use inspection findings, staff feedback and service request information to identify recurring issues and inform future maintenance priorities.

The principal risks affecting cemetery maintenance continued to include:

- prolonged adverse weather and wet ground conditions
- increased grave settlement
- delays to infrastructure repairs
- temporary staffing pressures

- contractor availability
- visitor dissatisfaction where works are delayed; and
- the cumulative pressure of maintaining nineteen cemetery sites alongside wider Parks and Cemeteries responsibilities.

Those risks were being mitigated through routine inspections and in particular the introduction of PSS Ultimate, manager oversight, prioritisation of health and safety issues, use of protective ground measures during burial operations, reactive grave reinstatement, escalation of infrastructure repairs and progression of approved improvement works.

It should be noted that continued delivery of improved cemetery maintenance standards would depend on maintaining appropriate staffing levels, timely recruitment, responsive contractor support and sufficient revenue and capital provision for repairs, maintenance and site improvements.

Officers would continue to identify and pursue opportunities to enhance cemetery appearance, improve the visitor experience, and increase operational efficiency, subject to available resources and approved budgets. Potential areas for continued review included:

- targeted resurfacing of roads and paths
- improved signage and wayfinding
- continued review of traffic management arrangements at larger cemetery sites
- prioritised response to recurring grave settlement issues
- further improvements to operational storage arrangements
- accessibility improvements where gradients, paths or surfacing present difficulties
- continued review of boundary security at sites where external access issues arise; and
- use of inspection and service request data to identify trends and future maintenance priorities.

Those opportunities would be considered alongside existing operational commitments, budget availability and wider Parks and Cemeteries Service pressures.

Next Steps

Officers would continue to monitor cemetery maintenance standards across all sites through routine inspections, supervisory oversight and service request information. Recruitment activity to address current staffing pressures would continue to be progressed. Operational teams would also continue to respond to grave settlement issues, weather-related impacts and site upkeep matters as they arose. Planned capital and improvement works would continue to be advanced during 2026, including:

Cemetery	Issue / Improvement	Current Position
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Bangor New Cemetery	Automatic gates	Business case approved; installation scheduled during 2026.
Redburn Cemetery	Automatic gates and path gradient concerns	Gates scheduled for 2026; options to improve path gradients under review.
Kirkistown Cemetery	Operational storage and site presentation	New gravediggers' storage area constructed at the far end of the cemetery, reducing impact on visitors and improving the entrance to the lawn sections.
Loughview Cemetery	Visitor shelter and horse access	Visitor shelter works underway; interim fencing installed to prevent horse access, with no further incidents reported to date.
Whitechurch Cemetery	'O' Section works	Scheduled to proceed in the coming months.
Movilla Cemetery	Traffic management system	The business case for improving site traffic management has been approved, with work scheduled to begin in the coming months.

Infrastructure repair requests would remain under review with the relevant contractors and services, with priority issues escalated as necessary.

Summary

This report provided a six-month update on cemetery maintenance activity and confirmed that service delivery had continued broadly in line with expected standards.

While wet weather, grave settlement, temporary staffing pressures and delays to infrastructure repairs had presented challenges during the period, those had been managed within normal operational arrangements. Progress had also continued on several improvement projects, including planned automatic gate installations, new visitor facilities, site enhancement works, traffic management improvements and scheduled works at Whitechurch Cemetery following weather-related delay.

Overall, cemetery standards had been maintained within available resources, with officers continuing to address site-specific issues, progress continuous improvement and monitor operational risks.

Officers would continue to review cemetery maintenance standards, respond to issues raised, progress agreed improvement works and identify further opportunities to enhance the appearance, safety and visitor experience of cemetery sites across the Borough.

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RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this update report on cemetery maintenance and improvement made within the Borough.

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

Alderman Adair considered an amendment that reports on cemeteries continued to be brought on a six monthly basis and the Director gave assurances that this was already the case having been agreed previously. The Alderman was pleased and reported that there had been a vast improvement in services within the cemeteries over the previous two years and it was important that continue by keeping the work under review. He went on to say that cemeteries were special places and the final resting places of our loved ones. He commended the work on the ground of cemetery staff and welcomed the new pedestrian access at Kirkiston. He explained that he and Councillor Edmund had met with staff to discuss cemeteries including memorial benches and maintenance and he hoped that could be built upon. He also appreciated the introduction of wooden memorials and he felt that was an appropriate step forward.

Seconding the recommendation Alderman Armstrong-Cotter thought it appropriate to highlight the work that was taking place on the ground and when she needed to address issues they were always rectified promptly. That acknowledgment had helped a grieving family to feel heard and acknowledged. Overall, she agreed that the report was welcome and she was interested to see what the new signage would do at Movilla in terms of traffic flow. She asked for her thanks to the team to be put on record.

Councillor Douglas thanked officers for the six monthly report and referred to an ongoing issue at Loughview cemetery related to horses and noticed that new fencing had been put up. She asked about the shelter at Loughview and when it would be put in place and the Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager reported that was scheduled for later in this financial year.

Councillor Wray referred to signage at Kirkiston Cemetery which was faded and now almost illegible. After discussion about the ownership of the sign Alderman Adair believed that the signage was owned by the Council and he had asked for it to be erected originally.

From his own perspective the Chair had never received many complaints in relation to the maintenance of cemeteries and he considered that the staff in the North Down area did an outstanding job. He referred to Bangor New Cemetery which had some very old graves and surrounds which were difficult to maintain and he asked what the Council could do there especially considering younger relatives had likely also died over the past hundred years. He asked what other Councils did in this position and he encouraged officers to see if lessons could be learnt from others.

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

16. PROACTIVE CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE REGIMES INCLUDING RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 702

(Appendices IX – XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Council was responsible for maintaining and cleaning over 300 hectares of open public space including parks, path networks, and public realm areas. The responsibility fell mainly to staff in the Environmental Services Directorate, across all three departments namely Waste and Cleansing, Estates, and Parks and Cemeteries. The maintenance and cleansing was carried out mainly on a scheduled proactive basis, determined by implementing an appropriate balance between prioritised need and budget made available. Those scheduled activities involved power washing, street cleansing, maintenance of planted open space and grasslands, and significant proactive maintenance of fixed assets including benches, tables, hard standing areas and all Council buildings.

The need for a review was determined following restructuring as for the first time all the departments responsible for public open space maintenance and cleansing became part of one Directorate, so opportunities for improvement and efficiencies were being given ongoing and further consideration. More recently a Motion brought to Council and agreed asked for the ongoing review to be reported back with options for Members to consider which could improve outcomes. The Motion that was agreed at February 2026 Council was as follows:

“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 has not 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 realm.”

Current Proactive Activity

The proactive activity for ease was set out in two sections. Maintenance (repairs, repainting, grass cutting etc) and cleansing (washing, cleaning and litter control).

1. Maintenance

The Council approved a Property Maintenance Strategy in October 2016 which focused significantly on a move towards a more planned proactive approach to maintenance. That covered the period up to 2026 and was currently under review. It related to not just buildings and facilities but also ‘shop front’ outdoor areas,

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particularly the busier areas where there was often higher footfall from residents and visitors alike. A full breakdown of the journey toward Planned Maintenance was included in the forthcoming Maintenance Strategy update report. The report however focussed solely on the maintenance of prominent outdoor spaces.

The Estates Department, as part of its planned maintenance activity established a public realm maintenance initiative with an initial budget of £30k per year. Its scope of works was to proactively clean, repaint, renew or repair the paths, benches, picnic tables, signs and bins in 20 high profile locations as follows.

	Town	Area	Category	Time req'd	Frequency
1	Ballywalter	Promenade	Medium	2 weeks	3 years
2	Bangor	Public realm works area	large	3 weeks	2 years
3	Bangor	ward park	large	3 weeks	3 years
4	Bangor	sea front	large	3 weeks	2 years
5	Bangor	Coastal Path 1	Medium	2 weeks	3 years
6	Helens Bay	Coastal Path 2	Medium	2 weeks	3 years
7	Hollywood	Coastal Path 3	Medium	2 weeks	3 years
8	Cloughey	Board Walk	medium	2 weeks	3 years
9	comber	Public realm works area	medium	2 weeks	2 years
10	Donaghadee	Public realm works area	large	3 weeks	2 years
11	Donaghadee	Commons	medium	2 weeks	3 years
12	Groomsport	Main St/Harbour Rd	medium	2 weeks	3 years
13	hollywood	Public realm works area	medium	2 weeks	2 years
14	hollywood	Seapark	small	1 week	3 years
15	Kircubbin	Promenade	small	1 week	3 years
16	Millisle	Beach park	Medium	2 weeks	3 years
17	Newtownards	Public realm works area	large	3 weeks	2 years
18	Newtownards	Kiltonga duck pond	medium	2 weeks	3 years
19	Portaferry	Castle Park	small	1 week	3 years
20	Portavogie	Promenade & Anchor CP	medium	2 weeks	3 years

The location of those areas was highlighted in the map in Appendix 1.

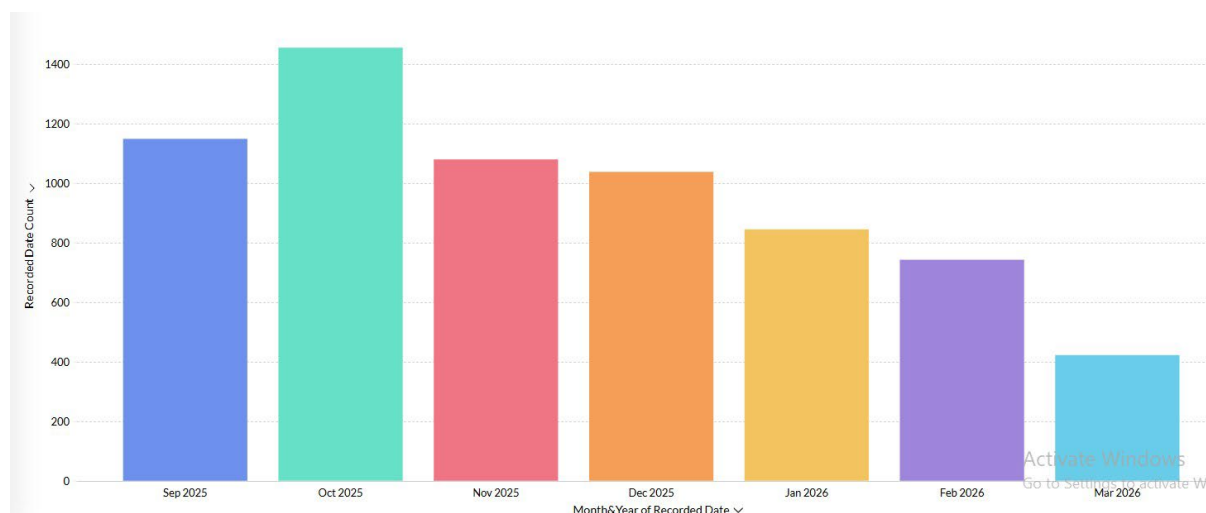
Further details of the activities at each location were detailed in Appendix 2.

For financial year 2026/27, the Estates Service received Council approval to increase this £30k budget to £55k, with a further £25k to be added to the budget for 2027/28. The additional budget would considerably increase the ability to proactively maintain those public “shop front” areas.

Since the introduction of PSS Ultimate, the Parks and Cemeteries Service task management software, this moved to digitally recording operational tasks within the service. From implementation in September 2025 to date, a total of 7,694 task records had been logged across the department, alongside 8,966 site quality check records. The Council was still at an early stage in the full utilisation of the system, with new sites, task types and asset details being added on an ongoing basis to build

a more comprehensive dataset. Despite that, the system was already enabling us to monitor activity more effectively and provide clear, transparent information on service delivery.

The data captured was helping us to better understand where time and resources were predominantly being deployed, while also highlighting areas where service shortfalls may exist. That insight would support future decision-making and allow the Council to target resources more efficiently as the system continued to develop.



2. Cleansing

The Council’s cleansing service carried out a significant degree of proactive activity in order to keep streets, public toilets and other estate clean and free from litter.

That could be considered in four categories:

Public Litter Bins

Approximately £753k was spent on this aspect annually. (£487k by street cleansing and £266 by Parks) The five largest city and town centres were serviced daily by Cleansing and all other areas were serviced between one and three times per week. During the high season, tourist areas such as beaches and promenades were serviced up to three times per day. The Parks Service also carried out routine servicing of litter bins in public parks and Council managed open spaces. Since 2022 the Parks Service and Cleansing had rationalised activity where possible to avoid duplicate teams servicing the same area. To address the issues raised by the Notice of Motion, Council Managers from Parks and Cleansing had continued to meet to work more collaboratively in order to maximise efficiency and effectiveness of litter bin maintenance across all areas of the Borough and improve outcomes.

The key objective of that was to firstly ascertain where there were areas of service cross over and identify where both services could work in collaboration to address litter collection during peak demand. All litter bins (Parks and Cleansing) across the Borough were now plotted on the Council’s GIS system. That had allowed for greater route maximisation and sharing between departments. In addition, purchasing more bins, extending the use of larger capacity bins with anti-bird flaps, more targeted use of litter collection, weekend rangers and volunteering had seen a dramatic drop in

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litter complaints since 2023. Services continued to meet to tackle litter and deliver continuous improvement, through better operational activity, engagement with community partners, education and behavioural change campaigns and enforcement.

Whilst it had proven impractical to transfer all waste bin maintenance to one department, the increased collaboration had improved the overall cleansing service provided by both departments. Furthermore, in the interests of providing an integrated, single point of contact to Members for the purpose of flagging up significant and urgent littering issues that arose at the weekend, whether they be in areas maintained by the Parks or Cleansing Service Units, a single email address was available (weekendlitter@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk) for Elected Members to use.

Mechanical Road Sweeping

Council spent over £1.15m annually on road sweeping. The five largest town and city centres were swept daily 7 days per week, supplemented by town centre warden activity. Some of those were five days per week and some were seven. Other towns and villages were serviced between two and four times per week. Many high-density housing areas were also swept every four weeks with anti-litter teams inspecting those every few weeks.

Power washing

The main streets and public areas of the five largest towns and city centres were each power washed three times a year at a cost of circa £130k, including chewing gum removal.

There were also proactive cleaning regimes in place for the Borough's slipways, harbour steps, skateparks and pump tracks.

Members may recall that there was an issue reported with the cleansing of street and facility signage during the Christmas period in 2025. A number of the areas highlighted were under Council control however many were not. In order to address the issue going forward it had been agreed that the facility or building manager, which was identifiable in every case, would be reminded of their responsibility to carry out cleaning of such external elements as well as routinely ensuring the cleanliness and timely reporting of maintenance issues within the facilities. That had been endorsed by the Corporate Leadership Team and communicated to all Heads of Service for onward messaging to their teams.

Town Centre Wardens.

The town and city centre wardens were 'on the ground' carrying out routine litter picking duties and general identification of issues for onward reporting. The regime was introduced in 2016 and had proven to be effective and any further opportunities for improvements to that service would be reviewed and introduced in so far as budgets permitted.

Borough Cleansing Survey

Council recently re-commissioned Keep Northern Ireland beautiful (now rebranded as Live Here Love Here) to conduct quarterly independent surveys of the Borough's

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main town and city centres, and to provide a performance report provided to Council officers. Survey results would be included in regular KPI reporting to Council. In previous years' reports, that had provided evidence of positive outcomes of the Council's routine cleansing activities and litter levels at randomly sampled times. Permission had been given by the Council to fund a similar monitoring arrangement going forward which would provide indication to officers on any areas that may require further attention.

3. Cleaning of Parks and Other Council Owned Open Spaces

The Parks and Cemeteries Service delivered routine cleaning and maintenance across a wide range of open spaces including parks, play parks, cemeteries, greenways, and landscaped areas. Planned activity included:

- Litter picking and bin emptying
- Path and hard surface cleaning (as required via contractors or using department owned sweeping vehicles)
- Graffiti removal (where required)
- Inspection and cleaning of play areas

Frequencies varied depending on the classification of the site, with high-profile and high-footfall sites (e.g. destination parks and promenades) receiving more frequent attention, while lower footfall sites were serviced on a programmed basis.

The introduction of PSS Ultimate software had improved the recording and monitoring of those activities, supporting better visibility of service delivery and identifying areas for improvement.

The service had recently invested capital expenditure in the region of £200,000 in additional equipment to assist in the ongoing proactive maintenance of areas under the control of the parks service. Those included up to date Parks sweeping vehicles, pedestrian footways sweeping equipment, and alternative weed control equipment. In addition to proactive maintenance equipment, the service was also a key stakeholder in all new infrastructure projects to ensure that it was best placed to effectively plan for and maintain and manage the public realm of such projects.

As a result of some now historic previous public realm schemes whereby the service was not considered as a stakeholder, there had been significant difficulties in efficiently maintaining certain locations. To that end, officers were working to address such issues with particular regard, as an example to Abbey Street Roundabouts and High Street planters in Bangor. That was intended to create a more visually attractive street scene with a minimal impact upon current workstreams and reduce maintenance demands. An example of that could be seen in the photos below depicting Abbey Street roundabouts with the planned investment of a resin bound surface :-



As part of the ongoing process of continuous improvement across the Parks service, Officers had detailed service elements into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). While currently in the development stage, once completed, the SOPs would provide the foundation to have greater standardisation across the service. That would inform the operational teams of the required level of maintenance across specific functions and bring uniformity to the service provision across the Borough.

Seasonally, high levels of waste could present difficulties across the service. In order to address that, the most efficient method of collection for both urban and rural locations was by way of compaction vehicles as currently deployed by Cleansing. That was an example of where greater collaboration had assisted in addressing peak waste flows during busy periods.

Ards and North Down had achieved a strong track record of success across both Best Kept and In Bloom competitions, with a number of towns and villages receiving top awards and runner-up positions. A Best Kept or In Bloom award demonstrated that a town was maintained to a high standard, with clean, attractive streets, well-kept parks, and strong attention to the overall environment. It reflected a commitment to good management of public spaces, including planting, biodiversity, and sustainability, which contributed to a positive and welcoming impression.

Locations including Comber, Groomsport and Donaghadee had secured category wins, while Bangor and Holywood had also been recognised at a high level. Donaghadee in particular had demonstrated consistent success across multiple competitions, including achieving top regional placings and national-level recognition and had qualified for the 2026 Ireland’s Best Kept Town Awards. Importantly, those awards also highlighted strong community pride and involvement. Success typically depended on collaboration between the Council, local groups, businesses, and volunteers, showing that people actively cared about and took ownership of their area. As a result, the town was seen as a high-quality place to live and visit, supporting tourism, placemaking, and civic identity.

In addition to the above awards, external validation of the service was provided through the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful Green Flag Awards. Essentially, that was an opportunity for elements of the service to be critiqued against quality standards set out in the Green Flag programme. Currently, the Council had 7 Green Flag accredited sites. Those were at the following locations:

- Castle Park and Walled Garden
- Clandeboye Cemetery

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- Ballymenoch Park
- Kiltonga
- Londonderry Park
- Cairnwood
- Linear Park

Reactive Activity

The Estates service operated a reactive maintenance provision for all Council assets. Works requests were logged on an Asset Management System and assigned a priority timescale for completion, either by our in-house team or a contractor. Around 6,000 such requests are received each year.

In Parks and Cemeteries in addition to planned maintenance and cleansing, a large proportion of resources was allocated to reactive activity. That included responding to:

- Increased waste volumes as a result of high visitor numbers
- Vandalism and graffiti
- Storm or weather-related damage
- Repairs to paths, structures and street furniture
- Fly-tipping and illegal dumping
- Public reports of cleanliness or safety concerns

High visitor numbers during periods of good weather had a significant impact on the service's ability to deliver its core grounds maintenance activities. Key resources had to be diverted from grass cutting and other horticulture duties to litter picking and bin emptying. That had a significant impact on the cyclic maintenance schedules for key locations and presented backlogs to key tasks.

Reactive work consisted of a considerable proportion of the overall maintenance workload and represented a substantial financial pressure.

Reactive activity was inherently unpredictable and could divert resources away from planned maintenance programmes, reducing the overall effectiveness of proactive regimes as previously stated.

Key Issues

The various proactive regimes were determined by the prioritisation of need within available budgets. Therefore there were a number of ways, either individually or combined, in which the activity undertaken could be enhanced in order to achieve better outcomes. Ways that could be achieved included.

1. Rationalise activity in individual locations so that more was carried out by one individual team from one department.
2. Reallocate existing budgets towards the higher profile areas and shift the balance of activity from one location to another.
3. Inject additional resource specifically towards areas to which more attention to cleaning and maintenance was desired.

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In order to implement elements of those options Officers had been working towards the following and would continue to do so over the next 12 to 18 months.

1. As a result of approvals given in the 2026/2027 rates, a Premises Officer would be appointed to each building within the estate as a central point of contact for any maintenance issues. Those were not new posts but an enhancement to the role of facility owners to recognise the duties associated with taking responsibility for additional elements such as compliance checks. That would also provide an opportunity to streamline the understanding of other duties such as cleansing (including outdoor signage), reporting and generally ensuring that visually standards were maintained to an acceptable standard.
2. As a result of approvals given in the 2026/2027 rates, there was now an increase in the proactive maintenance budget for Estates (as noted above). That would allow further resource to be targeted at the higher priority areas.
3. As referred to above (Vibrant Towns and Cities Fund) Place and Prosperity colleagues had applied for an Injection of funding from DFC, circa £1m to allow targeting of maintenance and cleansing, repairs and a replacement of public realm furniture, fixtures and equipment in the 5 main settlements. That would be administered through the Regeneration unit of Place and Prosperity and would allow further higher profile targeting and investment as required for cleaning maintenance repairs and replacements of FF&E.
4. Additional high-profile areas were being created which would need to be prioritised in terms of maintaining their condition and acceptability in standards. Allocation of resources to those higher profile areas such Marine Gardens, the new Ward Park areas and Greenways would be as a result of reprofiling of budgets and reallocation of staff, and if necessary subject to future business case approvals.
5. As a result of liaising with business and trade representatives over the winter, it had been agreed to implement routine walkabouts to which Elected Members and trade representatives would be invited to identify further opportunities for suggesting changes to regimes and reprioritisation.

Next Steps

Officers would ensure that the above additional measures and activities were undertaken and that a progress report was brought back for Members' attention in 2027/2028 on the impacts of the changes that would be made to prioritisation and allocation of resources and adjustment of regimes.

Summary

A significant amount of resource both financial and staff was committed daily to routinely cleaning and maintaining Council assets and the public realm as detailed in the report. Officers would continue to implement the changes and activities as detailed above over the next 12 to 18 months and report back to Members on the impacts of those for further consideration.

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RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the significant amount of proactive cleaning and maintenance activity already undertaken in public areas and the additional activity and resources planned to be continued with or introduced during 2026 and 2027.

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

Alderman Adair praised the Notice of Motion in relation to the public realm areas and the cleaning of those particularly on the Ards peninsula was to be welcomed. He thought that it appeared that two areas were missing, Portaferry and Portavogie and he hoped that had been an oversight since the Council had agreed to maintain those areas too. The Head of Estates explained that there was a limited budget and the Council could not include every area at every time but it did not mean that they were being neglected. The Alderman thought that it should be monitored to ensure that the investment made in those areas was maintained and he viewed it as important that the villages were kept maintained to the same standards as the city and larger towns.

As seconder of the recommendation Alderman Armstrong-Cotter thanked the team for the work that was done in Newtownards in advance of the King's visit but added that she would like to see that same standard every day of the week since Conway Square had looked beautiful. She expressed hope that the planting around Blair Mayne be continued. She had noted the Kiltonga area was on the scheme and it had been highlighted to her the problem of overgrown nettles and weeds there and she hoped that area could be maintained by the budget. It was explained that Kiltonga was managed on various levels and the aim was to let the area grow as naturally as possible with a commitment to keep the path clear.

Alderman McRandal asked about the maintenance of public bins at Seapark, Holywood, and Banks Lane, Bangor and if the service had been rationalised within the Council. The Director replied that the service had been rationalised as best it could be for now but was aware that there were a few matters remaining with overflowing bins which would always be kept under review and improved on further where possible.

Councillor Douglas thanked officers for the report and referred to public litter bins at Island Hill, Comber. The officer explained that that site was serviced by Council staff seven days a week in the summer and the position was challenging because the area was so popular with visitors. The Director added that the message to the public should be two pronged as it was good practise for residents and visitors to the countryside to take their own litter home.

The Chair thanked officers for the very detailed report and he considered walkabouts with the community a positive move to identify issues. He also asked about the use of town centre wardens who had been in place throughout the Borough for the past ten years. He thought it would be worthwhile reviewing the system at this stage to find out if that had been successful since feedback was not generally provided on their work. The Director replied that it was the intention to bring back a report on that work in town centres but they were a positive onsite presence litter picking and

reporting back on damage. The Best Kept Awards successes were viewed as proof that the town centre wardens were doing a good job on the ground. The Chair also referred to the Parks team who did, in his words, an amazing work but not on the Borough's roundabouts and he considered planting here would be quick wins for the Council since they were prominent. It was reported that there were plans for those areas with permanent planting and that would help significantly.

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

17. NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL AUTHORITY MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STATISTICS, OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2025
(Appendix XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the official waste management statistics for the third quarter of 2025/2026 (October to December 2025) had been released by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

The aim of this report was to:

1. Report key quarterly waste management performance statistics relative to the same period last year and other Northern Ireland councils.
2. Provide some detail around operational waste service management activities/actions that had been implemented during the quarter with the aim of improving performance.

In summary, key indicators remained positive for this reporting period. They showed that the Council had been successful in maintaining high levels of reuse and recycling. More detailed analysis revealed a reliance of higher performing HRC diversion, with a reduction in the percentage of kerbside collected waste diverted for recycling.

Key headlines

Sources: Quarterly data from DAERA's quarterly waste statistics reports. Annual performance data from DAERA's waste statistics 2024/25 annual report. [www.daera-ni.gov.uk]

Table 1: Overall performance 2025/26 vs 2024/25

Household Waste Recycling Rate (KPI(a2)) (National recycling performance indicator)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	59.8%	58.1%	53.6%	51.5%	56.1%
2025 - 2026	63.1%	61.0%	56.0%		
CHANGE	+3.3%	+2.9%	+2.4%		
Waste From Household Recycling Rates (Official UK recycling measure)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual

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2024 - 2025	59.7%	58.0%	53.5%	51.4%	55.9%
2025 - 2026	62.7%	60.9%	55.4%		
CHANGE	+3.0%	+2.9%	+1.9%		
NI Household Recycling Rate Ranking (KPI(a2))					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	3rd	3rd	3rd	2nd	3rd
2025 - 2026	1st	2nd	2nd		
CHANGE	up 2	up 1	up 1		
Composting Rate					
	Q1	Q2	Q 3	Q 4	Annual
2024 - 2025	38.8%	38.1%	30.0%	25.7%	33.6%
2025 - 2026	37.3%	37.3%	29.4%		
CHANGE	-1.5%	-0.8%	-0.6%		
Dry Recycling Rate					
	Q1	Q2	Q 3	Q 4	Annual
2024 - 2025	20.6%	19.5%	23.3%	25.4%	22.1%
2025 - 2026	25.4%	23.3%	26.2%		
CHANGE	+4.8%	+3.8%	+2.9%		

The headlines for household waste recycling were:

- **Household waste recycling rate (KPI(a2))** rose by 2.4% compared to the same quarter last year, from 53.6% to 56%. That was 5.6 percentage points higher than the NI average of 49.8%. We were ranked second out of the eleven NI councils for our household waste recycling rate, up one place from the same quarter last year.
- **Waste from Households recycling rate** rose 1.9% to 55.4% compared to the same quarter last year.
- **Household waste composting rate** fell by 0.6% compared to the same quarter last year - from 30% to 29.4%. Our household waste composting rate was 5.2% higher than the NI average of 24.2%. Ards and North Down was ranked 3rd in the council performance table for that stream.
- **Household waste dry recycling rate** rose by 2.9% compared to the same quarter last year - from 23.3% to 26.2%. Our household waste dry recycling rate (i.e. recycling of items other than organic food and garden waste) was 0.9% higher than the N.I. average of 25.3%. Ards and North Down was ranked 3rd in the council performance table for that stream.
- **Kerbside compostables capture rate** was 71.8% compared to a NI Council average of 63.8%.

Table 2: HRC performance 2025/26 vs 2024/25

HRC waste received (total tonnes)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	5,769	5,971	4,555	4,663	20,959

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2025 - 2026	5,824	6,275	5,572		
CHANGE	+1%	+5.1%	+22.3%		
HRC residual (tonnes)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	1,474	1,445	1,245	769	4,933
2025 - 2026	1,364	1,283	1,502		
CHANGE	down 7.5%	down 11%	up 20.6%		
HRC recycling (tonnes)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	4,295	4,526	3,310	3,894	16,026
2025 - 2026	4,460	4,992	4,070		
CHANGE	up 3.8%	up 10.3%	up 22.9%		
HRC recycling (%)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	74.0%	75.8%	72.7%	83%	76.4%
2025 - 2026	76.6%	79.6%	73.0%		
CHANGE	up 2.6%	up 3.8%	up 0.3%		

The headlines for HRC performance were:

- **Total HRC waste per capita** averaged 33.7kg, compared to an average 39.9kg per capita for all other NI councils.
- **HRC residual waste per capita** was 9.1kg, compared to an average of 15.8kg per capita for all other NI councils.
- **HRC recycling percentage** was 73% in this quarter, compared to an average rate of 60.4% for other councils. During the same quarter the previous year, our HRC recycling rate was 72.7%, compared to an average of 62.2% for other councils.

Table 3: Kerbside performance 2025/26 vs 2024/25

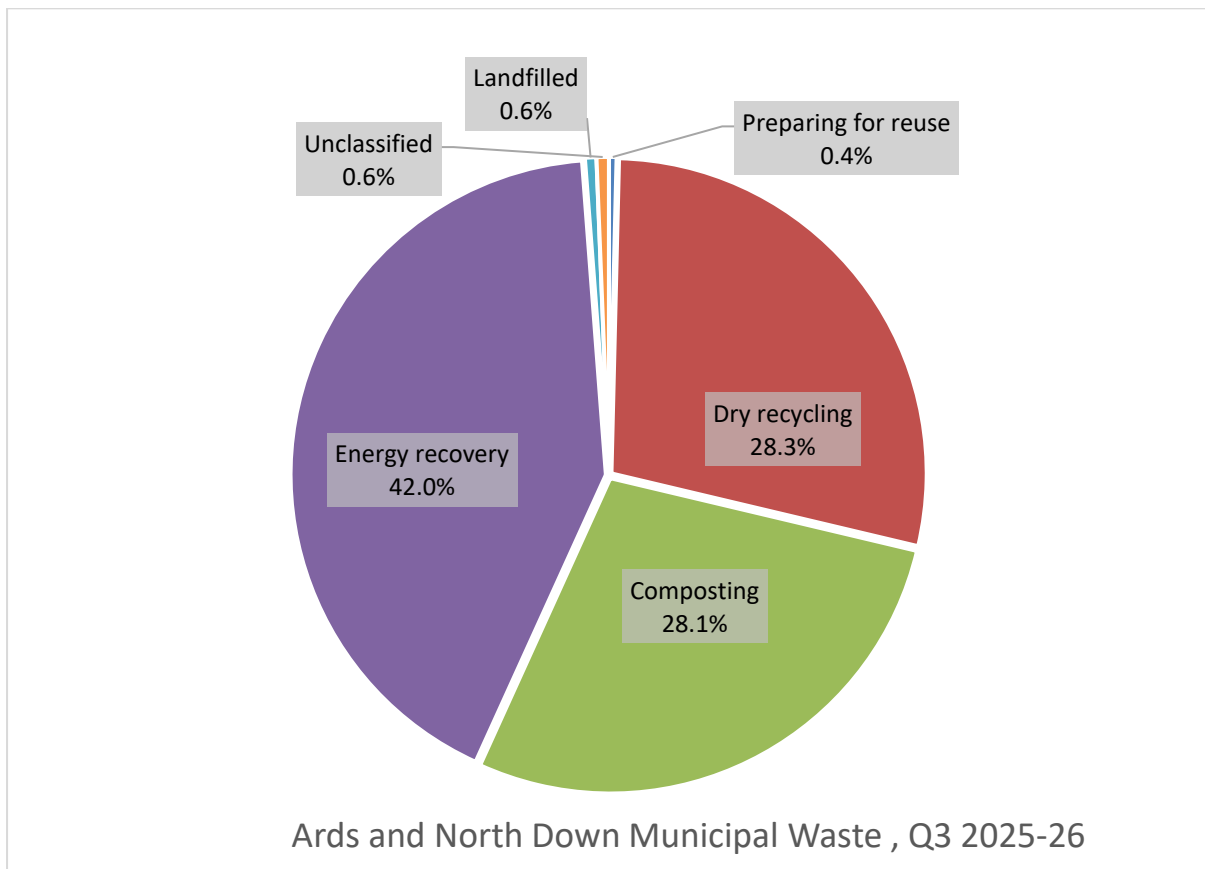
Total kerbside waste collected (tonnes)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	16,109	16,038	13,919	14,446	60,512
2025 - 2026	15,610	15,874	13,850		
CHANGE	down 3.1%	down 3.0%	down 0.5%		
Kerbside residual collected (tonnes)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	6,029	6,543	6,143	7,205	25,920
2025 - 2026	5,992	6,744	6,428		
CHANGE	down 0.6%	up 3.0%	up 4.6%		

Kerbside recycling collected (tonnes)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	10,080	9,495	7,776	7,241	34,592
2025 - 2026	9,618	9,130	7,422		
CHANGE	down 4.6%	down 3.0%	down 4.6%		
Kerbside collected for recycling (%)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	62.6%	59.5%	55.8%	50.1%	57.1%
2025 - 2026	61.6%	57.5%	53.6%		
CHANGE	down 1%	down 2.0%	down 2.2%		

The headlines for kerbside collection performance were:

- **Kerbside collected waste per capita** averaged 83.7kg during this quarter. The average for all other Northern Ireland councils was 82.2kg per capita.
- **Kerbside collected residual waste per capita** averaged 38.9kg per capita, compared to an average of 47.5kg per capita for the other Northern Ireland councils.
- **Kerbside collected recycling per capita** averaged 44.9kg per capita, compared to an average of 34.8kg per capita for the other Northern Ireland councils.
- **Kerbside recycling percentage** (the proportion of waste collected for recycling through our kerbside bin collection) was 53.6%. Although that was lower than for the same quarter in the previous year, it remained higher than the 42.3% average for other Northern Ireland councils.

Municipal waste overview



In Quarter 3 of 2025/26, 56.4% (11,473 tonnes) of the Council’s municipal waste was sent for recycling or composting. That included all material received through kerbside collections, HRCs, bring sites, and non-household collections.

The Council reported that 0.4% (78 tonnes) was sent for re-use or repair. For residual waste, 42% (8,546 tonnes) was sent for energy recovery during the quarter, and 0.6% (118 tonnes) was rejected as non-target material by our reprocessors and sent to landfill.

Operational Performance Improvement Measures

MC1 - Marketing and Communications Indicators

64 social media posts were issued across Facebook, Instagram and X. Those represented a mix of educational and operational messages including:

- Recycle Week (follow up messages)
- E-Waste Recycling including International E-Waste Day,
- Foil Fridays and Seasonal (Halloween & Xmas)
- Foil Recycling (Alupro assets),
- Cloth Nappy Scheme promotion,
- Food Waste (Pumpkins),
- Battery Recycling

- Festive Food Waste Campaign (WRAP Assets),
- Recycle Your Electricals/Disposal of Old Tech,
- Operational messages re: Bin Collections/HRC opening hours over festive season,
- The Winter Coat Project.

1 x press release issued. Copy available on website at [Love Your Leftovers: Feast Smart, Waste Less This Christmas in Ards and North Down - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

More detail on social media posts during the quarter was included in Appendix 1.

MC2 Bin-Ovation

- 4 Bin-Ovation ‘News and Info’ articles were published including holiday collection/HRC arrangements for Christmas, Feast Smart, Waste Less, Battery Fire Risk and E-waste Day 2025.
- 4 Bin-Ovation’ push notifications issued.
- 1,621 Bin-Ovation downloads recorded.

MC3 – Officers delivered 18 community and engagement events, reaching 1068 people.

- 2 x Events
- 8 x schools
- 2 x adult groups
- 1 x Brownies group
- 5 x Youth groups

Household Recycling Centre Indicators

HRC2 Number of visitors turned away from site: 436

HRC2a Number of HRC bookings: 77,429

HRC2b – Average number of HRC visits per household: 1.08 (averaged across the 71,976 households in the Borough)

2.3 Kerbside Household Waste Collections Indicators



KSI – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (yellow): 1612

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KS2 – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (amber): 133**KS3** – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (red): 63**2.4 Summary and Trend Analysis of Indicators**

Indicator Reference	Monitoring Period 10 (Apr to Jun 2025)	Monitoring Period 11 (Jul to Sept 2025)	Monitoring Period 12 (Oct to Dec 2025)
MC1 Social media posts	41	50	64
MC2 Print press and online articles	0	1	1
MC3 Engagement events/sessions	17	16	18
HRC2 Visitors denied entry	645	697	436
HRC2a No. of bookings	80,136	85,160	77,429
HRC2b Average no. of HRC visits per household in the Borough	1.11	1.18	1.08
KS1 Yellow warning stickers on grey bins	1938	1913	1612
KS2 Amber warning stickers on grey bins	161	133	133
KS3 Red warning stickers on grey bins	88	53	63

Summary Analysis

Our overall recycling performance demonstrated an increase of 2.4 percentage points over the same quarter in 2024/25 with the Council maintaining its 2nd place ranking in the NI council recycling performance table. This quarter's performance was in part due to good diversion at the Council's network of HRCs.

During the quarter October to December 2025, ANDBC:

- Recorded household waste recycling rate of 56%; the second highest household recycling rate of the 11 NI councils. That was an increase of 2.4 percentage points from the same quarter in 2024/25.
- Maintained a 73% recycling rate at our HRCs.

The total tonnage of material collected at the kerbside was similar to the tonnage collected in the same quarter of 2024/25. There was, however, an increase of 285 tonnes (4.6%) in the tonnage of kerbside non-recyclable waste and a decrease of 354 tonnes (4.6%) in the tonnage of recycling collected. For the last three quarters, the kerbside recycling rate had remained consistently below the rate recorded in the corresponding quarters of the previous year. Council Officers were reviewing options to increase kerbside communications messages and necessary enforcement interventions.

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Overall composting tonnages were lower than for the same period in the previous year. One of the reasons for that could be the sensitivity of garden waste to seasonal growth conditions. Autumn 2025 was the third wettest on record in Northern Ireland, with rainfall 39% above the long-term average. That may have reduced gardening activity during the period leading to less material being placed out for kerbside collection.

The Council's HRC network continued to perform well despite some limitations at smaller sites. The controlled access provided by the HRC booking system improved site flow and allows for better interaction between staff and users, helping to encourage correct segregation and higher recycling levels.

The Council continued to anticipate DAERA's published response to its 2024 Rethinking Our Resources consultation. The recycling consultation response was expected to outline consistent material collection requirements and new opportunities to support workplace recycling. That would inform and shape the Council's future waste and recycling service plans.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Councillor Wray was encouraged that the figures were continuing to improve and that Council staff and the public were buying in to the messages being sent out. He enquired about the recycling of hard plastics on the Peninsula and if more information could be provided on that. The Waste Resource and Contracts Manager replied that that was still being worked on and under the HRC review it was believed that there should be good provision right across the Borough and that was one of the objectives.

Alderman Adair concurred in respect of plastics and he considered that Kircubbin was the best site since it was bigger and more accessible to all. He wondered about increasing capacity at the kerbside such as for small electrical items, textiles and soft plastics. The officer advised that it was hoped to introduce soft plastics soon and that was at tendering process and was more delayed than had been hoped. The Chair added that the market had collapsed for textiles but he thanked officers and the public for the progress that was being made.

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

18. ISLE OF MAN VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR FISHING VESSELS (Appendix XIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in April 2026, the Council agreed to the following as a result of a Notice of Motion.

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That this Council is deeply concerned at the impact of the change to Isle of Man's visa requirements on the Northern Ireland fishing fleet. The changes which mean that overseas crew require an Isle of Man's work visa rather than the transit visa or UK skilled worker visa and therefore cannot fish within the Isle of Man 12 nautical mile limit, effectively excluding the Northern Ireland fishing fleet from its fishing traditional waters. Council requests that officers write to the Manx Government, to highlight the damage to the Northern Fishing and Fish Processing Industry and request that the relevant measures are taken by the Manx Government to reverse the impact of these changes.

Key Issues

The debate centred around the negative impacts understood to be experienced by the Northern Ireland Fishing Fleet due to changes in visa requirements. It was agreed that a letter be sent to the Isle of Man Government asking that measures are taken to reverse the impact of the changes. A response was received from Hon Alfred Cannan MHK Chief Minister of the Isle of Man Government on 27 May 2026 and was attached.

Next Steps

The Council was asked to note the contents of the response letter attached.

Summary

As a result of the notice of motion detailed in this report, a letter was sent as agreed to the Isle of Man Government. A response was received which Members are asked to note.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the attached letter.

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

Councillor Edmund appreciated the correspondence and the outcome. He could not say that he was totally happy but he did view it as progress. He pointed out that there would be a cost involved in getting visas and that, along with the rising cost of fuel, was an ongoing challenge to the fishing industry. He said that he had since spoken with Dr David Bird, Manx Fishermen Producers Association and the response was confirmed. The Chair of the Committee praised Councillor Edmund for being a great champion for the fishing industry.

Alderman Adair shared the view that the response had not been what had been wished but stressed that the industry was a significant part of the economy of the Borough and he wanted to thank the Council for supporting it unanimously and doing all it could to protect the industry.

Councillor Brady had been happy to learn that there had been some positive movement on this and referred to the efforts of the immigrant community in supporting the industry. Alderman Armstrong-Cotter commented and thanked Councillor Edmund for raising the Isle of Man visa issue and was disappointed that would be a further cost to fishermen.

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

19. NOTICES OF MOTION

19.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Edmund and Alderman Adair

That this Council task officers to bring forward a costed programme of works to bring slipways and harbours in Council ownership or control up to an appropriate standard in order that they can be utilised by leisure users as part of our wider tourism offering and to investigate appropriate funding streams to deliver this.

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

Councillor Edmund said this was not necessarily about checking slips and harbours but he wished to see how those could be best utilised for recreational purposes and how they could be used for various sea activities. He appreciated that this would be a lengthy piece of work but it was vital that it was provided. He also encouraged officers to look for funding opportunities externally.

RECESS 9.02 pm

RECOMMENCED 9.15 pm

In seconding, Alderman Adair said he believed that all areas should be examined, and it was important to search for external funding opportunities.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

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

This Council recognises the service and sacrifice of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), including those from the Borough and surrounding areas who served with dedication during a difficult period in Northern Ireland's history.

Accordingly, tasks officers to bring back a report to this Council on providing a memorial bench within Clandeboye Cemetery, Bangor, dedicated to the memory and service of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The proposed bench should provide a dignified place for remembrance and reflection for families, veterans, and members of the wider community.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine explained that the reason for bringing the Motion forward was that some of the members of the North Down Branch had come to him for advice on the policy for memorial benches. They had not been successful themselves and he

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had since spoken to officers who had suggested a Notice of Motion. The Veterans Champion had worked with the group in the past and there were around forty members of the Association buried at Clandeboye Cemetery. He thought that a bench would be a fitting and respectful memorial and many local families valued the way it would enhance the Cemetery. He asked Members to support and approve the installation since the Ulster Defence Regiment had an important role in maintaining law and order during a difficult time in Northern Ireland's history.

Councillor S Irvine seconded the Motion and acknowledged the service of those who in the Ulster Defence Regiment, including many local men and women, who carried out their duties during a challenging and often dangerous period in Northern Ireland's history.

He said the UDR served the country for 22 years, from 1970 until 1992, and throughout that time its members played a significant role in protecting communities and supporting the security forces during The Troubles and many had paid a significant personal price for that service, and many families continued to live with the consequences of that today.

He spoke from personal experience, having friends who had served, and knew of the commitment, courage and sense of duty they brought to that role including recent former Councillor Stephen Cooper, whose service and dedication to both community and country would be remembered by many.

At the same time he recognised Northern Ireland's shared history was viewed through different perspectives across the community. Memorials and acts of remembrance should therefore be approached with sensitivity, dignity and respect. It was for that reason he supported the proposal to request a report from officers on the provision of a memorial bench within Clandeboye Cemetery. Seeking a report did not predetermine the final design, location or wording, but it allowed the Council to consider those matters carefully and appropriately.

A memorial bench would provide a quiet place for reflection and remembrance for families, veterans and members of the wider community. It would also be a fitting and dignified tribute to those who served, and an opportunity to ensure that their contribution was remembered by future generations.

Speaking as the Council's Veterans' Champion Alderman Cummings commended the Members for their Notice of Motion explaining that he worked closely with the Association. He said this was a unique regiment whose battalions had lost 198 soldiers in the height of The Troubles. It had now been amalgamated with the Royal Irish Regiment and he looked forward to an officers report and was pleased to support the Motion.

Councillor Wray thanked Members for bringing forward the Motion and looked forward to further information on the special proposal.

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

20. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the public and press be excluded from the following items of confidential business.

21. TENDER REPORTS

21.1 EXTENSION OF HAULAGE CONTRACT

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the contract for The Supply of Services Relating to the loading, haulage and transfer of residual municipal, co-mingled dry recyclable, organic, street sweeping and bulky wastes, was due to expire on 1 August 2026.

The Arc 21 Joint Committee through which the tender was originally processed had agreed that it should be extended for a further 12 months. Council Officers were in agreement with that approach for the reasons given in this report.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the extension of the contract.

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

21.2 EXTENSION OF TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF LEGIONELLA SERVICES

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that to ensure compliance across Council facilities, officers procured specialist contractors to provide Legionella services.

The Council's Procurement Section carried out a procurement exercise, and the tender for the Provision of Legionella Services was awarded on 27 June 2024. The contract was initially awarded for one year, with the option to extend for up to three further 12-month periods, subject to annual review. The original award was reported to the May 2024 Committee, and the first contract extension was reported to the April 2025 Environment Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees to extending the contract with the above contractor for Lot 2 of the Provision of Legionella Services be extended for a further year, in accordance with the terms set out in the original tender.

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

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.29 pm.

ITEM 8.3.

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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 11 June 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Smart

Aldermen: Adair (Zoom)
Armstrong-Cotter

Councillors:	Blaney	Hollywood (7.09pm)
	Brady	McCollum
	Edmund	McCracken
	Gilmour	Morgan
	Hennessy	Newman

Officers in Attendance: Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Head of Tourism (S Mahaffy), Head of Economic Growth (S Ferguson), Head of Strategic Capital Development (P McGirr), Economic Development Manager (K McGuckin), Strategic Development Manager (S McMaster), Corporate Project Officer (R Farr) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster).

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman (Councillor Smart) welcomed everyone to the meeting commenting that he looked forward to good work being done by the Committee, mindful of the passion that it had for the Borough.

At this stage he handed over to the Director of Place and Prosperity who provided an update on a number of new staff members.

The Director informed the Committee that two new Heads of Service had been appointed and were present at the meeting. He introduced Phil McGirr, Head of Strategic Capital Development and Steven Ferguson, Head of Economic Growth.

NOTED.

1. APOLOGIES

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

Apologies had been received from Alderman McDowell and Councillor Thompson. An apology for lateness had also been received from Councillor Hollywood.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest at this stage and the following Declarations were made.

Item 5 – East Border Region Contribution 2026-27 – Alderman Adair and Councillors Blaney and Morgan.

Item 21 – Proposed Business Improvement Districts for Bangor – Update – Councillor McCracken advised that he had previously been a Strategic Adviser to the Group but had subsequently stepped away from that role and as such had no further need to declare an interest in such matters going forwards.

NOTED.

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

3. GROWTH EVENTS FUND 2027-2030 (FILE TO/EG68)(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that in November 2020, the Council approved the Borough Events Strategic Direction 2021-2026 (BESD). The BESD outlined a vision for a more sustainable, successful, and impactful portfolio of events that deliver a range of cultural, social and economic outcomes for the Borough. Two requirements to make this happen were recommended within the BESD as follows.

1. The Council reviews and develops actions across four key strategic areas:
 - Events Delivery
 - Capacity Development
 - Grant Schemes and Funding Models
 - Event Bid for Model and
2. The Council rebalances its financial resource for event delivery and event industry support to underpin current growth and success and attract new ideas and organisers.

As a result of the requirements above, the Growth Events Fund (GEF) was approved by the Council in September 2023, and further to this an annual budget of £150,000 for the Fund was approved for three years, subject to Rates setting process.

The GEF was advertised and launched in November 2023. Prior to completing an application, interested parties were invited to attend a meeting with officers to assess if their event met the criteria of GEF. Conversations were held with four potential applicants, one event was eligible to complete an application. In January 2024, the Council approved the GEF award to one successful applicant, Open House Festival, for three years, subject to rates setting, annual Key Performance

Indicators (KPI's) and adherence to terms and conditions within each year's Letter of Offer (LoO).

Year 2 of the GEF opened in November 2024, two event organisers made contact with the Tourism Events Team with one eligible to apply. After a meeting with the event organisers, the organiser made the decision to apply to the Tourism Events and Festivals Fund meaning GEF had no applications for Year 2. As the fund was for multiple years support, GEF did not open for Year 3.

At the time of writing this report, Year 1 and Year 2 of the GEF had been administered successfully with Year 3 underway. A full review of the 'first' applicant would be conducted at the end of year 3.

Key outputs of Year 1 and 2 of the current GEF round included:

Objective	Outputs
Grow our local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Organiser delivered a total of 232 events throughout the summer months over the past two years. Attendees at these events include over 22,000 visitors from Out of the Borough. • Total economic benefit - £3,112,428 over two years. • Return on investment £14.82 for every £1 invested by Council. • With the introduction of a Blues and Jazz Weekend in Year 2 to replace Seaside Revival, the organisers have successfully engaged with an increasing number of local businesses. This includes eight bars on Main Street and High Street as well as local hot food providers.
Grow our visitor experience and destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The event delivered a marketing plan each year that gained total media reach of over 67.3million over the past 2 years. • New sustainable measures have been implemented over the past two years including recycling of cans and crisp packets at Ward Park and re-usable plastic glasses at the Court House events. • Over the past two years, the three main venues for the event (Walled Garden, Ward Park and the Court House) have all undertaken successful disability audits enhancing the appeal of the event to a broader audience and implementing innovative responses to the findings.
Grow the potential of our local community and place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The event has recruited and trained 183 volunteers over the two years and showcased six unusual event spaces throughout Bangor each year.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of some space within Bangor has been restricted due to the development work at the Waterfront.
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Next Steps

Officers’ assessment was that the first round of the GEF had met the objectives of the Fund with the data available to date. The longer-term funding model enabled the applicant to develop the event sustainably which was ‘distinctive to place’ and aligned with the objectives of the Fund.

Officers were therefore proposing only minimal amendments to the current GEF Guidance and Application Form. The existing criteria remained aligned with the Corporate Plan’s Economic Priority and the following outcomes:

Outcome 2	An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets.
Outcome 3	A thriving and sustainable economy
Outcome 4	A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors.
Outcome 6	Opportunities for people to be active and healthy.

For purposes of clarity and ease of reading, the proposed changes to the GEF 2027-2030 are set out below.

Introduction section

The following addition would apply to previous applicants, giving consideration to the fact that this was a second round of a three year Growth Fund which aimed to enable events to grow and become more sustainable.

Where an applicant previously received a Letter of Offer under GEF 2024-2027, plans for substantial growth across the event must be clearly detailed. There is no guarantee of a similar level of grant or any grant to any applicant.

Eligibility section

Inclusion of in-kind support as part of the match funding criteria.

This currently read:

Must demonstrate need for the Council’s financial support by showing match funding of a minimum of 50% (this can be made up from own funds or other sources of funds/sponsorship/grants).

The proposed change was:

Must demonstrate need for the Council’s financial support by showing match funding of a minimum of 50% (this can be made up from own funds or other sources of funds/sponsorship/grants and can include a maximum of 20% in-kind support).

Surplus

Requirements on surplus were updated in line with the Council Grants Policy.

Budget

To ensure the Fund could deliver the aim and strategic objectives of the GEF, officers were recommending the budget remained at £150,000 for 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30, subject to each annual Rates setting process.

Timeline

The AND Tourism Events and Festival Fund was advertised annually in October/November, to allow event organisers sufficient lead time to organise their events/festivals the following year. The formal awards were made once the budget was confirmed after the Rates setting process. As with the previous GEF, it was proposed that the Fund would run alongside the current AND Tourism Events and Festivals Fund.

As was the case with the GEF 2024-2027, applications would be accepted for two or three years support and the number and size of grants approved in Year 1 of the Fund (2027) would determine whether the GEF would reopen in Year 2.

Summary

In addition to financial support from the GEF, the Tourism Events Team would offer the following additional support alongside any GEF award:

- A dedicated Case Officer who would offer advice on completion of risk assessments, apply for use of Council land (if applicable) licencing etc., and provide additional advice on how to run and promote the respective event.
- Event Management Toolkit to ensure all event organisers are equipped with skills/knowledge to run their event safely, the Council had established an online toolkit, which was a valuable resource for all event organisers, irrespective of the size of the event. [Event Management Toolkit - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)
- Festivals Forum - Following discussions with local festival organisers, officers had established an AND Events and Festivals Forum specifically for event organisers and venues that host events. It met up to four times annually, featuring guest speakers, case studies, training and practical advice. Each event organiser who was successful in receiving funding would be invited to become a member of the Festivals Forum.

RECOMMENDED that the Council **Approves** the Growth Events Fund Guidance Notes and Application Form, and further approves an annual budget of £150,000 per annum for the years 27/28, 28/29 and 29/30, subject to the rates setting process.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter congratulated the Chairman on his appointment and continuing she stated that it was great to be able to propose the Growth Events Fund adding that it was important to ensure that it attracted additional businesses and tourists to the Borough. She welcomed the aims and goals set out within the report.

Alderman Adair commented that he looked forward to more events coming to the Borough and existing events growing. He noted that the Borough was well known for its events adding that the Fund would help to grow new and interesting events going forwards.

Referring to Page 4 of the report which considered the budget for future years, Councillor Hennessy asked if there would be any leeway in respect of inflationary levels.

In response the Head of Tourism advised that the budget referred to in the report was the budget which had previously been set and put forward as part of a budget screening process. It was noted that could be reviewed as part of the Council's rate setting process.

At this stage the Chairman expressed the view that this represented a real opportunity for the Borough and the Council's ambition for it.

Councillor McCollum referred to the in kind support and sought some further clarity around what that might look like.

The Head of Tourism advised that in kind support included the donation of equipment, staffing elements associated with the delivery of the event, promotion or advertising of an event provided by another organisation. It was noted that guidance would be set out how to associate costs with that.

The Chairman added that it was a very welcome report particularly with the details around the Festivals Forum.

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

(Councillor Hollywood joined the meeting at this stage – 7.09pm)

4. BANGOR WATERFRONT UPDATE (JUNE 2026) (FILE PCU43)
(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity providing an update on the progress across the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme. It also summarised the outcomes of public consultation and stakeholder engagement in respect of Pickie Fun Park and the BYC Watersports Centre. The report also sought approval to proceed with the revised Pickie Fun Park proposals.

RECOMMENDED that Council

- **Notes** the progress to date across the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme
- **Notes** the outcomes of public consultation and stakeholder engagement in respect of Pickie Fun Park and the BYC Watersports Centre
- **Approves** the revised Pickie Fun Park proposals as set out in Section 6 of this report, including the reallocation of approximately £375k within the Council's existing Bangor Waterfront programme contribution to support delivery of the revised scheme, leveraging additional private sector investment from the operator.

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

The proposer Councillor McCracken welcomed the progress which had been made on this adding that the consultation had clearly done its job. He was aware that some of the previous proposals for Pickie had been a concern for residents. Continuing he sought clarity around the following:

- Was this still planned to be a ticketed paid for experience with no free elements?
- Concerns had been raised around noise and anti social behaviour elements, as such was it sill planned to close the facility no later than 8.00pm.

To respond the Head of Economic Growth commented as below:

- The majority of the attractions would be pay to use in line with current provision
- In respect of opening times it was noted that in line with the new operational agreement, the opening hours of the park had been reduced

Continuing he advised Members of the operator's intention to possibly hold a number of late night events at the park and those proposals would go through the normal Council channels.

Councillor McCracken sought further guidance around the selling of alcohol at special events and asked if a special licence would be required for that.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that no final decision had been taken in respect of that however he indicated that his understanding was that it would not be a permanent licence.

Councillor Blaney also welcomed the progress which had been made and made reference to the connection to the roller coaster and water activities. He expressed disappointment that the two had went hand in hand and while residents would not have been content with the rollercoaster he believed the water activities would have proven popular. He made reference to the two splash parks at Groomsport and Donaghadee both of which were well used by young people and as such he asked that consideration was given to a facility like that in Bangor.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that the operator had considered what was believed to be most appropriate at the park and a revised approach was adopted. While the direction of travel appeared to be a move away from wet play areas it was something he stated which could be given further consideration.

Councillor Blaney commented that he was aware of the ongoing issues there had been with the wet play area at Pickie but having said that it had attracted visitors. As such he believed that it would be a shame if there was no wet play area in Bangor.

Also welcoming the consultation process which had been undertaken, Councillor McCollum noted that it had been very well carried out having attended the events and spoken with residents directly about their concerns. Continuing she referred to milestone variances being activated, actively managed and recoverable and sought further clarification around that. She also referred to the reallocation of the £375,000 within the existing programme and asked how that would be calculated.

In response the Head of Economic Growth stated in respect of milestone variances the Council had a number of key dates in respect of deliverables and included things such as the procurement of the design team and obtaining Planning Permission to name a few. Due to governance processes, it had taken a little longer than anticipated to make certain appointments, he added that any that had been missed he believed to be recoverable. In respect of the £375,000 he advised that had been the result of reallocation of Council funds relating to the wider Bangor Waterfront programme and specifically the Court House given the decision not to proceed with that.

Councillor Brady stated that it was great to see this moving forwards however he expressed some disappointment that the Court House proposals were now not proceeding. While he noted some information relating to that was confidential, he asked if further clarity around that decision could be provided.

The Head of Economic Growth reminded Members that the OBC dated back to 2018 and at that point Stage I of the Court House had not yet been progressed. During the intervening period a change of direction occurred with some alternative proposals given consideration in conjunction with the Court House and Open House Festival. Every possible avenue was considered to make the proposals work however it was deemed not possible to take forward Stage II of the Court House project.

At this stage the Director added that the team had worked with Open House Festival and the Court House the entire time and kept them informed. As such they were fully aware of the situation and when the end result came through, while they were disappointed, they were accepting of that and that everything had been done to see if it could proceed.

Councillor Gilmour welcomed the investment into the Pickie Fun Park. Returning to Councillor Blaney's comments around splash pools, she recalled that previously the splash pools had been replaced with splash pads due to ongoing maintenance issues. She agreed that it was important for consideration to be given to some form of wet play area particularly as many people associated Bangor with wet play provision.

The Head of Economic Growth commented that given the stage the current scheme was not at, it may not be possible to do that through Pickie Fun Park. However, through the Urban Waterfront and Public Realm Scheme this was something which could be considered along the area from Skippingstone to Banks Lane.

Councillor Gilmour welcomed that it would be kept under consideration.

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

(Having declared an interest in the next item the following Members left the meeting at this stage – Alderman Adair, Councillors Blaney and Morgan 7.24pm)

5. EAST BORDER REGION CONTRIBUTION 2026-27 (FILE DEV23) (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the East Border Region (EBR) was a cross-border organisation with local authority partners on both sides of the border that included Ards and North Down Borough Council. By exploring various funding mechanisms, they had developed and delivered a number of EU funded initiatives, most notably projects that were developed under Interreg and the various PEACE programmes. Its aim was to promote economic, social and cultural development within the following six partner regions: Ards and North Down Borough Council Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Newry Mourne and Down District Council Monaghan County Council Meath County Council Louth County Council Projects Funded Through the East Border Region since 2015, the only Economic Development led project funded through EBR was the PEACEPLUS Mini Digi Hub Project, for which a letter of offer was signed on the 28 May 2025. This €6.3M project worked over the six partner Councils and one academic institution, Dundalk Institution of Technology.

The Ards and North Down allocated budget was €553K (£482K) which would be used to re-imagine the Comber Community Centre as a Digi Hub and Internet of Things Exemplar centre. The legacy Councils of Ards BC and North Down BC would also have availed of monies from EBR for various projects including; Eisenhower Pier Project, Greyabbey Walking Trails project and Car Park, North Down Museum Christian Heritage project, Bangor Castle UV lighting project and the FASTER (electric Vehicle) project. Further details on those projects and respective budgets were available in Appendix 1: East Border Region Past Projects

A request from East Border Region had been received asking the Council to contribute £20,000 towards the organisation to support its work in securing and managing funding for the region's members for the financial year 2026-27. This was the agreed amount for the past number of years.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees the request from East Border Region to contribute £20,000 to support its ongoing work as highlighted in this report. A budget provision has been made for this.

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

The proposer Councillor Brady commented that he believed this was an excellent return on investment adding that the Council was lucky to have the partnership in place.

Councillor McCollum noted that this was a very worthwhile relationship adding that she had no issue with it continuing particularly as contributions were not increasing.

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

(Alderman Adair, Councillors Blaney and Morgan returned to the meeting at this stage – 7.25pm)

6. MINI DIGI HUB – UPDATE (FILE DEVP23)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that project work was underway as part of the PEACEPLUS funded “Mini Digi Hubs” project. This cross border project was led by the East Border Region and funded through the “Smart Towns and Villages” strategic priority of PEACEPLUS. As previously recommended, the focus of the capital investment would be with Comber Community Centre. Following on from receipt of the letter of offer in March 2025 and subsequent legal review this had now been signed following Council permission.

This project would see a significant facelift to the Comber Community Centre in line with the ambitions of the Mini Digi Hub project. The intervention would be delivered to add value to existing users of the facility while seeking to attract new users. The building would be used, in addition to current usage, to accommodate training and mentoring in digital transformation that was funded through the project. The building itself would be used as an exemplar site to demonstrate digital transformation technologies.

Progress

The initial stage of the project was to establish a data collection solution at Comber Community Centre. This IoT (Internet of Things) system would collect data through the use of real time digital sensors informing officers on the environmental metrics, power consumption figures and usage of the centre. Tiger Tech had now been successfully procured and appointed to carry out this work and were currently developing the solution. The awarding of this contract would significantly further the project to answer the ambitions the “Smart Towns and Villages” funding mechanism.

In addition, a part time project officer had now been recruited to work exclusively on this project. Amidst ongoing stakeholder engagement, officers were currently in the later stages of developing procurement routes for Architectural consultancy.

Update

Officers had now finalised the details relating to the procurement route to commission architectural services. Following approval from the lead partner, quotes would be sought from appropriate architectural delivery agents.

Financial Implications

The Mini Digi Hub project was fully funded by PEACEPLUS with no financial contribution required by Council.

RECOMMENDED that Council Approves the above and the appointment of Tiger Tech Consultancy.

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

The proposer Councillor Morgan welcomed the proposal for Comber but added that she would like to see it progressing a little quicker.

The Economic Development Manager commented that there had been some delays around funding which had impacted the commencement of the project. However momentum had since gathered pace with a number of claims already processed. She added that she would anticipate further progress being made during the current financial year.

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

7. SUMMIT OF THE CITIES CONFERENCE 2026 (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Bangor was formally awarded City Status in December 2022 as part of the Queen's Jubilee Celebrations. At that time key local stakeholders, including the business community, indicated their desire to capitalise on this opportunity from a marketing and investment perspective in line with progress made to realise regenerations plans in the city.

Key Issues

With the Phase 1a handover of Marine Gardens planned for Autumn 2026, and work progressing at pace on the planning applications for the redevelopments of Pickie Fun Park and Ballyholme Yacht Club (Belfast Region City Deal), there was now 'on the ground' redevelopment work to profile across Bangor City.

As such officers had accepted an invitation to participate in the 'Summit of the Cities' event in Belfast on Wednesday 24 June 2026. This event, being held for the first time, aimed to bring together government leaders, policy-makers, entrepreneurs and cultural voices from every city on the island of Ireland to share ideas, confront common challenges, foster collaboration and innovation, and create a bold vision for city leadership. Agenda topics would include connectivity, housing/ community and

how the arts, heritage and culture can contribute to city regeneration. The former Mayor of New York City, Bill De Blasio, was keynote speaker.

Representatives from all six cities in Northern Ireland and all five cities in Southern Ireland (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) were confirmed to attend the one day event.

Next Steps

The Council had been offered five tickets to attend the Summit and represent Bangor at various panel and Q&A sessions. One ticket was allocated for the Mayor and one for the Chief Executive, with three remaining for elected members.

It was recommended that the Council nominated three elected members to attend the event at Belfast City Hall on Wednesday 24 June 2026, from 9.00 am – 5.00 pm.

Summary

The Summit of the Cities was a new event aimed at fostering collaboration and shared learning between cities across the Island of Ireland. Three elected members were invited to attend the event and contribute to various panel and Q&A sessions on topical and common 'city' challenges and opportunities.

RECOMMENDED that the Council Agrees to nominate three elected members to join the Mayor and Chief Executive at the inaugural Summit of the Cities event in Belfast on Wednesday 24 June 2026.

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

Nominations to attend the Summit of the Cities event were sought at this stage.

Councillor Blaney proposed, seconded by Councillor McCollum, the Chairman, Councillor Smart.

At this stage Councillor McCracken welcomed the opportunity for Bangor to be part of this Summit, adding that it was an interesting Agenda and a good profiling opportunity for the City. He added that while he would be attending the Summit through his day job he wished to propose that Councillor McCollum attended. Councillor Blaney seconded the nomination.

Councillor Gilmour commented that the Summit very interesting and she welcomed the range of cities which would be represented. Continuing she proposed that Councillor Cathcart attended and this was seconded by Councillor Edmund.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that the recommendation be adopted and furthermore that the following Members be nominated to attend the Summit:

- **Councillor Smart**
- **Councillor McCollum**
- **Councillor Cathcart**

REPORTS FOR NOTING

8. MINUTES OF THE LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (FILE) (Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Local Action Groups (LAGs) had now been established for each of the five urban areas: Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards. Introductory meetings were held during January and February 2026.

The minutes and associated briefing papers for the Quarter 1 period, as listed below, were available in Appendices 1-7.

- Newtownards Local Action Group - 21 April 2026
- Donaghadee Local Action Group - 23 April 2026
- Comber Local Action Group - 27 April 2026
- Holywood Local Action Group - 28 April 2026
- Bangor City Local Action Group - 30 April 2026
- Newtownards Local Action Group 12 May 2026 (Special meeting to discuss Christmas)
- Christmas Lighting Proposals

Key Information

Members were asked to note the following updates:

1. Christmas 2026 – Bangor and Newtownards

Officers from the Events Team were tasked with engaging the Bangor City and Newtownards Local Action Groups to consider arrangements for Christmas activity in 2026.

The events team attended two meetings of the Newtownards Local Action Group and attended one meeting of the Bangor City Local Action Group with a follow up meeting to be arranged in June 2026. Options for Christmas animation was discussed and associated programming. Please refer to the minutes.

2. Christmas Lighting

Members would be aware that a Notice of Motion was presented by Councillor McClean and Councillor Cathcart in April 2025, highlighting the tired and inconsistent presentation of Christmas lights and illuminations in Bangor city

centre and asking officers to consider potential festive lighting improvements for Christmas 2025.

An amendment was subsequently proposed by Councillor Morgan and seconded by Alderman McAlpine to extend this work across the wider Borough.

In 2025, officers responded to the Notice of Motion in relation to Bangor city centre by delivering new motifs for lighting columns and catenary lighting displays on the Main Street. This was delivered in collaboration with the Bangor City Advisory Group and funded by the Department for Communities and the Council.

The upgraded Bangor display was well received by both residents and visitors, with a significant volume of positive feedback shared on social media.

Officers had since secured further funding from the Department for Communities to roll out this initiative across the urban towns. Proposals had been presented to each of the Local Action Groups for consideration.

Key points were:

- Engineering reports indicated that only Newtownards was currently suitable for a catenary lighting display.
- The proposed lighting display for the lighthouse in Donaghadee was subject to consent; if this was not granted, an alternative location would be identified.
- In Comber, further engagement with the Chamber was needed on motif design, but members were otherwise content to proceed.
- Members of the groups welcomed the Christmas enhancements.

3. Car Parking

The Licensing and Regulatory Services Manager was tasked with engaging with each of the Local Action Groups in relation to car parking matters. A briefing paper was circulated in advance, and the officer attended each meeting to address questions raised by members.

The key outcomes arising from that engagement were to be noted.

4. Conway Square - Vehicle Access

A representative from the Department for Infrastructure attended the Newtownards Local Action Group to discuss the proposal for restricting vehicle access to Conway Square.

It should be noted that this was engagement only at this stage to determine the best way forward.

5. Regeneration-led Studies

The following studies were presented to the relevant Local Action Group for their input during the final stages of development:

1. Newtownards – Study to Explore Opportunities to Develop the Night-Time Economy
2. Donaghadee – Study to Explore Opportunities to Enhance the Tourism Offering in Donaghadee
3. Holywood | Comber | Donaghadee – Vacancy and Dereliction Study for each town

RECOMMENDED that Council **Notes** the minutes of the Local Action Groups Quarter 1 meetings and associated reports.

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

The proposer Councillor McCollum welcomed that the LAGs had now been formally established and held their first meetings with all of the right people in attendance. Referring specifically to Holywood LAG she commented as followed:

- Was there a date for the Focus Workshops to consider the Masterplans
- She welcomed that Car Parking had been included on the Agenda and an agreement reached for two hours parking on the High Street
- A request had been received from Ards and Norh Down Cycling Clubs to be included at future LAG meetings.

The Director commented that the official launch event of the LAGs had gone well in conjunction with the Council's social partners. In respect of the review of Masterplans he stated that had been delayed due to staffing constraints however now that a team was in place that work would recommence. He also indicated that there would be no issue with representation from the Cycling Clubs and they could be co-opted onto the LAG to make their presentation.

Referring specifically to the Bangor LAG, Councillor McCracken noted that it highlighted a lack of service provision in respect of the Council taking ownership of Marine Gardens in the Autumn. Currently there was no dedicated events budget for it as far as he was aware. He believed that the Council should be putting significant resources into animating Marine Gardens and the provision of good quality events. As such he sought comments from the Director on how to obtain further funding to provide such events

In response the Director confirmed that an Animation Officer was to be appointed for Marine Gardens and a reasonable budget set aside in this financial year to carry out animation of the area. He added that as part of the rates setting process it was intended to seek a similar budget if not more where possible for this.

Councillor McCracken sought clarity around what that reasonable budget was and also suggested that perhaps there may have been failings by Council officers that this matter was not brought to the attention of the Committee at an earlier stage.

The Director stated that the budget was £80,000 and while he had not been in attendance at previous meetings it was intended that the Head of Economic Growth would oversee this going forward.

Councillor Gilmour referred to the Appendix detailing the Christmas Light proposals and noted the proposed bauble shaped lighting animation proposed for Holywood. This was similar to the one previously placed in the Sunken Gardens at Bangor and she recalled that there were frequent issues with it. As such she sought reassurance that quality animations had been sourced in order to future proof them for years ahead.

The Director confirmed that the equipment sourced on this occasion was of the highest specification and the Council's Assets team would be up to speed with its maintenance.

At this stage Alderman Armstrong-Cotter referred to the Newtownards LAG during which Christmas events were discussed. Following on from this she asked when it was anticipated the details of the plans would be brought forward to include dates etc.

In response the Head of Tourism confirmed that officers had found the LAG meeting very useful and the team were now working up the proposals which had been discussed. She added that timing was a big consideration and if Members were content a report would be brought to the September meeting for Noting.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter asked if consideration could be given to a report being brought to the full Council meeting in June 2026 or July 2026.

The Director commented that once the proposals were fully worked up that a Special LAG meeting either via Teams would be convened or the information instead circulated to all members of the LAG.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed this adding that it was important to get this right and ensure a great family Christmas event for all was able to take place.

Referring to the Comber LAG, Councillor Morgan noted within the minutes reference to the red boundary line associated with the Freshen Up Grants. She welcomed that people were buying into the scheme however she suggested that the Local Development Plans (LDP) could well be out of date now meaning some businesses were losing out on this opportunity. As such she asked what the Council could do to persuade the Department to extend those boundaries.

In response the Director confirmed that it was DfC which provided the funding and they worked on the town centre boundaries which were agreed in the old Area Plans. As the new Local Development Plan (LDP) had not been enacted that would not change. He added that as it was DfC's money it could only be spent within the red

line boundary. Members were advised that currently the Council contributed 10% to the overall pot however if it decided to put in a larger pot of money it could be spent as the Council so wished. It was noted that officers would need to have discussions with DfC.

Councillor Morgan welcomed the Director’s comments.

Councillor Hennessy reported on a very productive meeting of Donaghadee LAG and thanked officers for their attendance. While there were a number of challenging issues a good discussion was had around those and the proposals for Christmas were welcomed by all.

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

9. ECONOMIC GROWTH HALF YEARLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025/26B(FILE 160127)

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

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

The Council’s 16 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 Half Year (H2) October to March 2026 was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

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

Outcome 1

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

Key Achievements:

- City/Town Advisory Groups reconstituted to Local Action Groups
New Local Action Groups had been established for each urban area (Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards). Membership had been agreed for each group and included representation from a range of sectors such as youth, faith, sport, commerce, culture, historical and others. A Terms of Reference had been agreed which clearly defined the vision, principles and purpose. An introductory meeting of each group had been held within this reporting period, and an official launch would be held in June 2026.

Outcome 3

A Thriving and Sustainable Economy

Key Achievements:

- Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme
Launched in Summer 2025, this programme of support was designed to revitalise city and town centre high streets through targeted grant schemes and regeneration initiatives. The programme aimed to create safer, more attractive streetscapes, increase footfall, and attract new businesses. The initial strand of support to be made available, the 'Glow Up' Grant Scheme was launched in June 2025, this was followed by the 'Empty to Energised' Pilot Grant Scheme in January 2026, and recently the next strand of support the 'Freshen Up' Grant Scheme was being developed for release on the 1 May 2026. The various initiatives would result on over £1million of investment to the town and city high streets.
- Chamber Programme of Grant Support
Business plans were delivered by each of the five Chambers of Commerce, utilising the grant allocation to deliver a series of initiatives aimed at supporting local businesses and chamber activity.
- Regeneration Project Development 'working up'
Vacancy and Dereliction studies were completed for 15 villages and three town centres (Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood), a study to enhance the night-time economy in Newtownards, and a study to enhance the tourism offering in Donaghadee were delivered within this reporting period. Directly linked to Masterplan outcomes and Corporate Plan priority of a thriving and sustainable economy.

- Go Succeed
The target for job creation through the Engage and Foundation pillars of the service was 123, and had been exceeded to reach 178. (this figure was subject to monitoring and evaluation from the PMO and would be confirmed when the year was fully closed)
- Labour Market Partnership (LMP)
The LMP had delivered a full suite of interventions that have had an immediate positive impact on individuals needing support to get into employment. It had also attracted its full budget rather than the reduced budget originally allocated by DfC.
- Mini Digi Hub
The Mini Digi Hub project had progressed according to plans. Phase 1 of the IoT project had been successfully procured and ready for delivery with the procurement for the architect scheduled for May 2026.
- Innovation Hub
The original site ceased to be a viable option and a new site was sourced and approved by Council.

Key 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 key issues and agree any actions required as detailed below:

- Organisation Redesign
As part of an ongoing organisational redesign within the Council, the Regeneration and Economic Development Services merged to form the Economic Growth Service. Since January, the Head of Economic Growth post had remained vacant, and the recruitment of other vacant posts had been paused during this period. This transition, together with vacancies at Head of Service and officer level, had an impact on service delivery.
- Labour Market Partnership
The Department for Communities had not yet confirmed the budget allocation for the LMP 2026/27, although it had been confirmed that 25% of the budget could be used to support the LMP until the end of June 2026, no letter of offer had been received to date. This presented a challenge in terms of planning and delivery of support.
- Go Succeed
The Go Succeed service had been cut by 64% as the allocation under the Local Growth Fund had placed an emphasis on capital rather than resources. Despite the Council lobbying the Department for Economy for additional support and increasing its own match funding, the service would see a 20% reduction and may not meet its statutory targets.
- Bangor Harbour and Marina
Bangor Harbour and Marina was brought back to Council after negotiations on the maintenance, operations and liabilities failed to reach an agreement between the proposed deliver agent and the council.

Actions to be taken:

- Appoint the Head of Service post and progress the restructuring of the Economic Growth Service to ensure all required posts were filled.
- Pressure from all 11 Councils must be maintained to secure funding for the Labour Market Partnership.
- Collective action by all 11 Councils, led by Belfast City Council, must continue to obtain additional funds from DfE to support the transitional year of the Go Succeed Service. The Council must also continue to lobby the Department for support in developing the new Entrepreneurship Programme which was to start in 2028.

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
To develop a master plan and outline business case for the delivery of a business park at the former NIE site on the Balloo Road, Bangor	Unsuccessful procurement exercise to secure an Integrated Consultancy Team to produce a masterplan for the Former NIE site	Proceed with a Development Brief to secure a development partner to support the development of the site into a potential Business Park. This will be delivered in 2026-2027.	Strategic Development Manager	2026/2027
To deliver a minimum of 3 capital projects aligned to the town/city Masterplans and deliver 3 capital projects aligned to the Village Plans	<p>This was achieved for the town/city areas under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme and the rollout of a capital grant scheme across the five urban areas.</p> <p>The Village Plans for the rural areas have been delayed due to resource constraints.</p> <p>It should be noted that 3 capital projects under the Small Settlements Programme were delivered within the rural areas during this reporting period in Ballygowan, Greyabbey and Kircubbin.</p>	<p>It is expected that funding under the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places Programme will provide significant financial support to deliver capital projects over the coming years in both the urban and rural areas. Officers are also looking at options to deliver a similar initiative of the grant scheme to rural areas within the next financial year.</p> <p>The Village Plans will be completed by Summer 2026.</p>	Regeneration Manager	2026/2027

Completion and evaluation of the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Programme	Contract for Funding extended to March 2027 to allow for the delivery of an additional project to utilise underspend. Evaluation can only be completed once all projects are fully delivered. It should be noted all capital projects within the agreed action plan have been completed.	Delivery of additional project no later than March 2027 with evaluation to follow six months post completion.	Regeneration Manager	2026/2027
Development of a Motorhomes Strategy	Resource constraints. Initially led by Urban Designer – post now vacant.	Proceed with a temporary restructure of the regeneration service (pending the wider restructure) to ensure service delivery. Internal working group to be formed to ensure wider organisational support and resource.	Regeneration Manager	2026/2027
Completed employee appraisals	1no employee appraisal remains outstanding due to period of absence.	To be completed following return to work.	Regeneration Manager	August 2026
To commence Phase 1 of the development works to Marine Gardens and the McKee Clock Arena in keeping with the agreed Quality Specification as part of the Queen's Parade redevelopment scheme –	Phase 1 of the development works have commenced and continue to progress. Expected completion October 2026 to coincide with the Public Art.	Continued engagement with Bangor Marine, Dept for Communities, Artist and wider project team to ensure project timeline is achieved with stage 1 of Phase 1a being open to the public by November 2026.	Head of Economic Growth	December 2026

completion March 2026				
To develop the Bangor Art and Animation Placemaking Strategy	Resource constraints	Appointment of dedicated officer - Marine Gardens Animation Officer – process commenced.	Head of Economic Growth/ Regeneration Manager	2026/2027

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor Morgan proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Councillor Morgan welcomed the report and the good work which was going on and took the opportunity to welcome the new members to the Team.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter stated that it was great to see the targets exceeded noting that the Go Succeed programme had 50 more engagements than what had been targeted for. She stated that Newtownards was a great place to set up a business given its connectivity to Belfast and other surrounding areas. Continuing she reported that she had referred several people and got excellent reports back from them. Alderman Armstrong-Cotter added that since the targets had been so well exceeded that consideration was given to increasing them further.

Alderman Adair welcomed the report adding that he was delighted to see within it the development of a Motorhome Strategy. He stated that motorhome tourism was a growing industry particularly down the Ards Peninsula and he believed that the Council needed to do more to embrace it further. He added that he had been encouraged to see over the past few months motorhome tourists from the mainland United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland visiting the Ards Peninsula. This was a lifeline to local businesses particularly when the tourism season came to an end during the winter months. Alderman Adair reiterated his support for the Motorhome Strategy referred to in the report.

Following on from that Councillor Hennessy reported that this matter was due to be discussed by the Donaghadee LAG however that had been deferred as it was thought that a separate meeting to consider that was to be held. He advised that had subsequently been postponed again and he asked if that was due to resource constraints.

Regrettably the Director confirmed that to be the case as the person who had been leading on this had went off on long term sick, then got another job and left. A further person had then been asked to take the matter over and they too had gone off on long term sick, however, he was happy to report that they had since returned to work. He added that it was hoped to get the matter back on track

Thanking officers for the report Councillor Edmund referred to the Supporting Thriving High Streets initiative which had been very welcome to many businesses. He welcomed that High Streets could be kept up to date, well presented and modernised. Turning to the motorhome issue he stated that this was something he had had an interest in for many years and was keen to see the Borough embracing motorhomes. Motorhomes were self sufficient as long as they were provided with connection to water. He referred to previous reports presented on this matter and was now pleased to see this coming forward and he hoped it would get the appropriate support.

Councillor McCollum noted that the report was generally an upward trend and she commended the Economic Development team for their efforts. Referring to motorhome tourism she agreed that this was a growing area within tourism and as such the Council needed to be ahead of its game to ensure that it did not lose out on it becoming a destination for motorhomes.

Referring to page 8 of the report which detailed the redevelopment of the former business park at NIE site in Bangor, Councillor McCracken sought an update on the proposed procurement for the site.

In response the Director reminded Members that the report before them covered the period up until the end of March 2026. As such the matter raised by Councillor McCracken was about advice received and timing, however while this had not been completed by March 2026 officers believed that it was now being done better as they were taking their time to ensure the best possible outcome. At this stage he referred to the issue of motorhomes thanking Members for their comments however he advised that motorhomes could not just be parked anywhere. The Council was bound by the regulations set out in the Caravans Act which were quite detailed and as such it needed to take the time to fully absorb the requirements within it. As such he urged Members to have patience as officers were working on it to ensure that the Council did not fall short of those regulations.

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

10. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL ACTIVITY 2025-26 (FILE ED55)(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the role of the Economic Development (ED) Service Unit was to promote and encourage local economic growth and to work to develop a pipeline of support from enterprise awareness, business start and business growth, employability and skills and sector development.

To encourage skills development, enterprise, growth and innovation, ED provided a suite of support, projects, interventions, and collaborations. Local businesses and entrepreneurs benefit from one to one confidential business advice, a business intelligence service, signposting to other support agencies, workshops, advice sessions, networking opportunities and mentoring programmes.

This year, the ED Section had continued to support and deliver the Enterprise Support Service, Go Succeed. In addition to this it had also managed the delivery and outworkings of the Labour Market Partnership Action Plan. The team had worked in conjunction with colleagues across other internal Council service units, alongside the other 11 Councils, to provide timely, crucial advice and support to assist businesses in navigating emerging issues.

This annual report, as in previous years, provided a summary overview of the elements of the support services provided to local businesses between April 2025 - March 2026.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

Commenting as seconder, Councillor McCollum noted that the figures looked great and believed this was something to be proud of.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to Economic Development team for the work which had been carried out as part of this very important remit.

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

11. TOURISM, ARTS AND HERITAGE HALF YEARLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025/26 (Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing the Performance Report Plan for Tourism, Arts and Heritage for the period H2.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the engagement which had taken place but expressed her keenness for more work to be undertaken to promote the Borough through social media.

Councillor Hennessy commented that it was a great report to read and continuing he referred to Page 6 of the report which referred to KPI's and in particular he noted the KPI around Customer Satisfaction at Events. Those figures were slightly down and he sought clarification on why that may have been the case.

In response the Head of Tourism advised that had been the result of feedback from the two Christmas events and she believed that had previously been well documented.

Referring to the Sea Bangor event held earlier in the year, Councillor Gilmour reported that her children had particularly enjoyed ‘the Screen Guy’ part of that event which had sought feedback from visitors. She felt the new approach had worked well when it came to seeking feedback and she hoped that could be replicated at future events.

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

12. VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE REVIEW 2025/26 (FILE TO/VIC4)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the Tourism unit managed two permanent Visitor Information Centres (VICs) located in Bangor City centre (Tower House and the Market House – pilot site 2025) and Newtownards town centre. Open daily, Monday to Saturday, they serviced visitors (pre and during visit) and locals, by facilitating enquiries, encouraging longer dwell time and spend in the Borough, alongside providing a retail offering and ticketing service.

The service also operated a seasonal centre at Cockle Row Cottages, Groomsport, The Moat, visitor site at Donaghadee, plus facilitates a Local Information Visitor Information Office (LVIO) provision, through a Service Level Agreement at Exploris Aquarium, Portaferry.

This report provided an overview of the activity at Bangor and Newtownards Visitor Information Centres from April 2025 – March 2026 along with detail on both Cockle Row, The Moat and Exploris sites.

Visitors and Enquiries

Within the VICs, the profile of visitors continued to be dominated by the ‘Staycation’ and ‘Day trip’ market.

The VIC’s were a primary point of contact for tourist information on the region and wider Northern Ireland, as well as offering local ticket sales both for internal Council activity and third parties.

88% of VIC customers were in person centre visits, highlighting the continued value of a face-to-face provision and the associated ambassadorial function.

Excluding self-service visitors or “browsers”, a total of 19,861 customers were serviced via direct engagement at the counter, telephone, or by post and email, overall, a slight decrease of 5% on the previous year. Those enquiries covered a wide range of local topics from what was on in the area, where to stay or eat, directions, local history, activities, attractions, ticket sales and wider NI information.

Bangor and Newtownards VIC’s	April 25 - March 26
Total footfall to the Centres*	21,478
ENQUIRY TYPE	

Face to face enquiries	16,910
Self-service visitors/browsers	4,568
Enquiries Post/Email	634
Enquiries Phone	2,317
TOTAL SERVICED	24,429

*Combination of face to face and self-service visitors/browsers within centres.

Enquiries by origin (where known)	April 25 – March 26 % of total
NI	85%
GB & ROI	9%
Rest of the World	6%
TOTAL	100%

Origin of visitor remained largely on par with the previous year. Northern Ireland increased by 2%, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland remained the same and the rest of the world saw a small drop of 1%. Footfall was similar to last year (21,530).

Income

Whilst visitor information provision was the core function of the VICs, both permanent centres provided a retail space, comprising mainly of locally produced/sourced gifts, souvenirs and books, as per customer demand. Both VICs encouraged sales via special promotions for residents which were advertised in local press, for example Christmas, Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, with themed displays, and regular "merchandising" to attract both new and repeat customers. Overall, the VIC's combined brought more than £33,000 in income.

The VICs actively advertised a box office service allowing third parties for example drama/musical productions to be bookable online and via the Visit AND website. In 25/26 new and existing clients had made use of this service with continued positive feedback. The Box Office service generated an income of over £2,000 commission, an increase of 14% year on year.

Retail sales proved challenging, with continued higher costs of living a likely factor on "non-essential" purchases. Ards VIC spend per head was £2.02 (up from £1.79 the previous year) with Bangor VIC's spend per head £1.86 down from £2.07.

Income type	April 25 - March 26
Retail sales	£31,438
Ticket sales commission	£2,037
Total income	£33,475

VIC Performance Summary

Overall, this year saw a slight decrease of 5% in level of enquiries (1,237 enquiries) with those customers likely serviced by the increasing traffic on the Visit AND website and social channels. Telephone calls and email queries rose by 32% but postal correspondence was almost zero.

The VIC team continued to engage with local tourism businesses developing effective 'client' relationships through trade ezine, phone calls and when staffing allows site visits.

The team actively supported the wider Tourism section with 'call outs' to trade for campaigns, experiences and food and events programming, and the ticketing of the walks, tours, and experiences.

The centres also participated in seasonal activity with both Ards Chamber of Trade at Hallowe'en and Easter, and Bangor Chamber of Commerce at Christmas.

Bangor VIC (Market House pilot 2025)

Approved by Council in December 2025, Bangor VIC was located from April through September 2026 to the Market House, Main Street, following the successful pilot in 2025.

Portaferry Local Visitor Information Office – Exploris Aquarium

Located in reception it offered visitor servicing 10am – 5pm daily, seven days per week, all year (except for limited Christmas closure). In spring and summer, a prominent advertisement was installed on the slipway bus shelter and in The Square, highlighting the LVIO. With a high footfall of visitors to Exploris throughout the year, the exposure to visitors was significant. A new SLA had been developed with Exploris in 2026/27 as the previous three-year SLA had completed.

The provision consisted of visitor literature, alongside an interactive touch screen highlighting what to explore in the Borough. Exploris staff were trained by the Council on the local tourism product and frequently asked questions to address visitor enquiries directly.

In 2025, the Council provided additional visitor servicing support with availability of staff during July, August. Over 4,000 customers were serviced with visitor information at this site – enabling them to explore more of the region.

Exploris LVIO	
ENQUIRY TYPE:	
Exploris Face-To-Face Enquiries	2,819
ENQUIRIES supported by ANDBC Staff	1,418
TOTAL SERVICED	4,237

Cockle Row Cottages, Groomsport

The Cottages operates as a seasonal attraction and information centre with a small gift shop and heritage centre. Open daily June through to mid-September (Thursday–Sunday -11am–5pm) with free family weekend entertainment, between 2–4pm. Additional key dates of activity include Easter and Hallowe'en and support to the Groomsport Community Fun day in May by opening the Cottages.

The team also worked with local group, Discover Groomsport, and the Ulster-Scots Association to deliver activity across the 2025 season. Educational visits also returned with three visits totalling 96 pupils and one private group tour. Like last year the Cottages were featured on the small screen, this time for the BBC's popular daytime police drama series "Hope Street".

The Cottages attracted over 7,800 visitors, an increase of 17% on the previous season and generated almost £2,000 income. In 2026, a debit/credit card facility was to be installed to manage contactless payment which was hoped would increase sales.

The Moat Donaghadee

In 2025 the management of the Moat and Camera Obscura in Donaghadee transferred from Regeneration to the Tourism Visitor Servicing team.

The site opened May-September, operating Saturdays and Sundays 10am – 4pm. During the 2025 season staff welcomed 1,585 visitors to the historic building – with 16% from GB, 4% ROI and 12% Rest of World.

Outreach Activity

An additional 5,212 visitor enquiries were serviced at manned pop-up information stands throughout the season over 20 key dates. Those ranged from Council tourism events to trade shows and "honeypot" sites such as Castle Espie. Regular outreach also happened at Bangor Castle Walled Garden and Pickie Fun Park when the weather was favourable and where staffing allowed.

Literature

The Tourism service produced Visit AND literature for example visitor guide and map, with distribution via VIC staff to external sites. Outlets included Visit Belfast, Bangor Translink Station, Pickie Fun Park, Exploris, Pier 36 and other key tourism sites. Within Ards and North Down almost 20,000 pieces of literature were distributed, highlighting continued demand for print. The VIC's also provided bedroom packs for the accommodation sector including hotels such as The Premier Inn, The Nines and Strangford Arms Hotel.

Online Activity

Digital communication continued to grow as a source of information for the visitor. This was a trend continuing to grow with the inclusion of AI and therefore a crucial part of visitor messaging.

In relation to "Visit AND" channels (visitardsandnorthdown.com, Facebook and Instagram), VIC staff work with the Tourism Marketing Service to create content. For example, website content creation for example blogs. The team members also reviewed the site for required updates along with contacting trade on a regular basis to encourage them to upload events/activity to our site.

NB Figures in relation to user stats are currently reported to Place and Prosperity Committee as part of Service Unit KPI's*

Independently, Ards VIC continued to manage the Visit Strangford Lough Facebook page daily throughout the year. Through engaging posts, the page had a following of 11,000 followers (an organic increase with no paid promotion of 12% on the previous year) with positive interactions from users. Due to audit requirements the content was transitioning onto Visit AND and Newry Mourne and Down District Council Facebook channels respectively. Council users would be encouraged to sign up to the VisitAND page which would continue to promote Strangford Lough as part of its messaging.

Key Issues

Consumer trends were likely to see a continuation of a move away from direct VIC visits for information provision. The service recognised the need for face to face provision but equally changing times regarding how visitors access information. Currently team members were moving to 'visitors' where possible for example sites where there would be large footfall, provision of visitor literature at more sites away from VIC's and content provision for online activity such as social media.

Staffing had also been challenging with a change in workforce patterns and recent recruitment drives in the marketplace demonstrate fewer applicants were wishing to work as "casual" staff. Therefore, cover for seasonal additionality was beginning to prove difficult and on occasions restricting the ability to deliver the full service. This would be assessed during the incoming season and any changes in service provision would be brought back to the Council for consideration.

Summary

Whilst new technology had improved accessibility to information, consumers still cited the value of face-to-face interaction with, 'welcome and hospitality'*, rated highly among all aspects of a trip by consumers who had recently visited Northern Ireland. The quality-of-service provision at the VIC and other sites providing the personal experience sought by visitors. The VIC statistics demonstrated that visitors sought the 'trusted' and 'personalised' service offered at VICs with face-to-face enquiries dominant at the centres. *Tourism NI's Consumer Sentiment research 2025.

The Council's VICs continually engaged with visitors promoting the Ards and North Down offering and had engaged with almost 40,000 customers, via its permanent VICs, Cockle Row, The Moat, Outreach and LVIO, and showcasing the region's tourism offering for holidays, short breaks, day trips and events.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the engagement which had taken place but expressed her keenness for more work to be undertaken to promote the Borough through social media. She sought reassurance that more consideration would be given to young people to involve them going forwards. Continuing she welcomed the numbers associated with Ards commenting that a great team was in

place there and acknowledged the changes which were occurring in Bangor but was hopeful things would settle there in due course.

Commenting as seconder Councillor Hollywood welcomed the report adding that it all sounded good. He stated that he did have some questions around the shift to digital communications and how well integrated the VICs were with the Council's own channels. Also, in terms of income from gifts and souvenirs he asked if that was from instore sales or online as well.

The Head of Tourism confirmed that VIC advisers worked on content for the website and social media. Direct E-Zines were also delivered directly to businesses. In respect of gifts and sales those were not available online and as such were purely inhouse sales. It was noted the online sales had previously been considered however there had been a number of reasons why that had not been taken forward.

Councillor McCracken expressed the view that he did not believe the staffing of VICs was a good use of Council resources comparing it to an analogue service in a digital world. In terms of the revenue from retail, £30,000 was nothing as once VAT and the cost of goods was removed as well as card services that would effectively leave less than £10,000. Councillor McCracken also questioned if the Council should be competing with local businesses, adding that there would be no money to be made by selling items online. Continuing he also acknowledged that people liked to have literature and that was something which could be provided by static displays meaning that full time staff would no longer be needed. As such he believed that service delivery in this area needed to be reviewed in its entirety and expenditure directed towards more digital products.

Councillor McCollum indicated that she had two points to make. In respect of the digital offering, she commented that she had been in attendance at the launch of the Digital Loughs and Legends. Good work was being done there with the assistance of SERC students. She recognised the benefits of digital information however she also acknowledged there were those who did not engage in any online activities or forums and instead preferred to deal with people to provide assistance. As such while she acknowledged Councillor McCracken's comments there was a case for both to be made particularly in Northern Ireland and this Borough with its aging population.

Councillor Hennessy commented that it was a great report and he welcomed the Groomsport figures for Cockle Row Cottages. He acknowledged the work which had been going on in the village which was now clearly paying dividends. Referring to page 2 he noted that 19,000 people had been serviced at VIC counters and asked whether or not that was a good figure.

In response the Head of Tourism commented that the report acknowledged there was a downward trend in people visiting VICs. As such the Council was considering ways of taking the service to people. It was noted that figures were benchmarked through a VIC Network through Tourism NI and it would seem that everywhere was experiencing a similar trend. She believed based upon that the Council was doing reasonably well. Issues also being looked at included staffing which was generally

more seasonal and stretched across the four sites. Members were advised that those posts were becoming more difficult to fill.

At this stage Alderman Adair stated that he disagreed with Councillor McCracken's remarks expressing the view that there was added value for VICs and they were vital to encourage people to get out and explore. He firmly believed that a physical presence was important and highlighted brochures which were available at the George Best City Airport arrivals area highlighting the Ards and North Down Borough as a tourist destination. Continuing Alderman Adair commented that anytime he had visited a VIC there were always people there from wide and far including the Republic of Ireland, mainland Great Britain and America. Staff were also always on hand to find niche places for them visit as well as able to refer them to local businesses. In respect of the items being sold within the VICs, Alderman Adair stated that they were local crafts and souvenirs which could not be purchased anywhere else. As such the VICs were providing an outlet for all of the local crafters in the Borough. Continuing Alderman Adair acknowledged that consideration was being given to the relocation of the Ards VIC and he would agree that perhaps currently it was in the wrong location. In summing up he believed that the Borough needed to be marketed as a tourism destination through a physical presence as well as online with support from Tourism NI.

Concurring with previous comments Councillor Edmund agreed that people of a certain age were not technically minded and instead looked for a physical presence. He gave an example of how that had worked well for him on a trip to France.

Councillor Gilmour while welcoming the report agreed that it did raise a number of questions about the low level of visitors to the VICs. However, it did also highlighted the need to have a physical presence and she did support looking at greater outreach opportunities where tourist generally visited. She also reiterated the importance of that personal touch for visitors to the Borough.

Councillor Morgan recalled a previous request to have a representative of Tourism NI to come to the Committee and make a presentation and she sought an update on that.

The Head of Tourism confirmed that an invitation had been sent and timed with the new Chief Executive being appointed. The Mayor at that time, Councillor McCollum, was able to host that visit. Officers had recently reviewed what had been in the minutes in regard to this but she indicated that could be looked at again.

Councillor Morgan stated that it was her understanding that the Chief Executive of Tourism NI had been invited to a meeting of the Committee.

The Head of Tourism noted there had been a request to come back to Committee and with the new Chief Executive's diary that had been paused. She added that she would relook at this with a view to this coming back in the Autumn.

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

13. STRATEGIC CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT HALF YEARLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025/26

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

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

The Council's 16 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 H2 was attached. End of year budget or attendance was not available at the time of writing the report.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

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

Outcome 1

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

Key achievements:

- Successfully led inclusive stakeholder engagement as part of the planning process for the BYC Water Sport Centre, Pickie Fun Park Redevelopment, involving a wide range of stakeholders including operational partners, local residents, youth voice and disability forum on resulting in a strong and positive response to the proposed developments.

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Embedded BREEAM Excellent standards within all capital projects procurement processes, ensuring alignment with the Council's net zero ambitions and promoting high levels of environmental performance.

Outcome 3

A thriving and sustainable economy

Key achievements:

- Successfully delivered the Newtownards to Green Road Greenway on budget, securing 93% co-funding from DfI and LUF while embedding low maintenance bridge design solutions, finishing material and street furniture to ensure long-term economic sustainability and reduced lifecycle costs.
- Delivered over 840 Social Value Points against the required 420 points through the Newtownards to Green Road Greenway project by boosting local economy activity, supporting job creation, providing high quality inclusive infrastructure which promotes active travel, improves public health outcomes and strengthens community connectivity.

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Successfully completed a programme of greenways, enhancing connectivity, accessibility, and the overall attractiveness of the Borough.
- Agreed a maintenance plan with internal stakeholders to enable a Handover of the Portaferry public realm back to DfI.
- Advanced the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme through significant progress in design development, supporting future regeneration and investment opportunities.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- Delivered greenways and the Portaferry public realm, creating safer, more inclusive, and accessible spaces which support community wellbeing and active lifestyles.

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- Completed a programme of greenways, providing accessible and safe active travel routes which encourage physical activity and healthier lifestyles.
- Identified and embedded a range of active living opportunities through the design development of the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme,

including BYC Bangor Water sports and enhanced active travel connections via the Urban Waterfront Public Realm.

- Enabled future sports provision by securing planning permission (valid until 2030) for the Portavogie 3G Pitch and Pavilion.

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Implemented a new Electronic Document Management System, including the full migration of SharePoint files, improving information management, accessibility and organisational efficiency.

Key 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 key issues and agree an actions required as detailed below: -

Next Steps

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Seek planning permission for the development of Greenway A21 connection to Comber Greenway	DfI provided their permission to proceed with lodging the A21 application on 11 May 2026, i.e. outside this reporting period.	Officers are now seeking an updated quotation from their consultants to lodge an application. This should be a smooth application given that DfI and PSNI gave the design their approval in principle. Officers to ensure no delay for securing other statutory consultees feedback or approvals.	Graeme Bannister	H1 2026-27
Business case to increase cemetery provision within the Borough	This KPI should sit with the Senior Responsible Owner /Designated Officer remit. Delayed due to land acquisition issues.	Ongoing engagement with a landowner to secure a land at Ballymacormick Road.	Graeme Bannister	H1 2026-27
Support the delivery of the Capital Projects Portfolio	Navigated significant resource constraints from October 2025	Prioritise Phase 2 re-structuring in collaboration with the new Head of Section.	Brian Dorrian	H1 2026-27

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
	to May 2026, with two senior SUMs stepping up to sustain delivery of the capital projects portfolio under increased operational pressure.	<p>Ensure 1-2-1 appraisals are scheduled and completed in a timely manner to support staff wellbeing and performance.</p> <p>Progress timely recruitment of two Corporate Project Officers to replace existing vacancies (one resignation and one upcoming retirement).</p> <p>Retaining a reserve list to aid future recruitment.</p>		

Summary

The Strategic Capital Development service would complete appraisals in line with the schedule agreed for 2026-27 and would progress timely recruitment of two Corporate Project Officers to replace existing vacancies.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

The proposer Councillor McCracken referred to Page 3 of the report and specifically Outcome 6 Completion of Programme of Greenways. He noted that this had recently enjoyed a high profile launch with the Minister and a number of local dignitaries in attendance but reported that it had caused a lot of confusion as the Greenway was not yet complete. As such he sought an update on this as well as the actual date for completion.

Responding the Head of Economic Growth indicated that he did not have that information to hand however he undertook to report back to the Member in due course with an update.

Councillor McCracken thanked the officer adding that it may be useful for Council officers to visit the Greenway to see for themselves the barriers that were in place and the confusion that it was causing.

Councillor Morgan agreed that it was quite confusing particularly as the report stated that it was finished. Continuing she sought clarification around how it tied in with the work of the Active and Healthy Communities directorate.

The Director acknowledged Members concerns advising that those projects were generally reported through the parent Committees, Active and Healthy Communities or Environment. He suggested that such matters would have been reported there and what was being report here was around the Strategic Capital Development service and its targets and achievements. Continuing he suggested that may be why there was an element of overlap and it was something which could be looked at going forwards, however, he reiterated that his Team looked after the technical side of projects. He added that the Director of Environment was in overall charge of the Greenways projects.

Concurring with the comments which had been made Alderman Armstrong-Cotter stated that it had been very confusing and as such she asked that the right information was being portrayed. Continuing she reported that she had walked sections of the Greenway and the work that had been done to date was incredible and would be accessible for all once fully completed. She encouraged officers to ensure that it was launched well as it was something the Borough should be very proud of.

In light of the fact of the comments which had been made the Director advised that his team would converse with the Director of Environment's team to suggest that a report was brought back to the appropriate Committee detailing the various elements within the Greenways project.

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

14. NOTICES OF MOTION REFERRED TO COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL

The Chairman advised that no Notices of Motion had been referred to the Committee by Council.

NOTED.

15. 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 Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

(Alderman Adair left the meeting at this stage – 8.32pm)

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL (IN CONFIDENCE)

16. BANGOR WATERFRONT – URBAN WATERFRONT AND PUBLIC REALM – APPOINTMENT OF THE INTEGRATED CONSULTANCY TEAM (FILE PCU43)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

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

SUMMARY

The report contains commercially sensitive information relating to the outcome of a competitive procurement process, including tender evaluation and pricing, which is not suitable for public disclosure.

17. LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP – UPDATE (FILE ED136) (Appendix VIII)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Exemption Reason :4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations

SUMMARY

The LEP is still negotiating amendments to its current action plan before making it public and the attached minutes of all the Task and Finish Groups are not suitable for public scrutiny.

18. INNOVATION HUB OPERATOR PROCURMENT (FILE DEV23)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Exemption Reason :4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations

This is requesting permission to go to tender and not appropriate to discuss outside Committee.

19. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT (WORKING UP) ANNUAL BUDGET PROPOSAL

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Exemption Reason :4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations

The proposal should only be presented to the Local Action Groups following formal approval by the Council. Premature disclosure, in advance of the necessary approvals being secured, could prejudice the Council’s position and adversely impact the proposal; it should therefore remain confidential until the approval process has concluded.

REPORTS FOR NOTING (IN CONFIDENCE)

20. COMPLETION OF RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT SCHEME 2025/26

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Exemption Reason :4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations

21. PROPOSED BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS FOR BANGOR – UPDATE (Appendix IX)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Exemption Reason :1. Exemption: relating to an individual

Information relating to the proposed Rural Business Development Grant Scheme for 2026/27 remains confidential at present as this is subject to Ministerial approval. Any publicity in advance of Ministerial approval would have negative consequences.

This report contains an appendix that could identify an individual.

22. PICKIE FUNPARK – PERIOD 2 2025-26 (FILE DEVP1)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

Exemption Reason :4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations

SUMMARY

The report includes details about the current contract with McAdams in the relation to the proposed redevelopment of Pickie

23. EXPLORIS – PERIOD 2 2025-26 (FILE DEVP3) (Appendix X)****IN CONFIDENCE******Exemption Reason** :4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations**SUMMARY**

The report includes contractual, financial and grants details that would be considered as confidential.

24. WAR YEARS REMEMBERED UPDATE (FILE CW152)****IN CONFIDENCE******Exemption Reason** :3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person**SUMMARY**

This report contains information relating to financial matters of the Grant Recipient.

RECESS

The meeting went into recess at this stage – 9.12pm and recommenced at 9.25pm.

NOTED.

(Councillor Hollywood left the meeting at this stage – 9.26pm)

25. NEWTOWNARDS CITIZENS HUB – QUEEN'S HALL UPDATE (FILE PCU 21) (Appendix XI)****IN CONFIDENCE******Exemption Reason** :3. Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person**SUMMARY**

This report contains information relating to Partner financial and business affairs.

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

At this stage the Chairman thanked the Corporate Project Officer for her presentation noting that this would be her last Committee meeting before retiring. He wished her well for her retirement.

NOTED.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.48pm.

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 Monday 15 June 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman Cummings

Alderman: Brooks

Councillors:

Boyle	W Irvine
Chambers	McBurney (Zoom, 7.48pm)
Cochrane	McClellan
Douglas	McKee (Zoom)
Hollywood (Zoom)	Quinn

Other Elected Members in Attendance: Councillor Wray and Councillor Newman

Officers in Attendance: Director of Active and Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Head of Community Development (N Dorrian), Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services (G Kinnear), Head of Leisure (A Cozzo), Leisure Contract Lead (I Elliot) and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

Other Officers in Attendance: Mr Chris Kelly (NCLT/Serco)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend were received from the Vice Chair (Councillor S Irvine), Councillor Kerr, Councillor Moore and Councillor McBurney (for lateness).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest and the following were notified:

Councillor Chambers – Item 8 (Leisure Delivery Model) and Item 27 (NCLT Report Q4 2025 – 2026).

3. DEPUTATION - DONAGHADEE RUGBY CLUB

(Appendix I)

The Chair welcomed representatives of Donaghadee Rugby Football Club (Peter Walker, Stephen Quinn and Matthew Stockton) to the meeting and invited them to address the Committee.

Their address was summarised as follows:

- The Club was established in 1885, with 140 years of history of supporting and engaging with the community.

- It had over 500 members and its facilities were in use six days a week, 10 months of the year, with potential for further growth given the Club's location and new housing at the High Trees and Hadlow developments.
- The clubhouse and pitches had been developed by the Council in the early 1970s and completed in 1971, and the Club held a 50-year lease from 1981 which gave it control of only the club room and kitchen on the first floor of the building, with the Council retaining responsibility for the remainder of the building and the pitches.
- The Club had fully maintained the playing fields for 44 years at an estimated cost of £420,000, including major drainage works, and while the fields were in good condition they required constant attention.
- The Club had come to the Committee because its facilities are old and in decline, requiring constant repair. Issues included inadequate disabled access to the first floor, pitches in need of major drainage, insufficient floodlighting, showers and toilets requiring refurbishment - particularly inadequate ladies' facilities - and persistent roof leaks. Photographs showed buckets catching rainwater and water staining.
- The Club aimed to provide upgraded leisure facilities for the community, creating business and community opportunities, securing a 50-year lease to enable grant funding, increasing employment, and improving facilities for wellbeing and social inclusion.
- Donaghadee lacked a gymnasium and had limited capacity for additional activities such as yoga, pilates, spin, high-intensity training, music, dance and the arts, all of which a new hub could accommodate.
- The Club welcomed the use of its facilities - boys', girls', men's and women's rugby - making particular mention of a strong women's rugby section and a team for those with special educational needs (sharkeys).
- The Club was sponsored by over 50 local businesses and was also used by ladies' hockey and cricket teams, and it intended to combine external funding with sustainable revenue to serve the wider community over the long term.
- It envisaged an expanded youth and special educational needs programmes, state-of-the-art fitness facilities, a gymnasium and a social area, and anticipated the creation of at least two full-time and several part-time jobs, likely for young people.
- The main community benefits would be improved wellbeing and social equality, expanded access to recreation, open active space, and support for inclusive communities.
- There had been a previous proposal for a large sports hub at Donaldson Park, incorporating soccer, hockey and cricket, but its cost of over £10 million had led the Club to seek a compromise.
- The Club's quantity surveyor had estimated the redevelopment of the current clubhouse at around £900,000, whereas the Council's quantity surveyor had advised that a new clubhouse would cost £1.4 million. Following consultation with the Council, it estimated at a total redevelopment cost of approximately £1.8 million.
- This would be a practical, deliverable and phased investment. This would be a 700 sqm hub, designed to be lifestyle-compliant with a net-zero target and with lifts and ramps for disabled access.

- The existing clubhouse would remain in use while the new facility was constructed elsewhere on the Club's car park to ensure continuity of play with the pitches not forming part of the scheme; it emphasised that continuity was essential as no other rugby facility would rent pitches during a rebuild.
- A new 50-year lease would enable applications for grant funding to Ulster Rugby, the IRFU, the Sports Council and local businesses, and the Club planned to use crowdfunding to unlock Olympic legacy funding, supplemented by corporate sponsorship, increased membership prices, private investment and naming rights.
- In a recent visit, Minister Gordon Lyons had praised the Club particularly its SEN offering.
- There had been growth across the women's and girls' and men's teams, with two senior men's teams in the Ulster Championship, over 150 juniors, well-attended Ulster competitions, and Colts and Academy provision for the development of under-20s.
- The Club was awaiting a business plan for the redevelopment of Donaldson Park, which it hoped Council officers would produce within the following month or two, and had engaged its own accountants at its own expense to prepare business planning covering revenue, funding, investment and net-zero strategy.
- This was a matter of urgency as the Club could not justify significant investment in the current premises when a full rebuild was required.
- Other groups were seeking access - yoga, Pilates, Zumba, spin, fitness, dance, the arts (including creative writing, book clubs and music), hockey and cricket for pre-season, and a Duke of Edinburgh's Award group was seeking office space.
- The Club was unable to accommodate all requests within its current facilities.
- It requested the Council's support to expand the Sports Hub for the benefit of all current and potential users.

The Chair thanked the deputation and invited questions from Members.

Councillor Boyle acknowledged the Club's long and proud history, echoing its strapline of honouring the past and building the future, and considered it sensible to plan well ahead of the lease's expiry. He raised a series of questions including the timeline of the existing lease, when the new lease might take effect, if the club was financially sustainable, what support it was seeking and what role the club and Council would play in running the proposed facility.

In response, the Mr Quinn explained that the existing 50 year lease had five years left to run, and that a new lease was subject to agreement by the Council's Corporate Services Committee and Council ratification. A new long-term lease would enable access to grant funding, which the Club could not pursue without it. He explained it would allow an immediate application for funding.

On the Club's finances, Mr Quinn responded that the Club was financially sustainable, with £150,000 in the bank, and confirmed that the Club sought Council support for approximately 50% of the estimated project costs, believing it could deliver at around 15% below the Council's estimate, with VAT advantages as a charitable entity.

He explained that the new lease would give the Club control of all the facilities - the pitches, clubhouse, car park and ancillary areas - and it was confirmed that the Club's preference was to run and deliver the project itself, using internal expertise from the project managers, architects and quantity surveyors already involved. He clarified that the Club had brought the plan to the Council.

Councillor Cochrane praised the Club's work and asked for further details on its ability to deliver the development more cheaply than the £1.8 million figure, requesting further detail on the anticipated savings.

Mr Quinn explained that the Club's quantity surveyor's estimate showed a saving of around 15% against the Council's QS team, suggesting that the overall cost could be reduced to around £1.5 million once VAT savings were included.

Alderman Brooks spoke of the importance of the Club to Donaghadee referring to its history and visibility in the town. He recalled having been involved since the initial sports hub proposals under the new Council some 12 to 13 years earlier and recalled a long process. He noted the £150,000 held in the Club's bank and the sound organisational status of the Club, and referred to the previous Director's understanding that, over the next two to three years, upwards of £9 million could be allocated for sports facilities in Donaghadee, including for rugby, football, cricket and hockey clubs.

He added that the Club played a wider role in the community, its ground was the gateway to Donaghadee, and used for many events despite the outdated facilities. Alderman Brooks praised the robustness of the business case and urged the Council to work at pace with the Club rather than allowing the process to drag, expressing frustration that nearly 15 years had passed with little action and a strong desire for tangible progress.

Councillor W Irvine had been alarmed by the images of buckets collecting water in the clubhouse. He asked about the next steps and potential funding streams, noting that other local clubs had accessed 'cocktail' funding.

Mr Quinn responded that the club was currently unable to access IRFU funding but if the new lease was confirmed it would be in a position to make further applications. The Chair thanked the Club for its comprehensive presentation and for setting out its current and future ambitions. This type of input would help assist the Council's decision-making and he noted that the timing coincided with the launch of the Council's Leisure Strategy. He acknowledged the lack of progress over the years despite considerable effort by all involved including officers.

(Mr Walker, Mr Quinn and Mr Stockton returned to the public gallery)

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that a report be brought back for further consideration based on the information from the deputation.

4. **GRANT OF ENTERTAINMENT LICENCE - KINGS QUAY** ***ITEM DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE***

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the following application for an Entertainments Licence had been received:

Premises: **The Kings Quay, 9-11 King Street, Bangor, BT20 3AH**

Applicant: **Elizabeth Bonhomme, 10 Upper Crescent, Belfast, BT7 1NT**

Type of Entertainment: **Dancing, singing or music or any other entertainment of a like kind**

A previous application had been brought to Committee for consideration with recommendations from Environmental Health and Regulatory Services Officers based on noise emanating from the property. The Committee had agreed to grant an Entertainments Licence for a term of 6 months, subject to the following conditions:

1. All structural mitigation measures recommended by the acoustic consultant and outlined in Sections 6 and 7 of the Noise Impact Assessment dated 22 September 2025 must be completed prior to Entertainment taking place in the premises.
2. The Noise Management Plan detailed in table 6 of section 7 of the Noise Impact Assessment dated 22 September 2025 must be complied with prior to each Entertainment event and included in the Pre-Entertainment Checklist, namely,
 - All bands and entertainment providers will be made aware of the terms and conditions of the entertainment and the noise limiter device.
 - Take such measures as are necessary to minimise the noise created by patrons outside the premises.
 - All windows shall remain closed during entertainment hours.
 - All external doors shall remain closed during hours of entertainment.
3. Entertainment shall be restricted to an end time of midnight.
4. The noise level within the premises shall be restricted to 95 dB(A).
5. During entertainment, a competent member of staff should patrol the exterior of the premises at the nearest dwellings, every hour, to assess the overall sound levels and record their observations. If the sound and bass levels are distinctly audible and likely to cause disturbance, then they will ensure that the entertainment providers lower the volume.
6. If, following monitoring of entertainment by Council, there appears to be unreasonable disturbance, the noise level stated in Condition 4 above may be reduced and/or the licensee may be required to re-engage their noise consultant to propose what further mitigation measures may be required.

Following the Committee meeting, the applicant had purchased the attached residential neighbouring property. Officers from EHRS had met with the applicant at the property to discuss the new licence conditions, her plans for the neighbouring property and the options available to her.

The current legislation prevented Officers from amending an Entertainments Licence without intervention from the Courts, and therefore, following discussions, the applicant had lodged a Statutory Appeal in respect of the terms and conditions of licence.

Officers from EHRS, together with the Council's legal team, had liaised with the applicant and her legal representatives to agree revised licence conditions. These amended conditions were subsequently formalised by way of a Consent Order issued by the Court on 11 May 2026.

The Statutory Appeal had resulted in the Entertainments Licence renewal application being placed on hold until after the agreed Court date of 11 May 2026. This meant the newly agreed terms and conditions of licence could be reflected in the renewed licence. Subject to the legislation and Council Licensing Policy, as an application for renewal had been received prior to the expiry of the existing licence, the applicant had been able to continue to provide entertainment under their existing licence.

A planning application had also subsequently been received from the applicant as follows:

The King's Quay, 7 - 11 King Street, Bangor, BT20 3AH

Change of use of No. 7 King Street, from residential use to provide an extension to the existing public house and outdoor smoking area on the ground floor, with ancillary storage area on first floor area and Change of Use of first floor area of existing public house from ancillary storage to provide additional seating.

Officers recommended that the Entertainments Licence be issued to the Kings Quay for a period of 12 months subject to the following additional conditions of licence in line with the Consent Order.

Conditions of licence:

1. The following conditions must be complied with prior to each Entertainment event and included in the Pre-Entertainment Checklist:
 - All bands and entertainment providers will be made aware of the terms and conditions of the entertainment and the noise limiter device.
 - Take such measures as are necessary to minimise the noise created by patrons outside the premises.
 - All windows shall remain closed during entertainment after 8pm.
 - All external doors shall remain closed during hours of entertainment.
2. Entertainment shall be restricted to an end time of midnight.
3. The noise level within the premises shall be restricted to 95 dB(A).
4. During entertainment, a competent member of staff should patrol the exterior of the premises, every hour, to assess the overall sound levels and record their observations. If the sound and bass levels are distinctly audible and likely to cause disturbance, then they will ensure that the entertainment providers lower the volume.

5. If, following monitoring of entertainment by Council, there appears to be unreasonable disturbance, the noise level stated in Condition 4 above may be reduced and/or the licensee may be required to re-engage their noise consultant to propose what further mitigation measures may be required.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the Grant of an Entertainments Licence to the Kings Quay, 9-11 King Street, Bangor with the additional licence conditions specified in the next steps section of this report.

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle sought clarity on the legal process that the applicant had taken in order to change the licence conditions and the Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services confirmed that the applicant's circumstances had changed following the purchase of the neighbouring property but the Council could not amend the previously imposed conditions without a court decision.

Councillor Boyle asked if Officers would have known that the applicant was potentially going to have to follow that route and the Officer clarified that could be the case with regard to any licence that was issued. Responding to a further query from Councillor Boyle, he clarified that the licence application before Members was a typical annual licence renewal.

Councillor W Irvine welcomed the report and the recommendation for what was a popular city centre venue. He queried the planning application for the conversion and addition of the neighbouring property and asked if this would help fulfil the licence conditions due to the additional space which would support music.

The Officer advised that each planning application was judged on its own merit, in this case ongoing monitoring and assessment in terms of noise control, would be carried out to determine any impact on local amenity. In response to a final query regarding the curfew for evening entertainment, the Officer clarified the midnight end time for music remained unchanged.

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

5. **LIQUOR LICENSING – PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON MARKET DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION**

(Appendix II – III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Department for Communities (DfC) was conducting a public consultation on the effectiveness of the current liquor licensing arrangements in supporting market diversity and innovation.

The Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (the Order) established the legislative framework governing the sale of alcohol across Northern Ireland. Under this

framework, any person wishing to sell alcohol had to hold an appropriate licence granted by the courts.

Under section 23 of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the Act) the Department had appointed an independent consortium, led by the University of Stirling, to undertake a comprehensive review of the Liquor Licensing System in Northern Ireland. The Report of the Independent Review of the Liquor Licensing System in Northern Ireland, including the Surrender Principle (the Report) was published on 21 February 2025 and outlined 26 comprehensive recommendations.

In light of the authors' observation as to a lack of diversity in licensed venue type in Northern Ireland, Recommendation 18 had proposed the creation of a "Cultural Venue" licence. The authors did not recommend a definition of "Cultural Venue" but suggested that 'licences should be created, prioritising businesses that would increase the diversity of venue types and/or promote cultural activities.'

In its 'Response to the Report', published on the 18 November and attached as Appendix 1, the DfC had recognised the licensing regime should, where possible, support greater market diversity, and committed to:

- explore how far the objectives of Recommendation 18 could be delivered within the context of the current licensing regime;
- consider potential solutions if it found that the current regime did not adequately support market diversity. This included the potential introduction of secondary legislation to expand the categories of venue eligible to apply for a place of public entertainment licence.

The current licensing regime provided for 13 different categories of licences (outlined in Article 5(1) of the Order) These were:

- Public houses, commonly known as "pubs";
- Off-licences;
- Hotels;
- Guest houses;
- Restaurants;
- Conference centres;
- Higher education institutions;
- Places of public entertainment;
- Refreshment rooms within certain transport premises;
- Seamen's canteens;
- Indoor arenas;
- Outdoor stadia;
- Local Producers.

In certain circumstances the current licensing regime provided for the sale of alcohol to take place in parallel to different forms of entertainment:

- Places of public entertainment licence – under Article 5(1)(h) of the Order, provided that intoxicating liquor may be sold to people employed by or attending entertainment at licensed ballrooms, theatres, cinemas and racetracks;
- Indoor arenas & Outdoor stadia – Under Articles 5(1)(k) and 5(1)(l) of the Order intoxicating liquor may be sold to people employed by or attending an event or activity at these premises;
- Occasional Licence – under Article 30 of the Order, permitted the holder of an existing pub, hotel or restaurant licence to sell intoxicating liquor temporarily at premises other than their normal licensed premises for a specific event.

Officers had engaged with Community Development, Economic Growth and Tourism, and Arts and Heritage to provide a draft response which was attached as Appendix 2.

The date for consultation response was 23 June 2026. It was recommended that Committee review and agree the attached response and Officers provide a submission by the consultation response date. Should this decision fail to be ratified by Council, it could be withdrawn later.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees the draft consultation response, attached as Appendix 2.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine welcomed the response, feeling that it would help ease existing restrictions and noted the potential benefits for the night time economy.

Councillor McKee added his support and praised the inclusion of issues that would help small producers and others affected by the licensing laws. Many areas had been touched upon for campaigners too and he highlighted the 'surrender principle'.

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

6. FOOD CONTROL SERVICE PLAN 2026-27 (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Council delivered its Food Service Plan in line with its statutory duties under the Food Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and relevant retained EU food law, including Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 and Regulations (EC) No 852/2004 and 853/2004. These duties were also supported by associated legislation, including the Food Hygiene Regulations (Northern Ireland), the Food Information Regulations and the Official Controls Regulations (Northern Ireland). In carrying out this work, the Council had to have regard to the Food Law Code of Practice (Northern Ireland) and associated guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency. These set out the requirements for risk-based interventions, officer

competence, enforcement activity and performance monitoring to help protect public health and consumers.

Delivery of the Food Service Plan 2026/27, which was attached as Appendix 1, would support the Council's statutory duties and Corporate Plan objectives by achieving the following outcomes:

- Protection of public health through the effective regulation of food hygiene and food standards, with a particular focus on higher-risk premises and activities.
- Increased compliance across food businesses through a consistent, risk-based programme of inspections, follow-up interventions and proportionate enforcement.
- Improved consumer confidence through targeted work on allergens, food information, and food authenticity.
- Timely and effective response to food complaints, food safety incidents, and infectious disease investigations in partnership with the Public Health Agency and the Food Standards Agency.
- Continued delivery of the new Food Standards Delivery Model, aligned with national and regional priorities.
- Support for economic growth by providing advice and guidance to food business operators, helping compliant businesses to thrive while ensuring fair competition.
- Continued assurance to the Food Standards Agency through compliance with the Food Law Code of Practice (Northern Ireland) and positive audit outcomes.
- Ongoing development of staff competence and resilience through training, supervision, and workforce planning.

The Food Service Plan also reviewed performance against the 2025/26 Service Plan. This showed that the Food Standards Agency had completed a successful audit in January 2026, providing assurance that effective systems and controls were in place, while recommending a review of the Scheme of Delegation to ensure it remained current. During 2025/26, the Food Control Service had delivered all planned inspections of category A, B and C food hygiene premises, investigated 77 food poisoning notifications, responded to 285 complaints and service requests, collected 686 microbiological samples, inspected 138 new businesses and secured one successful prosecution. In relation to food standards, the service had inspected four A-rated premises, collected 98 chemical samples, investigated 84 complaints relating to allergens, composition and labelling, participated in Operation Opson and national sampling surveys, and successfully implemented the new Food Standards Delivery Model.

To ensure effective delivery and continuous improvement, the following actions would be progressed during 2026-27:

- Implement the planned inspection and intervention programme, with workloads prioritised by risk and progress monitored regularly.

- Review and update the Scheme of Delegation to reflect current structures, roles, and decision-making arrangements, in response to the January 2026 FSA audit recommendation.
- Continue to explore and develop mobile working solutions and use of digital technology to improve efficiency, support flexible working, and reduce carbon emissions.
- Prioritise recruitment, retention, and development of qualified food officers, including expanded training opportunities and exposure to a wider range of premises.
- Strengthen partnership arrangements and information-sharing protocols, including completion of the revised Memorandum of Understanding with the Public Health Agency.
- Monitor emerging risks, changes in legislation, and updated FSA guidance, adapting the service approach where required.
- Review performance against the Food Service Plan throughout the year and report outcomes through appropriate management and committee structures.
- Carry out the annual review of the Food Service Plan to inform the development of the 2027-28 plan.

The Food Service Plan 2026-27 set out how the Council would meet its statutory food law enforcement duties through a risk-based and proportionate approach. Delivery of the plan would protect public health, support consumer confidence, and promote compliance across food businesses, while contributing to the Council's Corporate Plan objective of *A Sustainable Borough*.

Progress would be monitored throughout the year, with key priorities including higher-risk inspections, effective response to complaints and incidents, continued implementation of the Food Standards Delivery Model, workforce development, and ongoing service improvement informed by audit findings and annual review.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the Food Control Service Plan 2026-27 (attached as Appendix 1).

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that Council defers the decision until officers have responded to the following questions:

In terms of food standards enforcement, can officers confirm that under this Plan no action will be taken to remove grey market goods deriving from GB as a result of the Protocol/Windsor Framework?

Does the EU law from which the need for this Plan derives in NI differ in any respect from what is in place in GB?

7. BANGOR MARKET

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that a pre-market engagement exercise was currently ongoing in respect of Council's future market provision. As part of this exercise,

Officers had engaged with Market Traders in Bangor and Newtownards regarding the current and future market provision.

While Bangor Market had declined in recent years, it retained five regular traders who supplied fresh local produce and were keen to contribute to the market’s revival.

Engagement with the regular market traders in Bangor had demonstrated that they were in support of Council taking steps to incentivise new traders attending the market.

Engagement with traders in Newtownards had indicated that the current fee structure for Bangor Market was acting as a barrier to participation, but that some traders would be willing to expand into Bangor if this was revised.

The current fee structure was as follows:

Per parking space (or equivalent space)	£11.00
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It was proposed that a new trader rate be introduced to incentivise new traders to trade at the market at a reduced rate of £9 per trader. This figure had been calculated based on feedback received from potential new traders. It would support new businesses and encourage more traders to become established within the market, enabling them to build their customer base over a number of weeks while ensuring they were contributing towards the running costs of the market.

This trial rate would be available to traders who had not previously attended the market and would apply to each eligible trader for up to six attendances, whether consecutive or not, and would not be reset following non-attendance.

It was envisaged that this would attract new traders and provide a wider market offering in Bangor for residents and visitors to the borough.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees to implement the new trader tariff set out in this report.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine noted that the number of consistent permanent traders had fallen over recent years, and hoped that the new fee would help. He asked whether there was a marketing plan alongside this to attract new traders.

The Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services explained that this was the first step - getting something in place for the summer and engaging existing regular stallholders in Bangor along with regular Newtownards traders. He hoped this would entice more traders to Bangor Market.

Councillor Chambers noted that new traders would receive six weeks for the equivalent of five under the discount. While he did not consider the discount to be a great incentive given it was only a small reduction, he felt it was a good opportunity

to test the market. He believed the main issue was footfall and how the Council would promote the market and encourage visitors, suggesting that a busy, successful market would itself attract traders who were happy to pay the full fee.

Councillor McClean questioned why Members were receiving a report that simply proposed a £2 reduction which while welcomed, did not go far enough. He believed that Bangor also needed a successful weekend farmer/artisan market like St George's Market in Belfast, which offered weekday basics alongside beautiful artisan goods at the weekend that drew tourists from all over the world. He said he would welcome a report on how the Council could achieve that quality while supporting current traders, who he felt had suffered considerably since moving to a car park.

The Officer responded that this was the plan - to develop, enhance and reinvigorate the market and that this was what everyone would like to see in Bangor going forward.

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

(Councillor Chambers withdrew from the meeting due to a declaration of interest in Item 8 – 7.50pm)

8. LEISURE DELIVERY MODEL

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that, as Members were aware, at the 11th February 2026 Council Meeting, approval had been given to appoint FMG Consulting to provide leisure expertise and A&L Goodbody to provide legal advice to the leisure provision project. Both companies had been appointed.

Since February, in line with the Council decision in September 2025 to continue to outsource part of the service, the project team had been working on the procurement strategy and, as a first step, had been carefully considering the detail of the key commercial and operational decisions required to inform this strategy, including the outsourcing model.

Workshops on operational, financial and procurement matters had taken place with the project team, A&L Goodbody and FMG Consulting to develop the operating model, inform pre-market engagement and shape delivery. The sections below provided detail on the major key areas discussed and the recommended outcomes arising from these workshops.

Scope of Facilities

The following facilities were included in the outsourcing including relevant outdoor facilities associated with those particular sites:

- Bangor Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex
- Queens Leisure Complex

The following were out of scope:

- Sports Development
- Outdoor Sports Pavilions/facilities currently operated by NCLT under the current contract extension (Bangor Sportsplex, Bloomfield playing fields, Valentines playing fields, Seapark playing fields, Ward Park tennis pavilion, Ward Park bowling pavilion, Ward Arras playing fields and Kingsland.) These were to transfer to Parks and Cemeteries at the close of the existing contract under the agreed Organisational restructure.
- Legacy Ards sites. As agreed at Special Council meeting September 2025, "It is the intention of Council that the hybrid model will remain in place throughout the term of the operating contract."

This report summarised the work that had been undertaken by the team. The report was structured into six sections, each with a recommendation on the approach that should be taken for approval by Council.

1. Delivery Model

1.1 Context and Strategic Drivers

The operating environment for leisure services had changed significantly in recent years due to increasing cost pressures, changing participation patterns, a greater focus on health outcomes and targeted interventions, and evolving expectations around affordability and accessibility.

In parallel, legal rulings and subsequent HMRC guidance in March 2023 had fundamentally changed the financial landscape for local authority leisure provision. Local authorities could now treat in-house leisure services as non-business activities, meaning no VAT was charged on income while input VAT could still be recovered. This had reduced the historic VAT advantage associated with outsourcing and created opportunities to explore alternative delivery models that optimised financial efficiency.

In this context, officers had worked with specialist leisure, legal and financial consultants to review delivery model options to ensure that the Council's future approach was financially sustainable, aligned with corporate priorities and deliverable within the current market.

1.2 Delivery Model Options

Two primary delivery models had been considered:

1.2.1 Traditional Concession Model

Under the traditional concession model (the Council's current approach), an external operator delivered the leisure service in its own right under contract. The operator contracted directly with customers, retained income and assumed a degree of commercial risk.

Historically, this model had benefited from VAT exemptions available to eligible bodies. However, this had also resulted in irrecoverable VAT on costs, reducing overall financial efficiency.

1.2.2 Agency Model

Under the agency model, the operator delivered services as an agent acting on behalf of the Council. The Council remained the principal provider of services, retained a greater level of control over income, pricing and key decisions, and benefited from the VAT treatment associated with in-house provision. The operator was paid a management fee for delivering the service. This structure sought to combine the operational expertise and efficiencies of an external operator with the VAT benefits now available to local authorities.

The key distinction between the two was that the traditional concession model transferred service delivery and much of the commercial position to the operator, whereas the agency model retained authority as the principal provider, with the operator acting on its behalf. This shift was primarily driven by changes in VAT treatment and the need to optimise financial outcomes while still accessing specialist management capability.

1.3 Key Strategic Differences between Models

The following section was a high-level strategic summary of advisory documents prepared by the Council's specialist consultants. The advice provided suggested that the choice between the two models was not simply contractual, it represented a strategic decision about how the Council wished to balance control, financial performance and risk.

- (i) Control: The agency model enabled the Council to retain greater strategic control over pricing, concessions, branding and service standards.
- (ii) Financial Position: The agency model might deliver improved financial outcomes, including potential VAT efficiencies estimated at approximately £250,000 per annum, subject to correct implementation.
- (iii) Risk and Responsibility: Under the concession model, more operational responsibility sat with the operator. Under the agency model, the Council retained overall accountability as principal, although risks could still be shared contractually through performance and commercial mechanisms.

Taken together, these changes had strengthened the case for models where the Council retained its role as principal, while continuing to benefit from the expertise of an external operator.

The table below provided a summary of the key strategic differences between the models described above:

Area	Traditional Concession Model	Agency Model
Operator Role	Operator delivers service in its own right	Operator delivers service on behalf of the Council
Council Role	Client/contract manager	Principal provider with strategic control
Control (pricing, concessions, standards)	Limited – largely set through contract	High – Council retains control
Customer Relationship	Operator contracts directly with customers	Council remains the supplier to customers, through delivery agent
Income and Financial Flows	Operator retains income and bears more commercial risk	Income flows through the Council; operator paid a management fee
VAT Position	VAT exempt on income, but irrecoverable VAT on costs reduces efficiency	Potential to treat as non-business: no VAT on income and input VAT recoverable (subject to compliance)
Financial Outcome	Historically beneficial, but less advantageous following VAT changes	Potentially improved financial position (c. £250k p.a. benefit)
Risk Profile	Greater transfer of operational and commercial risk to operator	Council retains overall accountability, with risks shared through contract mechanisms
Governance Requirements	Lower intensity client role	Higher governance, oversight and assurance requirements
Contract Management	Relatively lighter-touch	More active and resource-intensive contract management required
Flexibility	Less flexible once contract is set	Greater flexibility to adjust pricing, programmes and policy priorities
Market Familiarity	Well-established and widely understood	Emerging model with increasing but variable market adoption

1.4 Implications for the Council under Agency Model

Moving from the current Concession Model and adopting an Agency Model would represent a step change in how the service was governed and managed. The key implications were:

- (i) **Governance and Accountability:** The Council would have greater visibility and responsibility for service delivery, requiring robust governance, oversight and assurance arrangements.
- (ii) **Contract Management Capacity:** The model required more active client-side management, including monitoring performance, compliance, financial flows and service standards. Additional staffing had been identified to support this.
- (iii) **VAT and Financial Compliance:** Achieving the intended VAT benefits depended on ensuring that the legal structure and day-to-day operation of the service were fully aligned.
- (iv) **Procurement Complexity:** Agency models were not standardised across the market, requiring careful design of procurement documentation to ensure clarity and comparability of bids.
- (v) **Workforce and Transition:** Any change in delivery model would require careful planning in relation to workforce implications, consultation and mobilisation.

1.5 Principal Risks and Considerations under Agency Model

The specialist advice highlighted several key risks that would require careful management by Council if moving from the current Concession Model to an Agency Model.

- (i) **Implementation Risk:** If the model was not fully developed before procurement, the Council might not realise the intended benefits and could increase complexity.
- (ii) **Compliance Risk:** The model had to be coherent in both design and operation to withstand legal, procurement and VAT scrutiny.
- (iii) **Capacity Risk:** The Council had to have sufficient skills, resource and governance discipline to fulfil its enhanced role as principal.
- (iv) **Market Risk:** Variations in how operators structured agency models might create challenges in procurement and bid evaluation.

These risks did not preclude adoption of the agency model but underlined the importance of careful design, resourcing and implementation.

1.6 Conclusion

The decision on the future delivery model was a strategic choice about how the Council balanced control, financial sustainability, flexibility and risk.

The Agency Model offered clear advantages in terms of retaining strategic control and optimising financial performance, particularly in light of the revised VAT position. However, these benefits were accompanied by increased responsibility for governance, compliance and active management of the service.

Success would depend on the Council's ability to implement a robust and integrated approach across legal, financial and operational arrangements.

1.7 Recommendation

Having considered the available evidence and specialist advice, it was recommended that the Council adopt the Agency Model as its preferred future delivery approach for outsourced leisure services.

Whilst there had been several risks identified with the adoption of an Agency Model, it was considered that these risks were outweighed by the benefits described in that it was considered to provide the strongest alignment with the Council's strategic objectives, enabling greater control over key service outcomes while offering a credible opportunity to improve financial sustainability.

This recommendation was made on the basis that further detailed work would be undertaken to ensure the model was deliverable, compliant and supported by appropriate governance and resources.

2. Contract Length

2.1 Context

Contract length was a key factor influencing bidder interest, financial viability and the ability to deliver long-term outcomes. Industry expectations for leisure management contracts were typically 10 years or more, often with extension options.

2.2 Options Considered

- (i) Short-term contract (less than 10 years)
- (ii) Medium-term contract (10 years)
- (iii) Long-term contract with extension options

Shorter terms were generally less attractive to the market due to the cost of bidding and limited opportunity to recover investment.

2.3 Assessment

A major factor when considering contract length was the condition and lifespan of the facilities. The facilities were mature assets with defined remaining life expectancy and requiring significant ongoing planned preventative maintenance (PPM) and lifecycle investment. A longer-term contract enabled the Operator to adopt a whole-life asset management approach and supported efficient lifecycle planning and delivery.

Contract length should also be considered where capital investment was to be made as part of the procurement process. Where investment was taking place, a longer contract term provided more time for a return on that investment to be delivered

within the contract and, therefore, encouraged bidders to invest in assets and programming, supported community outcomes and helped optimise long-term efficiencies.

The Council's priorities, as evidenced through the Council's Corporate Plan and Leisure Strategy (participation growth, outreach and health outcomes), required sustained delivery over time and long-term behaviour change in communities. A longer contract provided continuity of delivery, supported long-term partnerships (health, education and the community sector) and aligned with multi-year strategic outcomes.

2.4 Recommendation

A contract structure of 10 + 5 + 5 years was recommended. Following workshop discussions, it had been agreed that this length of contract provided the most appropriate balance of market attractiveness with sufficient stability for service delivery and investment and allowed flexibility through extension options.

3. Utilities

3.1 Context

Volatility in energy markets meant that the treatment of utilities risk was a key consideration in designing a viable and attractive contract.

3.2 Options Considered

Three broad approaches to utilities risk allocation were considered:

- (i) Full transfer to operator
- (ii) Full retention by Council
- (iii) Shared risk model

3.3 Assessment

A full risk transfer on utilities would require operators to price the risk and uncertainty on tariffs into their bids and could result in an unattractive bid for the Council. It could result in the Council paying more than it should in the event energy prices fell from current levels during the term of the contract.

Full retention would place all financial and operational responsibility on the Council.

A shared model allowed risk to be allocated according to where it was best managed.

The shared risk model would allow the Council to benefit from any fall in tariffs during the term of the contract, whilst transferring responsibility for energy consumption to the operator encouraged and financially incentivised investment in

energy-saving technology, which in turn contributed towards the Council's corporate commitment to carbon reduction.

Council might make capital investment in energy efficiency and sustainability measures during the contract term, reducing energy consumption and therefore costs. Where the Council implemented energy efficiency measures, the Council could retain the financial benefit arising from reduced utility costs through the revision of baseline consumption figures following such investment.

3.4 Recommendation

A shared utilities risk model was recommended, whereby the Council retained responsibility for procurement and tariff risk and the operator was responsible for consumption and efficiency.

This approach reflected current market practice, allowed the Council to benefit from favourable tariff arrangements, incentivised the operator to improve energy efficiency and support carbon reduction objectives.

4. Maintenance

Establishing the risk share on maintenance for the new contract was a key consideration for the Council. Several different models for maintenance had been examined and discussed.

4.1 Full Maintenance Transfer

Transferring full maintenance and replacement responsibility to the operator increased the risk of potential bidders "qualifying out" of the opportunity or including high levels of additional risk provision within their financial submissions, although this could be mitigated to an extent through robust condition surveys.

The Council's appointed specialist leisure consultants had advised that, in the current climate, operators were reluctant to accept full repair and maintenance risk, particularly for ageing facilities, and preferred a shared approach.

4.2 Shared Responsibility/Risk

Under the existing contract, NCLT and the Council had shared responsibility for maintenance, repair and replacement of assets, however, the current contract lacked clarity on this and had contributed towards some uncertainty with both parties being unclear about their respective responsibilities.

The Council's leisure consultant had suggested that as this shared responsibility approach was still the accepted norm within the industry and operated along the lines of a typical landlord and tenant agreement, where the operator was responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and repair of buildings and equipment, and the replacement of certain clearly identified assets (as per the existing arrangement).

Under a shared risk approach, the Council took responsibility for the maintenance of building fabric and structure, and for the replacement of certain clearly identified larger assets, for example boilers, pool filters or other major mechanical and electrical installations. This could be defined either on an item-by-item basis or above a certain cost threshold. This shared responsibility, including specific areas of risk allocation, should be clearly set out within the contract documents to avoid any future ambiguity.

4.3 Alternative Shared Approach

Council's Estates Manager had proposed an alternative approach to maintenance based on his experience in previous contracts which was to adopt a model which sat in between the previous two approaches, and create a largely Council budgeted, operator managed maintenance regime.

Council would assume greater responsibility for reactive maintenance, including day to day faults, minor repairs, unplanned breakdowns and non capital remedial works by forecasting and setting and controlling the annual budget. This budget would then be phased, managed and delivered by the operator, with Council oversight and technical review of completed works. Any repeated faults could be flagged and reviewed. Under this proposal, Council would retain more financial responsibility and strategic control for reactive, day to day maintenance whilst the operator executed the maintenance works, managed contractors and reported against budget, but did not carry cost risk.

A Preplanned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) schedule would also be specified by Council, to include all requirements for mandatory servicing, statutory compliance, manufacturer recommended maintenance and other fixed/predictable maintenance works. These works would then be costed by the operators, with budget for their completion proposed by the operator as part of their contract bid and delivered accordingly as required by Council. PPM delivery would be monitored through PMS.

As with the standard shared risk approach outlined above, lifecycle and capital budget was borne by Council. This covered items such as end of life replacements and energy upgrades etc, was not operator managed or accessible to the operator via any monthly spend approvals.

It was proposed that this model did not increase risk, it made existing risk visible. The Estates Manager reasoned that, in reality, even in the current shared risk model for maintenance, Council ended up paying for maintenance through contract costs, so risk sat with Council indirectly, after failure and often when issues became more serious. It was theorised that under this alternative model maintenance payments were more transparent and controllable, reducing this risk, with the result that it moved cost pressure forward in time, improved predictability and control, reduced catastrophic/end of life failures. It did, however, require officer input and capability in terms of contract governance, estates and compliance.

4.4 Recommendation

The project team had not yet agreed a preferred model for maintenance delivery.

Having considered the available maintenance delivery models, it was recommended that the Council progress with a shared maintenance approach, while further exploring the merits of the alternative Council-funded, operator-managed model ahead of final procurement. A fully transferred model was not considered favourable in the current market due to affordability and bidder appetite risks. Both the traditional shared risk approach and the alternative model provided a balance between operational efficiency and asset protection; however, they differed in the level of financial control and transparency retained by the Council. A clear allocation of responsibilities would be critical in either scenario to avoid ambiguity. It was therefore recommended that further financial and operational modelling be undertaken to determine the optimal balance of risk, cost certainty and control, prior to finalising the contract structure, (perhaps through market testing at PME stage).

5. Profit Share Mechanism

5.1 Context

As part of the proposed commercial arrangements under the contract, consideration had been given to the inclusion of a profit share mechanism. A profit share arrangement could be included as part of the contract to enable the Council to share in any excess profits generated through the contract, over and above those identified by the operator's tender response.

5.2 Outcome of workshop

The proposed model for this contract was based on a 50/50 split between the Council and the appointed operator. This approach was intended to ensure that both parties had a direct and aligned financial interest in the successful delivery and ongoing performance of the service. The operator was encouraged through a meaningful share of any surplus to bring its commercial expertise, innovation and operational efficiency to the service, whilst simultaneously ensuring that Council shared in financial outperformance.

5.3 Key Considerations

The profit share model would require clear financial definitions, robust audit provisions, and clear performance monitoring and safeguards to ensure that financial outcomes were balanced with service quality, customer outcomes and the Council's wider strategic objectives. These elements would be developed in detail as part of the next phase of contract design.

5.4 Recommendation

Following the workshop the project team had agreed that a 50/50 profit share was recommended in principle, subject to further development through the next phase of work.

6. Procurement Procedure

6.1 Context

Selecting an appropriate procurement procedure was critical to ensuring a competitive and compliant process.

6.2 Options Considered

Available procurement approaches included:

- (i) Open procedure
- (ii) Competitive dialogue
- (iii) Competitive flexible procedure

6.3 Recommendation

For the current leisure contract procurement process, the Council's specialist consultants had proposed using the Competitive Flexible Procedure introduced under the Procurement Act 2023. The proposed two-stage Competitive Flexible Procedure incorporated a Procurement Specific Questionnaire (PSQ) stage and a negotiation stage.

This procedure allowed the Council to design a tailored process, enabled negotiation with bidders, supported refinement of proposals before final submission and was less resource-intensive than full dialogue procedures. It was particularly suitable where the service scope was broadly defined, certain elements required further development and flexibility was needed to test delivery and commercial options.

Subject to Council agreement to the recommendations outlined above, the next phase of work would focus on developing the model and preparing for procurement. This would include:

- (i) Procurement Strategy Finalisation: Work with the Council's specialist legal and leisure consultants to finalise the procurement strategy, ensuring that it reflected the agency model, ensured compliance and a clear route to market.
- (ii) Pre-Market Engagement (PME) Preparation: Design and develop a pre-market engagement brochure outlining the Council's proposed approach, objectives and high-level commercial model to inform and test market interest.
- (iii) Pre-Market Engagement Process: Undertake a structured PME exercise with potential operators to gather feedback on the proposed agency model, refine key aspects of the delivery and commercial approach, and assess market appetite and capacity.
- (iv) Contract Specification Drafting: Prepare a detailed service specification and supporting contract documentation, including performance requirements, commercial arrangements and risk-sharing mechanisms, to ensure clarity and deliverability ahead of tender.

A further report would be brought back to Committee in Autumn 2026 setting out the outcomes of this work and seeking approval to proceed to the formal procurement stage.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the report that an agency model is adopted for the new outsourced leisure contract and approves the approach to Contract length, Utilities, Maintenance, Profit share and Procurement procedure.

Councillor McClean asked if the VAT savings were the only significant benefit of the agency model.

The Director responded that, while VAT savings were one of the main benefits, there were others: the whole leisure offer could be marketed as a single product, and the Council would have much greater control as principal over the agent. She summarised the three main benefits as control, marketing and finance.

Councillor McClean noted that Members had not received the specialist written advice and asked whether the Council actually held specialist VAT/tax advice confirming that the £250k was realistic, and whether that figure was gross or net.

He cautioned that, from a gross figure, deductions might be required for additional staffing - which he felt had crept in as a single line - governance, the management fee and, in particular, maintenance, noting the history of Bangor Aurora. He asked for confirmation that the figure was net and fully costed, with legal and tax advice, before agreeing to what appeared to be a 20-year commitment. He was concerned that the figure could be whittled down while the Council took on VAT risk against any HMRC challenge.

(Councillor McBurney joined the meeting via Zoom – 7.48pm)

The Leisure Contract Lead added that BDO had provided expert tax advice and that the £250,000 figure was net based on current spend and VAT rules. Under the agency model, more VAT would be recoverable versus the current arrangements.

Staff costs to boost contract governance were required anyway for transformation which was separate from the VAT model change.

Councillor McClean proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that Council defers this to the next available committee to allow Members to have sight an updated report that addresses the following:

- a) written confirmation from HMRC (or, failing that, a formal opinion from specialist VAT counsel) that the proposed contracting structure secures non-business treatment and input VAT recovery under section 33, together with an assessment of residual risk and how that risk is allocated between the Council and the operator;
- b) the projected financial benefit stated on a net basis – net of additional client-side staffing and governance costs, the operator's management fee, the

utilities and maintenance risk retained by the Council, the proposed profit-share, and any loss of rates relief – with the underlying workings provided; and;

- c) confirmation of the proposed contracting structure – including any continued role for the NCLT trust, and whether the Council or the trust is the principal provider – and the effect of that structure on the Council’s VAT position.

Councillor McClean stressed the need for full information to be provided ahead of any commitment to the model, particularly in relation to resource and staffing implications.

The seconder, Councillor Boyle, was sceptical over what he felt were vague claims of greater control for the Council and was worried that agreeing to this now equated to signing a blank cheque. He recalled a long history of Council facing unexpected maintenance costs and called for greater clarity on proposed arrangements for maintenance, utilities, profit share and contract procedure before he could support it.

Councillor McKee questioned the arrangements for utilities, noting previous issues raised by the Auditor. He was cautious that the operator would be able to offload its utilities costs via the profit share arrangement and bypass Council procurement process for maintenance contracts.

The Officer advised that the proposed arrangements for utilities were the same as what was in the current contract model and explained the operator would be pricing for risk regardless. He clarified that operators could continue to use their own contractors for small maintenance.

Councillor McKee felt that operator-led maintenance could ensure better service, but wanted more information before he could support the recommendation.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that Council defers this to the next available committee to allow Members to have sight of an updated report that addresses the following:

- a) **written confirmation from HMRC (or, failing that, a formal opinion from specialist VAT counsel) that the proposed contracting structure secures non-business treatment and input VAT recovery under section 33, together with an assessment of residual risk and how that risk is allocated between the Council and the operator;**
- b) **the projected financial benefit stated on a net basis – net of additional client-side staffing and governance costs, the operator’s management fee, the utilities and maintenance risk retained by the Council, the proposed profit-share, and any loss of rates relief – with the underlying workings provided; and;**
- c) **confirmation of the proposed contracting structure – including any continued role for the NCLT trust, and whether the Council or the trust**

is the principal provider – and the effect of that structure on the Council's VAT position.

(Councillor Chambers returned to the meeting – 8.10pm)

9. RAPID BIN RELOCATION, MILLISLE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that RAPID (Remove All Prescription and Illegal Drugs) was a community-led initiative supported regionally by the PSNI and Public Health Agency (via Extern) and locally by Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

RAPID raised awareness of the risks and harms to individuals, to families and to communities of using and misusing drugs.

The initiative provided secure, anonymous disposal points for unwanted prescription medication and illegal drugs, with the aim of:

- Reducing drug misuse within communities,
- Preventing access to unused or illicit substances,
- Supporting early intervention and harm-reduction strategies.

A RAPID bin had been installed inside the Eurospar, Millisle as part of the initiative however due to its ineffective placement and low community usage it was proposed the bin be reallocated to the adjacent Council-owned car park.

The bins were very secure, (originally used as bank safes). They were emptied monthly by PSNI and Extern staff and normal contents found were prescription drugs and sometimes Class A/B drugs.

Discussions with the PSNI, Extern and staff from Eurospar had resulted in the car park being identified as the most secure and advantageous location that should improve accessibility and uptake while maintaining security and visibility.

Key considerations supporting this recommendation:

- **Proximity:** The bin remained within the vicinity of the original intended location.
- **Accessibility:** The outdoor placement increased ease of use while ensuring anonymity for those depositing materials.
- **Visibility:** Enhanced visibility was expected to increase community awareness and encourage proper disposal.
- **Security:** The area benefited from natural surveillance and regular footfall, supporting safe operation of the RAPID bin.
- **Practicality:** The location provided sufficient space for proper installation and ongoing maintenance by project partners.

There was budget to cover the costs involved in moving the bin.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the installation of a RAPID bin in the carpark adjacent to the Eurospar, Millisle.

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

10. EVAWG TERMS OF REFERENCE

(Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that it had been agreed at the Council meeting in April 2026 that a members group would be established to lead the development of a Council strategy for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. A terms of reference had been drafted suggesting how this group would be established, how it would operate and what the governance arrangements would be. The Terms of Reference was attached in Appendix One.

The Terms of Reference were to be agreed and up to six members should be nominated by Council to sit on this task and finish group.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the terms of reference for the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls members working group and nominates six members to sit on the group.

Councillor Douglas asked if all six nominations were required this evening and the Director advised that any outstanding places could be filled at the full Council meeting.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Douglas, seconded by Councillor McKee, that Council approves the terms of reference for the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Members Working Group.

FURTHER AGREED, that Councillor Kendall is appointed to the Working Group and that further nominations be made at the June Council meeting.

11. RURAL NI OUR NEW APPROACH 2026 - 2041

(Appendix VI – VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) was consulting in relation to Rural NI - Our New Approach 2026 – 2041.

Rural communities were central to Northern Ireland's social, economic and environmental wellbeing. This consultation invited views on a new long term rural policy that aimed to better understand, champion and support rural Northern Ireland over the next 15 years.

A new rural policy was being developed in order to make sure rural communities got the right support over the next 15 years. To do this the right structures needed to be

put in place so government and rural communities could work together to help rural Northern Ireland thrive.

Things had changed in rural Northern Ireland.

- Rural communities were more diverse.
- Tighter public finances.
- New government priorities e.g. climate change.
- Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.
- The NI Rural Development Programme had closed.

What was Rural NI: Our New Approach 2026-2041?

- It was a long-term plan for the future.
- It set out a vision for rural Northern Ireland.
- It did not replace the old NI Rural Development Programme funding.
- It would help government and communities work together.
- It was using evidence to guide better decision making.
- It was about supporting rural communities in ways that went beyond funding.

What did the draft new rural policy aim to do? The new policy wanted to:

- Work together across government and communities.
- Understand rural communities.
- Champion rural voices.
- Support rural communities.

There were five main proposals including:

Proposal 1: Putting Rural Voices at the Heart of Government

Proposal 2: Local Partnerships for Local Impact

Proposal 3: Understanding Rural

Proposal 4: Strengthening Rural Communities at Local and Regional Level

Proposal 5: Reviewing the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

Rural areas were home to approximately 36% of our people and made up over 80% of Northern Ireland's land mass. Rural communities contributed greatly to the character and prosperity of our region, and their strength was essential to our shared future. Rural Northern Ireland was evolving. Greater diversity and an ageing population were being seen, alongside reshaped priorities driven by the restored Northern Ireland Executive, EU Exit, climate change, and financial pressures. Improved broadband and more accessible remote work offered new possibilities, yet rural challenges remained around transport, housing, and access to services. The proposed policy set a clear, long-term vision, shaped by wide engagement with

government, councils, community groups, and academia, through an inclusive co-design process.

This policy recognised the complexities rural communities faced which reinforced the need for a whole-of-government commitment.

The policy aimed to build on the significant potential of rural communities but had to also meet their diverse needs now and in the future.

Vision, Aim & Objectives

The proposed vision was: “People and Government working together to shape a thriving, sustainable and inclusive rural Northern Ireland”. This vision was supported by an overarching aim: “To understand, champion and support rural Northern Ireland”.

To help turn this vision and aim into action, the policy was guided by three core objectives:

- a. To improve the scope, relevance, accessibility and timeliness of rural research, statistics and other evidence and their use across government.
- b. To inform, influence and support strategic government policy from a rural perspective.
- c. To promote and support innovative, collaborative government action on rural challenges and opportunities.

The consultation closing date was 1st June 2026. A draft response had been submitted stating that a final response would be submitted, following Council approval in June 2026.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the draft response.

Councillor Douglas proposed, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Douglas queried the submission date of the draft response and the Head of Community Development advised that it had been submitted before the 1 June closing date and was subject to Council approval.

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

12. COMMONWEALTH GAMES 2026 UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that in August 2025 the Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland (CGNI) had contacted the Council seeking sponsorship for the upcoming 2026 Commonwealth Games. CGNI had indicated that they were seeking

sponsorship of £10,000 from Council to contribute to the preparation and participation of all the Northern Ireland athletes, coaches, and officials. Members would recall that a report to this effect had been submitted and subsequently agreed by Council in November 2025.

Members might be aware that the Commonwealth Games were due to take place in Glasgow from the 23rd July 2026 to 2nd August 2026. These games were originally to take place in Australia but due to cost concerns expressed by the Victoria State Government they had been cancelled and Glasgow had been awarded the games albeit on a reduced basis resulting in 10 core sports being facilitated at the Games; Athletics, Swimming, Gymnastics, Cycling, Netball, Weightlifting, Boxing, Judo, Bowls and Basketball with some sports also featuring in Paralympic format. It was envisaged that many of these sports would feature athletes from the Borough.

Council had a strong track record of supporting Northern Ireland athletes competing at previous Commonwealth Games and this support had yielded considerable success, with athletes from the Borough contributing significantly to medal tallies and reinforcing the Borough's reputation as a centre of sporting excellence across both Olympic and Paralympic disciplines.

As part of discussions and partnership working between CGNI and Leisure officers CGNI would undertake the following events in recognition of the sponsorship awarded CGNI by the Council;

1. Hosting Team NI Announcements (for Swimming, Gymnastics and Weightlifting athletes) - the Swimming Athletes had been announced at an event in Aurora on the 13th May 2026. At the time of writing the report no date had yet been agreed for the Gymnastics and Weightlifting Athletes announcement event, however it was anticipated to be held sometime in June and held in Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC).
2. King's Baton Relay Activity – an intended voluntary Beach Clean event in several locations across the Borough had been planned for June however unfortunately due to limited uptake for volunteers a new date was being considered by officers and CGNI.
3. Formal Partnership Launch – at the time of writing the report no confirmed dates had been scheduled however the intention was to co-ordinate this with the Gymnastics and Weightlifting team announcements at ABMWLC. Council branding had been provided to CGNI to be used at all events.
4. A Team NI Pre-Games Dinner – this event would take place on 23rd June at the Europa Hotel, Belfast. This would be at 7:30pm and Council had been provided 4 tickets for the event which would include photo opportunities and required no formal speaking commitments. It was recommended that Council nominate up to four members.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report and nominates up to four members to attend the Team NI Pre-Games Dinner on 23rd June 2026.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Mayor or Deputy Mayor, Chair of the

Active and Healthy Communities Committee, Chair of the Ards and North Down Sports Forum and Director of Active and Healthy Communities Committee attend.

Councillor Cochrane, as Deputy Mayor, advised that he was unavailable on that date due to a Mayoral engagement. Members felt it would be beneficial to have a reserve list with nominations provided at a later stage if required. Councillor Boyle urged those nominated to advise if they were unable to attend at the earliest opportunity.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that the recommendation be adopted and that the Mayor or Deputy Mayor, Chair of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee, Chair of the Ards and North Down Sports Forum and Director of Active and Healthy Communities Committee attend, with any reserves to follow.

13. FUNDING UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members would be aware that Council received external funding on an annual basis from a number of central government departments including Department of Justice and The Executive Office. No Letters of Offer had yet been received for 2026 – 2027, and no indications as to how much funding would be granted or if the budget would be reduced this year. The Department for Communities and the Joint Committee of the Department of Justice and the NI Policing Board normally offered a Letter of Comfort at this stage of the year, if a final Letter of Offer had not been forwarded. However to date nothing had been received. The Joint Committee of the Department of Justice and NI Policing Board issued an annual Letter of Offer to PCSP each year following agreement of its annual Action Plan. The Plan included a grant funding scheme to address anti-social behaviour and enable diversionary projects to take place during the summer months when schools were closed.

The Executive Office provided funding each year on approval of an annual Good Relations Action Plan. This plan included funding to enable Council to run a cultural expressions programme and provide funding for CE festivals to be held across the Borough.

Normal procedures were that a Letter of Offer was received and once accepted by Council and returned to the funder, officers were permitted to spend against the agreed budget. Spending at risk was not normally permitted due to continuing budget uncertainties and delays in funding being received from central government.

Both the PCSP and Good Relations team had completed the necessary governance requirements to allow funding to be distributed as soon as a Letter of Offer had been received.

Officers had no indication as to when funding might be forthcoming. All but two of the cultural expressions festivals were due to be held in July. A number of complaints and concerns had been raised in relation to how much funding groups would be awarded and when funding would actually be released. The uncertainty made it very difficult for community representatives to plan and run a local festival.

Events funded via the Community Festivals fund had received Letters of Offer for the Council portion of the funding. The total budget for this fund was £95,000 with £31,530 coming from Department for Communities. The delay in issuing Letters of Offer for the full amount had led to one festival cancelling its whole event and a number of other festivals significantly reducing their events due to lack of certainty and not able to take a risk on full reimbursement.

Community Development Fund was in place to support local Community groups who required running costs for local community bases, and groups (e.g. insurance, utilities, rent/venue hire etc.), which aimed to improve the quality of life in our communities.

Again funding for this was provided by DfC. The delay in the overall Letter of Offer for the Community Support Programme meant that Council was unable to issue funding to those successful applicants for 2026-2027. This in turn meant that community bases were without vital funds to ensure that they could pay essential costs such as rent and insurance to enable them to stay open.

Members would also be aware of the ongoing problems with anti-social behaviour across the Borough and surrounding beaches. Grant funding had been requested for diversionary projects which could help to reduce some of these issues.

Strategic Priority 2 of the PCSP action plan was to improve community safety by prioritising and addressing local community safety issues, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. Total funding required for this in 2026 - 2027 was £188,500.

Cultural expressions funding – 28 festivals X £2,300 = £64,400.

Council was asked to give consideration to granting permission to spend at risk on the following activity budgets outlined below:

PCSP - £188,500

Good Relations - £64,400

Community Development - Community Festivals - £31,530

Community Development – Running costs - £58,440

Total - £342,870

Figures were based on 2025-2026 Letters of Offer amounts and there was a risk to Council this might be reduced for 2026-2027. Should this be reduced then Council would then incur any funding which could not be claimed back from central government.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers the report and decides whether to issue the grants at risk.

Councillor Douglas proposed, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that Council proceed with the Good Relations Funding at risk and £50,000 at risk to assist PCSP and EVAWG over the summer and also to keep the other activity budgets under review and to ask for a fuller update report to come to council.

Councillor Douglas described the situation as deeply frustrating for the Council and constituents, noting that the Council was reliant on funding from Stormont and was being impacted by budget disagreements at Executive level.

There had been no letters of offer or clarity in relation to funding levels received and approved funding could be at reduced levels even if it was awarded. She referred to all categories of funding being of extreme importance to Ards and North Down. She highlighted particular urgency for Good Relations / Cultural Expressions funding due to upcoming events. It was therefore important to issue letters of offer as soon as possible.

Councillor Douglas noted that the full PCSP allocation was £188,500 and that £50,000 at risk was prudent. She warned that £350,000 was a huge risk to ratepayers, and her proposal was intended to balance benefit and risk. She supported the other activity schemes remaining under review with a full update in due course.

Councillor Chambers indicated that he wished to make an amendment, that the Council fully fund all of the programmes and grants for the current year in anticipation of reimbursement by the external funders.

He noted that the organisations affected had completed all necessary preparation and were ready to deliver real benefits. The situation had arisen through delayed funding decisions at regional level rather than through any fault of the groups or the Council and while there was a financial risk in proceeding, there was an equal risk to communities, volunteers and residents, in doing nothing. The Council faced the prospect of festivals being cancelled, groups struggling to meet basic running costs, and antisocial-behaviour programmes not operating over the summer when they were most needed.

The proposal was seconded by Alderman Brooks, who agreed with the points raised and considered that, in light of the Officer's advice, there would otherwise be a significant loss of services and grants over the summer. He took the view that provision existed within the Council's reserves to meet any shortfall in the unlikely event that funding was not forthcoming.

The Head of Community Development advised that, since the report had been prepared, a number of Letters of Offer anticipated from central government departments had not been received, and that the funding outstanding was therefore considerably greater than set out in the report. Members were advised that, across the PCSP, Good Relations, Community Development (including advice services, neighbourhood renewal, festivals and running costs) and EVAWG programmes, approximately £800,000 was awaited from external funders, with a Council portion of approximately £500,000, amounting to some £813,000 outstanding in total.

It was further reported that, at a meeting of Party Leaders held earlier that evening, it had been generally agreed that the Council proceed at risk with the Cultural Expressions programme, together with approximately £50,000 to enable the PCSP and EVAWG work to operate over the summer period, with a full update to be brought to the Council at the end of the month.

Councillor McBurney requested clarification as to whether the figures provided related solely to Councillor Chambers' proposal or also to the proposal already before the meeting. The Head of Community Development confirmed that Councillor Chambers' proposal related to all programmes (approximately £800,000), whilst the alternative addressed the PCSP, EVAWG and Community Festivals over the summer and represented the lower-risk option.

Councillor McKee sought clarification on the implications for running costs under Councillor Douglas's proposal, given their importance to community groups. The Head of Community Development advised that the original proposal of £95,000 comprised the Cultural Expressions festivals (approximately £45,000–£50,000) together with approximately £50,000 to enable the PCSP antisocial-behaviour stream and the EVAWG work and grants, which had already been through governance, to commence over the summer. In relation to running costs, she advised that the relevant scheme was due to open that day and to close in early July, that no Letter of Offer had yet been received, and that, while some insurance and building costs were arising in the interim, the majority of groups would not incur costs until September.

Councillor McClean felt that this was an extremely unfortunate position arising from the absence of an agreed budget. He could accept a proposal which did not threaten events imminently due to take place, but stressed the importance that a unified message be conveyed to the Minister of Finance, through senior elected representatives, as to the unacceptable position in which local councils and community groups had been placed and that imminent events not be jeopardised. He requested confirmation of the total financial commitment that would arise should Councillor Douglas's proposal not be carried, and the Officer advised that £813,000 was outstanding in total.

Councillor Boyle was not prepared to prioritise between groups or to create a hierarchy of funding, as all groups were of equal importance. He considered that this represented a delay rather than a refusal of funding, and that he preferred to take an optimistic view, noting that funding had been received late in previous years.

Councillor Boyle put this to the Head of Community Development and she advised that, by this point in the previous year, the Council would normally have received some indication or a Letter of Comfort, whereas nothing had been received to date. She advised that the Department for Communities Letter of Offer had been received on 3 July in the previous year; and that approximately 100 groups were awaiting funding.

Councillor Boyle indicated that he would support Councillor Chambers' proposal.

Councillor Wray, having been granted speaking rights, was disappointed that at the late stage at which the matter had come before Party Leaders. With the summer recess approaching, the Council needed to act, and it would be wrong for the Council to condemn antisocial behaviour publicly and not deliver diversionary work over the summer.

He noted that a number of Good Relations festivals and celebrations were due to take place in early July, some of which had already been cancelled or scaled back, and that certain community groups were meeting insurance costs from their own resources.

In relation to risk, he noted that PCSP funding was statutory in nature, that neither the relevant Department of Justice nor Department for Communities funding had been reduced in recent years, and that the worst-case scenario in respect of Good Relations would be a reduction of approximately £6,500. He believed it would be unprecedented and unlikely that both Departments would reduce funding. He was of the view that the Council should not seek to prioritise between programmes and should proceed at risk across all programmes, as other councils were doing. He gave support to the proposal of Councillor Chambers and Alderman Brooks.

Councillor W Irvine agreed that the Council should not seek to prioritise delivery of its programmes, and indicated that, while it was hoped the situation might be clearer by the full Council meeting in June, the Council should otherwise proceed at risk and review the position in September.

Councillor Hollywood felt that the Council should never have been placed in this position, which he regarded as a poor reflection on the regional administration given the recurrence of funding delays. He believed that a failure to proceed would risk worsening community-safety issues at the very time when diversionary activity was most needed, and that, given the strong record of funding in previous years, the financial risk to the Council was relatively small and the Council should proceed.

Following clarification, the Chair ruled that the proposal by Councillor Chambers was substantially different to the existing proposal and he could not consider it as an amendment. Therefore the proposal from Councillor Douglas, having being proposed and seconded, would be put to the meeting first. Councillor Chambers' proposal would then proceed if the original proposal fell.

On being put to the meeting, with 6 voting FOR, 2 voting AGAINST, 3 ABSTAINING and 5 ABSENT, the proposal was declared CARRIED.

Councillor Chambers queried the order in which the proposals had been considered and argued that his proposal should have proceeded first as an amendment. The Chair explained that he had not been able to accept it as an amendment as it was substantially different to Councillor Douglas' proposal.

Councillor Chambers stated his disagreement but accepted the outcome.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Douglas, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that Council proceed with the Good Relations

Funding at risk and £50,000 at risk to assist PCSP and EVAWG over the summer and also to keep the other activity budgets under review and to ask for a fuller update report to come to council.

14. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 668 – DANCE GRANTS UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members might be aware that the Council previously agreed NoM 668 that stated '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'.

An officer report had then been brought to this Committee in March 2026 that explained that without a National Governing Body for Dance, Dance groups were not classified as sports organisations under national frameworks and therefore were not eligible for Sports Development funding.

Subsequently, Council further agreed that Officers provide a report detailing existing grant schemes within Ards and North Down Borough Council that voluntary and constituted dance groups could directly avail from.

Council had three grant schemes currently in place which dance groups might be eligible to apply for.

1. Community Festivals

Constituted Community and Voluntary groups could only apply for funding through one application, for one festival.

To be eligible to apply, the applicant had to meet the following minimum requirements:

- A festival was defined as a one-off festival, or a series of related events that must take place over a maximum of a 12-week period and have a distinctive theme. A theme was defined as a topic or subject that runs through the festival such as maritime, music, or a specific commemoration.
- Provide appropriate governance, through regular public meetings, annual general meetings, and management by a publicly elected committee.
- Demonstrates a fair and equitable ethos through the applicants aim and objectives, in accordance with Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75).
- Demonstrates how the festival will improve the quality and capacity of the community.
- Applicants must deliver a Community Festival in the Borough of Ards and North Down, between 1 April 2026 and 31 March 2027.

Applications would not be accepted from the following:

- Individuals or sole traders
- Trade or professional conferences/conventions
- Organisations not legally established in the UK
- Christmas Festivals

The following activities were ineligible:

- Ongoing operational costs
- Retrospective activity festivals which have already taken place or where expenditure was incurred before a grant award was confirmed
- Any festival that does not promote equality of opportunity and good relations including political opinion, religious belief or racial group
- Festivals that are substantially fundraising vehicles, whether for the festival organisation itself or to raise funds for transmission to a third party.

2. Youth Arts Training Grant

Criteria (for individuals)

The Youth Arts Training Grant supported young people aged 11–21 in developing their artistic skills through training and development opportunities. Applicants had to live within the Ards and North Down Borough Council area, be within the eligible age range, and be applying to or accepted onto a youth arts course or development opportunity.

A summary of the grant was provided below:

- **Funding amount:** Up to £250 per applicant per financial year, covering up to 90% of eligible costs.
- **Eligibility:** Open to all applicants regardless of background; additional details required if disability support is needed.
- **Purpose:** Supports short-term (max. 3 months) arts-related training, courses, or residencies.
- **Restrictions:**
 - No funding for long-term or curriculum-based courses
 - No retrospective funding (cannot fund activities already completed)
 - Travel/accommodation allowed up to 20% of the grant (applicant only)

3. Arts Project Grant Criteria (Groups)

The Arts Project Grant supported community-based arts projects and events taking place in the Borough.

A summary of the grant was provided below:

- **Funding:** Up to £1,000 per group per year, subject to budget availability.

- **Eligibility:** Open to not-for-profit organisations and constituted community/voluntary groups whose proposed arts activity is taking place within Ards and North Down Borough Council boundaries.
- **Requirements:**
 - At least 20% match funding (cash or in-kind)
 - Projects must be new or developmental
 - Cannot apply if another arts project grant is currently open
- **Restrictions:**
 - No funding for capital costs, equipment, rent, overheads, or profit-making activities
 - No retrospective funding or fundraising events
 - Funding is for one-off projects, not guaranteed annually

Travel and transport

At present Council did not have a specific funding stream or budget in place to support groups travelling to compete or attend events outside of Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine asked if Officers had found alternative funding for groups competing outside of Northern Ireland, pointing to the Dance World Cup in July.

The Director advised that officers had not engaged with external funders but community officers regularly circulated all available grant information to registered organisations. Dance fell between Community and Leisure and the issue was largely due to the lack of a National Governing Body for dance.

The proposer asked that the matter remain a priority due to children from the Borough participating in the competition.

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

15. SPORTS FORUM GRANTS Q4 2025 - 26

(Appendix VIII – XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members would be aware that on the 26th August 2015 Council delegated authority to the Ards and North Down Sports Forum, in order to allow it to administer sports grants funding on behalf of the Council. £70,000 had been allocated within the 2025-2026 revenue budget for this purpose.

In September 2025, Officers advised Members that an additional sum of circa £12,000 would be required above the £70,000 budget agreed for 2025/26. This figure was estimated to be required to meet the expected level of applications based on the year-to-date trends of the grants scheme.

In December 2025, Officers advised Members that an additional sum of circa £15,000 would be required above the £82,000 budget for 2025/26, to meet the expected level of applications based on current trends of the grants scheme year to date and subsequently. Council approved the allocation of funding to facilitate all eligible requests for the remainder of the year with the surplus being sourced from the success at ABMWLC in surpassing income targets.

Therefore, a total budget of £97,000 had been allocated within the 2025-2026 revenue budget for this purpose.

During Q4 2025/26 the Forum received a total of 30 applications: (2 Coach Education, 20 Goldcards and 7 Individual Travel/Accommodation and 1 Seeding).

A summary of the 27 successful applications was detailed in the attached 2025-2026 Successful Coaching, Goldcard and Travel/Accommodation Appendices. The 3 unsuccessful applications did not meet the eligibility criteria and were detailed in Appendix 5.

Q4 2025/26 Budget	Annual Budget	Awarded to Date	Awarded Funding	Remaining Budget
Anniversary	£2,000	£1,440.60	£0	£559.40
Coach Education	£3,000	£901.09	£401.09	£2,098.91
Equipment	£26,750	£25,033.38	£0	£1,716.62
Events	£12,500	£11,760.51	£0	£739.49
Seeding	£2,000	£799.91	£978.00	£222.09
Travel and Accommodation	£32,750	£40,701.66	£1,750.00	£7,048.34* *over budget
Discretionary	£1,000	£340.00	£0	£660.00
Schools/Sports Club Pathway	£2,000	£0	£0	£2,000
	18 Goldcards Awarded in January, February & March 2026 (47 Goldcards in total during 2025 - 2026)			

2025 – 2026 Sports Forum Budget Summary

2025 – 2026 Total Budget	2025 – 2026 Actual spend	2025 – 2026 underspend
£97,000	£81,955.15	£15,044.85

The remaining budget at the end of Q4 2025-2026 was £15,044.85 due to a subsequent lower than expected uptake on funding applications upon the grant programme reopening in January 2026.

This report and appendices provided details of the Q4 2025-2026 grants that had been administered and approved by the Ards and North Down Sports Forum. This

was in line with the Council's Grant Policy and the Council ratifying delegated authority to the Sports Forum for 12th November 2025.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

16. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 680 – SWIMMING UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members might recall NoM 680 submitted by Cllr Cochrane and Cllr Edmund being agreed by Council that stated '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.'

The report served as an update as to the ongoing and intended next steps by Leisure officers to work towards the completion of this NoM.

Consideration had been given by officers as to how to complete this NoM most effectively whilst balancing business as usual activities, cost, and ensuring the accuracy and robustness of the audit and strategy. Whilst the potential use of a consultant had been considered, Leisure management agreed that by utilizing the existing skills, competencies, and working knowledge of learn to swim provision within Leisure facilities amongst the Aquatics team in ABMWLC would most likely provide the best results. Therefore, a structured and priority led review was being led by the Aquatics Officer in ABMWLC.

The approach would be delivered in the following stages;

1. Baseline Audit of swim lesson Provision

- An audit of swim lesson programmes in ABMWLC, Aurora Aquatics Centre, and independent swimming lesson / private pool providers
- Analysis of class capacity, utilization, and any waiting lists
- Review of instructor resources and pool availability
- Overview of pricing structures and concessionary access

2. Baseline Audit of Water Safety Provision Review

- An audit of current water safety and open water awareness programmes
- Identification of partnership opportunities either within Council departments and / or other providers

3. Demand Assessment

- Analysis of demand through engagement with schools, clubs, community stakeholders and swimming lesson providers

4. Analysis of findings

- Identification of capacity shortfalls and service pressures
- Assessment of barriers to access (cost, availability, location, timing)
- Consideration of equality and inclusion factors

5. Development of Options

Based upon the results from points 1 – 4 the development of potential options informing a strategy.

To note, whilst the approach and stages were feasible within Leisure facilities, amongst colleagues in Council and in some agencies, there might be a limitation on the willingness of some independent swimming lesson providers to provide information as it might be deemed commercially sensitive.

The review represented a timely opportunity to audit how accessible learn to swim opportunities were for children and young people within the Borough. Additionally, the development of options that would be progressed into a strategy would serve to increase the accessibility of learn to swim opportunities across the Borough.

A further update would be provided in Q3 of this year.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor Cochrane proposed, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cochrane welcomed the report and was content with the internal audit approach and sought confirmation that this would commence in September.

The Head of Leisure advised that officers had recommended an inhouse approach over a consultant due to the inhouse expertise of the Learn-to-Swim provision. An update was expected before the end of 2026.

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

17. **HMO ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26**

(Appendix XIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 provided the statutory framework for regulating and licensing HMOs in Northern Ireland. From 1 April 2019, responsibility had transferred from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to local councils to help ensure that shared accommodation was safe, suitable and properly managed.

All properties that met the definition of an HMO had to be licensed. The scheme was administered by Belfast City Council on behalf of all councils through the NI HMO Unit. As part of this service provision, the HMO Unit produced an annual statistics report, detailing activity across the year, broken down into council areas. A copy of the report had been attached as Appendix 1.

Overall, the 2025/26 statistics showed that HMO activity continued to be heavily concentrated in Belfast, which accounted for the vast majority of licensed properties, applications and inspections across Northern Ireland. In contrast, activity in Ards and North Down remained comparatively modest in scale, with 13 licensed HMOs and a permitted occupancy of 80 at 31 March 2026.

During the year, Ards and North Down had recorded only one renewal application, no unsuccessful applications, and 15 inspections in total, indicating a relatively low level of casework when set against the regional picture. Notably, there had been no enforcement action taken and no fixed penalty notices issued in Ards and North Down, suggesting a generally stable compliance position within the borough.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report attached as Appendix 1.

Councillor McKee proposed, but in the absence of a seconder, the proposal FELL.

18. **TOBACCO & VAPES ACT 2026**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Tobacco and Vapes Bill had received Royal Assent on the 29 April 2026, becoming the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026. This legislation represented one of the most significant public health interventions in recent years, introducing wide ranging measures aimed at reducing the harms associated with tobacco and nicotine use, particularly among children and young people. Smoking remained the leading cause of preventable illness and premature death in Northern Ireland, contributing to more than 2,000 deaths each year. It was also a major driver of health inequalities, with lung cancer rates in the most deprived areas two and a half times higher than those in the least deprived areas. Rising levels of vaping among children and young people had also become a significant concern. In Northern Ireland, 15% of all 11–18 year olds vaped, with evidence suggesting a potential gateway effect between vaping and subsequent cigarette use.

The Act also supported the long-term vision of the Ten-Year Tobacco Control Strategy for Northern Ireland, which aimed to create a tobacco free society.

Following enactment of the legislation, the Department of Health intended to develop a successor strategy with an expanded scope to include vapes and other nicotine products.

The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 introduced a smoke-free generation by prohibiting the sale of tobacco products, herbal smoking products or cigarette papers to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. This measure would come into force on 1 January 2027. Adults who could legally purchase tobacco today would still be able to do so, however current smokers were being strongly encouraged to quit.

The Public Health Agency continued to commission stop smoking services across Northern Ireland through community pharmacies, GP practices and local Health and Social Care Trusts. Further information and local support were available at: <https://www.stopsmokingni.info>

From 29th October 2026, it would also be illegal to sell non-nicotine vapes and other nicotine products to under 18s, and to purchase these products on their behalf. The existing tobacco vending machine ban would be extended to include cigarette papers, vapes and other nicotine products. A ban on the free distribution and discounting of vapes and nicotine products would also be introduced.

On a date to be appointed by the Northern Ireland Health Minister, the Northern Ireland Tobacco Retailers Register would be extended to include businesses selling vapes and other nicotine products.

The Act also provided a range of additional regulatory powers including:

- Regulations to extend smoke-free provisions in public outdoor places or workplaces, and to allow smoke free places to be designated as vape free and heated tobacco free.
- Restrictions regarding display of products and prices relating to tobacco products, herbal smoking products, cigarette papers, vaping products and nicotine products.
- The introduction of retail licensing provisions that would be commenced in the longer term
- Extension of existing tobacco advertising rules to include cigarette papers, herbal smoking products, vaping products and other nicotine products
- Enhanced powers to amend tobacco and vapes notification schemes to improve consumer safety
- Restrictions on products and information requirements such as retail packaging, features of products, contents and flavours of tobacco products, tobacco related devices, herbal smoking products, cigarette papers, filters, vaping products and nicotine products.

This legislation represented a major step toward reducing the harm caused by tobacco and nicotine use in Northern Ireland. Representatives from Councils, including Ards and North Down Borough Council were working with the Department of Health and Public Health Agency through the Tobacco and Vapes Joint Implementation Group to prepare for the phased implementation of the Act and its associated regulations.

At this stage, it was anticipated that the impact of the Act on Council would be managed within existing resources.

Council was asked to note the enactment of the Tobacco and Vapes Act, which strengthened the local government's ability to protect public health, particularly by preventing children and young people from starting to smoke or vape. The Act provided a clearer legislative framework for enforcement, enabling officers to take earlier and more effective action to safeguard communities and promote healthier lives for current and future generations.

Further information on the Act including the implementation arrangements for each phase, was available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/tobacco-and-vapes-bill-documents>

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine queried the proposed enforcement around vaping, particularly with schools and retailers. The Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services explained that vapes, as a relatively new product, was a moving issue and the industry had often been ahead of regulators. This bill was the first significant piece of legislation to tackle it properly and there would be significant work and consultation around how it would be enforced.

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

19. PERFORMANCE REPORT COMMUNITY SERVICES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members would be aware that Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement 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 16 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.

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 Half year (H2) October – March 2026 was attached.

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

Outcome 1

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

Key achievements:

- Community Development continued to fund and engage with Youth Voice.
- Community Services delivered Grant workshops in Bangor and Newtownards.
- Staff continued to attend community meetings across the Borough.
- Community Development continued to deliver and enhance direct provision.

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Introduction of Solar Panels at 4 Community Hall facilities.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- Community development continued to work on the implementation of an online grants system
- Community Development managed the provision of the two social supermarkets
- Implementation of the PCSP action plan
- Implementation of the Good Relations Action Plan
- Implementation of PEACEPLUS plan
- Weekly patrols conducted by the Councils Community Safety Officers
- Monthly meetings of ASB forum
- Monthly meetings of the Support hub
- Shared Voices Programme underway in Schools around the Borough

- Delivery of PCSP grants programme
- Delivery and monitoring of EVAWG momentum and change fund
- Delivery of Racial and Social cohesion funding

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- Conclusion of consultation on Community Services Strategy and review of Community Development direct provision and a Halls operating model
- Delivery of 8 Council run summer schemes, 2 community led schemes, and 1 facilitator led scheme – 11 schemes in total.
- Continued increase in footfall at a number of community centres
- Continued increase in the number of hours booked in some community centres
- 20 PEACEPLUS projects underway which encouraged activity across the borough.

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Community Halls ahead of expected income budget.

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

- Recruitment to fill vacant posts had been difficult and this had led to an underspend in staffing budgets
- Delay in receipt of planning approval had delayed PEACEPLUS capital project work beginning
- Delay in receipt of annual Letters of Offer having a detrimental impact on workloads and actual programme delivery across the Borough.

Action to be taken:

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Community halls transformation	Delay in transformation of caretaking staff	Has been addressed with HR	Steve McCready	June 2026

Completed employee appraisals	Staff on long term sick leave	Address in partnership with HR & OD	Steve McCready	June 2026
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Community Development - Performance Indicator Summary

Generated on: 05 June 2026

Last Update H1 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
Green	% spend against budget Community Centres	99.3%	100%

Last Update H2 2025/26

Performance Data Traffic Light Icon	PI Short Name	Performance Data Current Value	Performance Data Current Target
No data	% spend against budget		100%
Green	% staff attendance	96.12%	95%
Red	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	74%	100%
No data	Net Expenditure Per Head of Pop (164,200) Community Centres		£4.00
No data	Income per head of population (164,200) Community Centres		£1.62
No data	Income per member of Staff (FTE) 23.5 Community Centres		£12,254.00
Green	% sent to recycling rather than landfill for Community Centres	60%	60%
Green	Number of PEACEPLUS Revenue projects implemented	20	12
Green	Offer a space to every P7 pupil in the Borough to attend a session of the Bee Safe 9-day programme highlighting safety risks and how to stay safe both online and in person	1,700	1,600

Red	Number of participants on Living History visits to places that can be perceived as contentious followed by meaningful discussion	28	40
Green	Support the implementation of the Programme for Governments Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework in the Ards and North Down Borough by implementing a Change Fund grants programme.	100%	100%
No data	Increase number of participants having a positive learning experience using Community development direct provision services		4,700
Green	A min of 140 households supported by the social supermarket's, with a target of 50% of those households to be enabled to break the cycle of poverty and to have a positive social outcome	308	140
Red	Community Halls Transformation	65%	100%
Green	Total footfall at Community Centres (cumulative)	215,591	150,000
No data	% staff attendance Community Centres		95%
Red	% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026 Community Centres	74%	100%
Green	Customer Engagement (Number of groups and engagement sessions)	14	9
Green	Total hours booked in Community Centres (cumulative)	35,716	28,000

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

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

20. PERFORMANCE REPORT LEISURE

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

Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to the 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 16 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.

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 Half Year (H2), October – March, was attached.

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, the service had contributed to 5 outcomes as follows.

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

A new 285kWp rooftop solar array had been installed and become operational in March 2026 at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC). This signified a significant step in supporting the Council's commitment to sustainability and climate action. Key facts about the system were noted below:

- The solar panels were anticipated to generate up to 25% of ABMWLC's annual electricity demand, reducing reliance on grid electricity.
- The project was expected to cut carbon emissions by up to 40 tonnes per year, helping to protect the environment for future generations.
- On-site renewable energy generation would help reduce long-term energy costs and support the financial sustainability of public services.
- Solar power was a clean, silent and renewable energy source, with no emissions during operation.
- The installation made productive use of existing roof space with no impact on leisure centre services during normal operation.
- The project supported wider regional and national net zero and climate targets.

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Continued investment in fitness infrastructure across leisure centres, including the successful upgrade of gym equipment and infrastructure at Comber Leisure Centre (CLC), enhancing user experience, increasing capacity, and supporting member retention whilst growing the membership base significantly to over 1,290, equal to a 25% increase upon the same reporting period in 2025/26
- Ongoing partnership working with Origin Gymnastics to support the delivery and development of high-quality gymnastics within the Borough within a Council operated Leisure facility

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- Expansion of inclusive programming, including PAN Disability sessions and targeted initiatives designed to increase participation among individuals with additional needs. Two PAN Disability courses were delivered during this period, each with 30 attendees.
- Continued delivery of an Autism Friendly evening every Friday at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC), alongside the introduction of additional quiet/low-sensory sessions to enhance accessibility.
- Strong partnership working with the Public Health Agency (PHA), Health Trust, Macmillan Cancer Support, Cedar Foundation, and Origin Gymnastics, to deliver inclusive opportunities for leisure and wellbeing participation and access across all facilities and programmes.

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- In February 2026 the Leisure Service launched the Borough's first Leisure Strategy: Getting Active, Staying Active Leisure Strategy 2026 – 2035. The Strategy sought to identify and overcome barriers that resulted in some residents of the Borough being unable to get active. Additionally, the Strategy also aimed to encourage and facilitate residents to remain as active as possible. The Leisure Service in collaboration with a wider Strategic Implementation Group (SIG) was establishing key strategic and operational partnerships with Leisure, Health, and wellbeing organisations, agencies, and groups within the Borough to commence work on the Two-Year Action Plan.

- A sustained period of high participation levels across all leisure centres, with high footfall and continued engagement in fitness memberships, swimming, and group exercise programmes. For example:

Membership totals across the three centres recorded during this reporting period were:

- ABMWLC: 5,634.
- CLC: 1,292.
- PSC: 160.
- Total membership: 7,086.

Continued growth in programme participation, including Waves Swimming Lessons:

- 1,430 weekly Waves participants across 157 classes (83% capacity), including 46 pre-school classes.
- 1,185 participants attending weekly school swimming lessons.
- Swim team delivery to 41 schools, totalling 77 classes, including 5 SEN schools (with additional SEN participation included within mainstream school provision)

Delivery of a comprehensive fitness programme across all sites, with 62 classes offered weekly. Attendance during this period was:

- Ards: 30,791.
- Comber: 9,334.
- Portaferry: 1,512.

Physical Activity Referral Scheme (PARS) delivered with 129 completers at the end of this period.

Sports Development delivered:

- Sports Education courses to over 40 coaches in topics such as Safeguarding and First Aid
- hosted 45 schools as part of their multi-sport School Sports Series
- Processed 108 grants totalling £25,000 to local sports clubs and athletes

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

In December 2025 ABMWLC was recognised as one of the top performing Leisure facilities in the UK. ABMWLC reached finalist status in the 2025 Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Performance Networks awards in the Sport and

Leisure Facility Management Best Performer category. The national recognition was based on verified data for the 2024–25:

- financial year
- measuring excellence in service quality
- community engagement
- customer satisfaction
- and value for money.

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 key issues and agree any actions required as detailed below:

- Anti-social behaviour at ABMWLC – this issue continued to detrimentally impact the day-to-day activities, programmes, and the use of some facilities on a regular basis. Most recently, significant damage had been caused to internal and external fixtures and fittings resulting in the temporary closure of facilities and significant repair costs. Furthermore, two members of staff were verbally and physically abused whilst completing their duties.
- Current control measures were monitored monthly and greater collaboration with internal and external partners, Community Safety Team, PSNI and Serco for example was already underway and proving beneficial.

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Number of Sports Forum Grants Awarded	There were less applications received	A review of grants budget, processes, and profiling will be undertaken in 2026/27	Leisure SUM	Q2 2026
Implementation of Leisure Strategy Year 1	The Strategy was late to launch due to the impact of the organisational redesign	Timely progress has since been achieved since the launch in February	HoS Leisure	Ongoing
Total footfall across all Leisure sites (Serco)	Closure of the sports hall for several months negatively impacted footfall	Remedial works now completed and Sports hall has reopened	ANDBC and NCLT / Serco	N/A
Active Ageing Memberships (Leisure Ards)	The target is a typo mistake as recent previous targets have been 400, not 4,000	Amended going forward in the next Service Plan	HoS Leisure	November 2026
Participation in Sports Development Programmes	A noticeable downward trend in demand from Clubs / Individuals is evident	Outreach work planned to be led by Sports Development	Leisure Services Officer	Q2 2026/2027

Number of clubs affiliated with Sports Forum	The target was increased by 10% on the 2024/25 target which may have been ambitious, however the actual figure is close to the target	Outreach work planned to be led by Sports Development	Leisure Services Officer	Q2 2026/2027
% of completed employee appraisals	The operational nature of frontline posts shifts (circa 80 staff) and appraisal system made this target challenging to meet	Timely profiling of the appraisal system now in place amongst managers and a new appraisal system has now went live	HoS Leisure	Ongoing

The effective performance of a large, varied, and multi-site workforce had achieved positive frontline, operational, and strategic outcomes for the Leisure Service in H2 (October 2025–March 2026).

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine wished to note the strong performance and positive control measures in place. He praised the team for getting more people active.

Councillor Boyle echoed that view, praising the management and the entire team for the participation levels at classes and courses.

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

21. PERFORMANCE REPORT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & REGULATORY SERVICES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members would be aware that Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement 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.

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 Quarters 3 and 4 was attached.

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

Outcome 1

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

Key achievements:

- Participated in 6 interagency Antisocial Behaviour Forum meetings with community groups, 8 interagency community meetings, 8 onsite interagency inspections in local residential developments, 2 Beaches and Coastal resource planning meetings and 2 interagency bonfire meetings.
- Continued development of partnership working between Neighbourhood Environment Team and PSNI
- Monthly survey to service users to assess levels of satisfaction and areas of improvement.
- Processed a significant number of service requests made by Members, MLAs and MPs across all service units.
- Facilitated quarterly meetings of the Over 50s Council (2 afternoon & 2 evening meetings) with representations from SEHSCT, Capital Projects, Disability Forum, AbilityNet and Libraries NI.
- Co-designing and collaborating with Over 50s Council, Disability Forum and Community Planning to shape and design Considerate Parking Campaign.
- Reviewing and updating of the ANDBC 'Big Guide'.
- Engaging with staff through the Employee Health and Wellbeing Survey and the Staff Cycling Survey to inform and shape future plans and investment

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- The assessment, through the planning process, of the associated risk assessments for several Brownfield sites. This assisted in the promotion and reuse of land affected by contamination, resulting in the return to use of vacant and underused land which could help address local housing need in areas well served by existing infrastructure.
- This Service also responded to planning consultations for sustainable projects including, Electric Vehicle Charging Points, Biofuel Electricity generation and Storage Units, Wind Turbines and Air Source Heat Pumps which contributed to the Councils commitment to the path to net zero
- Inspection of 32 premises licensed for the storage and use of petroleum and assessed compliance with requirements of the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013 in the premises subject to permitting for vapour recovery under this legislation.
- Inspection of 4 Dry Cleaner's 3 Concrete manufacturers and 2 mobile crushers permitted within the borough and assessed compliance with requirements of the Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013
- 50% of total power supply to Council Kennels was supplied by off grid solar panels.

Outcome 3

A thriving and sustainable economy

Key achievements:

- Supported businesses providing advice and guidance on compliance with food safety, health and safety and consumer protection;
 - 170 total visits for Health and Safety, including inspections of workplaces, revisits, advisory visits and visits to investigate accident reports received.
 - 638 Food Hygiene and Food Standards inspections were completed during the reporting period.
 - 102 Visits were carried out to premises in relation to Consumer Safety compliance including product alerts and requests for advice.
- Supported businesses through the issue of Licences and providing associated advice:
 - 69 Entertainments Licences Issued
 - 5 Amusement Permits Issued
 - 3 Places of Marriage and Civil Partnership Licences Issued
 - 6 Pavement Cafe Licences issued.
- All of the 168 planning consultations received were responded to within the target time of 15 working days. Timely and thorough responses impacted the overall ability of the Council to provide a planning service that was fit for purpose and attracted developers to the Borough.
- Supported Breeding Establishments through inspections for compliance and issuing of licences.

- Promotion of job fairs and volunteering opportunities through older people's network and Over 50's Newsletter.
- Supported local businesses to become part of the Breastfeeding Welcome Here scheme by promoting the benefits to business, helping create more inclusive and welcoming spaces for families.
- 35 Letting Agents supported in relation to Private Rental requirements.

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Inspected Entertainment Premises for compliance:
 - 90 Annual Inspections completed
 - 73 During Performance Inspections completed
- 227 Fly-tipping service requests successfully investigated.
- Responded to 247 requests regarding alleged noise nuisance.
- Investigated 719 requests in relation to alleged statutory nuisance.
- 57 households contacted in relation to Flooding Notifications.
- Supported Council's Events Team to ensure events were safe and legally compliant.
- 12 Voluntary litter picks with 153 participants facilitated by NET and LHLH.
- Responded to 12 regulatory consultations, representing the interests of local citizens, businesses and our environment.

Outcome 5

Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing

Key achievements:

- 29 Project ELLA and 3 Dog Safety initiatives.
- 2 Over 50's Tea Dances in Queen's Hall (201 attendees).
- 177 Home Safety Checks provided to older people, vulnerable adults and under 5's including 1,026 home safety equipment being provided and onward referrals to 64 organisations such as OT, NIFRS, Falls Team, etc.
- Visited 129 tobacco/vape retailers to promote compliance with age of sale legislation and 46 test purchased (19 tobacco, 27 vapes).
- Positive Ageing Roadshow held in ABMWLC with 176 attendees.
- 31 Certificates of Fitness issued for private rental properties in the Borough.
- Ongoing engagement with key internal and external stakeholders regarding the review of our city and town centre CCTV system
- Provided advice and support to community groups and societies and issuing licences:
 - Issued Temporary Street Trading Licences for 2 community events
 - Issued Road Closure Orders for 3 community events.
 - Issued 9 Society Lottery Licences.

Outcome 6

Opportunities for people to be active and healthy

Key achievements:

- Empowering ANDBC staff to look after their health and wellbeing by providing 22 wellbeing activities for 380 staff in addition to 150 health checks, 60 flu jabs, 36 hearing tests, 72 skin checks.
- BeeSafe programme delivered to over 1700 pupils from 42 schools in Ards Arena.
- Providing free slow cookers and delivering slow cooker training to local community groups.
- Provided first aid training and employee health checks for local businesses through the Mind Body Business programme.
- Progressed with Action Plan for 'Whole Systems Approach to Healthier Weight' and set up a Physical Activity Working group with various stakeholders.
- 10 (of 14) defibrillators and cabinets had been installed at various council buildings throughout the borough to increase 24/7 access to lifesaving equipment.
- Puppy Socialisation class run for 5 weeks for residents.
- During the non-bathing season the Service had continued to liaise with DAERA regarding water quality at designated beaches in the Borough.
- The Service responded to 85 Freedom of Information / Data Subject Access Requests.

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- 96% of service requests received by Environmental Health service units responded to within 2 working days (3616 service requests received).
- NET successfully investigated 1246 service requests, had 18 successful prosecutions, 7 sets of control conditions issued and 9470 dog licences issued. 153 abandoned vehicles were investigated and 3 subsequently removed by council contractor.
- NE successfully investigated 45 Graffiti service requests.
- Officers had completed e-learning.
- Officers had completed the following training, Complaints Handling, Equality and Good Relations, Personal Safety, Purchase Order, Mindful Manager, Emotional Intelligence 1 & 2, Evidence Gathering and Suspect Interview Techniques, Hoarding Awareness, SEFA (Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance), Pest Control, Better Beaches Forum, Exhumations & Public Health Update, Contaminated Land, Fireworks and MSER, Infection Control in Beauty Treatment Premises, Interviewee Skills, ILM 3, Proof Reading, Fire

Warden training, Finance & Budgeting Skills, People Management and Policy, Equality & Diversity, Complaints, Dementia Awareness, Mental Health First Aider. Staff had also attended SharePoint and CiA training.

- 97.3% of customers satisfied upon completion of service request.
- Food Standards Agency Audit of Approved Premises completed in January 2026, with one recommendation.

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:

- Confirmation that funding of Animal Welfare services was unlikely to be provided by DAERA in future.
- Notice of Motion in relation to Fixed Penalty Notices as a result of dog fouling.
- Future enactment of Tobacco and Vapes legislation.
- Other legislation likely to be enacted in 26/27, such as Dilapidation Bill, Puppies and Kittens Bill etc.

Action to be taken:

- AERA Committee decisions were being monitored in relation to future funding arrangements and the implications reviewed for ongoing service provision and funding of Animal Welfare services.
- Review of dog fouling enforcement would be undertaken in 26/27.
- Prepare for new legislation through training and designing new work processes.

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
% of PTO applications completed within 180 days	Significant staff vacancies in the team, connected to Head of Service recruitment.	Adequate staff in post will ensure targets are met in 26/27	Deirdre Roddy	30/09/26
NET Fixed Penalty Notices	Target not attainable with vacancies that impacted team during the year.	Target has been reset and review of service is being undertaken.	Gareth Kinnear Dawn Phillips	30/11/26 – initial phase
% of completed Employee Appraisals	Good performance during first reporting period. Practical difficulties of Core system impacted reviews.	Appraisal process now on new and improved platform, will make process easier to navigate.	All	30/09/26
% staff attendance	Narrow failure by 0.01%. Significant	Support staff to minimise risk of long term absence	All	Ongoing

	improvement in second half of year.			
% spend against budget	Staff vacancies resulted in missed target. Improved performance in second half of year as a number of vacancies filled.	Regular budget review by HoS and SUMs to ensure expenditure is in line with agreed budget.	HoS/SUMs	Monthly review

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

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

22. NOTICES OF MOTION

22.1 NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR WRAY AND COUNCILLOR NEWMAN

That this Council acknowledges increased demand for service experienced by North Down and Ards Women's Aid. Over the last three years referrals for floating support have increased by over 33% and referrals for refuge have increased by over 186%.

This council is committed to the campaign of ending violence against women and girls, and to providing the best possible support service to victims, therefore officers will be tasked to:

Writes to the Minister for Communities requesting a review into the funding provided to Women's Aid through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Supporting People Grant.

Writes to the Northern Ireland Executive welcoming the funding provided, but expressing concerns that the (EVAWG) programme is primarily resourced to support prevention activity, rather than provision of services. While investment in prevention is essential, it is already resulting in increased disclosures and referrals, particularly to Women's Aid services. The letter should also highlight the need for multiyear funding, and increased funding allocation for the Tier 3 EVAWG programme, which currently doesn't cover the cost of one additional member of staff.

Secondly the letter should propose the establishment of a dedicated Emergency Fund in Northern Ireland to support women who are fleeing domestic abuse but face immediate financial barriers to accessing safety. Many women, particularly those who are working or have limited access to benefits, are unable to afford refuge accommodation costs or secure private rental housing due to high upfront expenses such as deposits and rent in advance. As a result, they are often forced to remain in unsafe environments or face homelessness. This fund would provide flexible, rapid financial assistance to cover emergency costs, refuge stays, and access to long-

term housing, ensuring that no woman is prevented from leaving an abusive situation due to a lack of financial resources.

(Councillor Wray and Councillor Newman joined the meeting from the public gallery)

Councillor Wray proposed, seconded by Councillor Newman, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Speaking to his motion, Councillor Wray explained that the notice of motion had originated from discussions with his own and other party colleagues and independents, which had led to engagement with North Down and Ards Women's Aid to define a clear path in what the Council could do to help in tackling violence against women and girls.

He and Councillor Newman had subsequently met with the Director and officers to ensure the motion did not duplicate existing work, and officers had been content.

He outlined that the motion had four parts: an acknowledgement, a commitment, and two actions by way of requests to two departments within the Northern Ireland Executive.

On the acknowledgement, he described violence against women and girls as an epidemic across Northern Ireland and referred to what was a 'sickening crisis', noting that since 2020 thirty women had been murdered, that one in three women suffered abuse, and that 30,793 domestic abuse incidents had been reported to police in 2025, with police called to a domestic abuse incident every 17 minutes. He stated that the Borough was not immune, referring to the deaths of Sarah Montgomery and her unborn child and of Patricia Aust, and expressed his sympathy for their families. He paid tribute to the work of North Down and Ards Women's Aid, noting that referrals for floating support had risen by over 33% and referrals for refuge by over 186% in recent years, without any increase in resource.

In relation to commitment, he said the Council was committed to ending violence against women and girls and to providing the best possible support to victims, which would mean managing EVAWG funding, speaking with a clear and united cross-party voice condemning domestic abuse and coercive control, and lobbying central government for the best possible funding package for both prevention and provision.

On the third element, he explained that the Council should write to the Minister for Communities requesting a review of the funding provided to Women's Aid through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Supporting People Grant, noting that this core funding had remained stagnant while overheads, salaries and service demand had risen. The organisation was saving lives in some cases and was being forced to raise funds themselves when they should be able to focus on what they do best in supporting vulnerable people.

On the fourth element, he said the Council should write to the Executive Office welcoming the funding provided but expressing concern that the EVAWG programme was resourced primarily for prevention rather than provision. While prevention work was to be commended, he argued that provision and service

delivery could not be neglected, and that the letter should highlight the need for multi-year funding and an increased Tier 3 allocation. He stressed the importance of being able to provide refuge and support services now and it was not enough just to say that it was ok because prevention work was taking place in schools, for example.

He added that the letter should propose the establishment of a dedicated emergency fund in Northern Ireland to support women fleeing domestic abuse who faced immediate financial barriers to safety, such as deposits and rent in advance, providing rapid assistance to cover emergency costs, refuge stays and access to long-term housing.

RECESS

The meeting went into recess at 9pm and resumed at 9.15pm.

The seconder, Councillor Newman, recognised both the surging demand for support across North Down and Ards and the urgent need for increased, sustainable funding. The EVAWG programme was resourced primarily for preventative work and not for the provision of services. While prevention was vital, it was not enough on its own.

She had seen first-hand the preventative work Women's Aid delivered in schools – supporting teachers, educating students and helping to shift attitudes that would have a profound long-term impact. She noted however that this work was funded year to year, leaving a skilled and committed postholder facing employment uncertainty with no agreed Executive budget.

Councillor Newman noted that the Council often described domestic violence as an epidemic proportions and she wondered if Members really understood what that meant for families in the Borough. She referred to the two women murdered in the Borough in the past two years and to Operation Encompass, noting that some schools were receiving calls on average five times a month, which highlighted how widespread the issue was. While teachers did their very best, they could not shoulder the full responsibility of helping a child recover from an adverse child experience. That required the specialist support that Women's Aid was uniquely equipped to provide if they had the funding to do so.

She pointed to the impact of domestic violence on children's school attendance, emotional wellbeing, education and life chances, noting that Education Welfare Officers reported domestic violence as a factor in around half of their cases. She argued that Women's Aid could not carry the weight of the crisis without secure multi-year funding and urged members to support the motion's call to lobby for increased funding, to write to the Minister for Communities, and to urge The Executive Office to increase Tier 3 funding and commit to multi-year support.

Councillor McKee welcomed the motion and gave it his full support, noting that he had himself written to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on related issues. He praised Women's Aid as advocates working at the coalface who had been let down by the Executive. He recalled that in the previous Assembly mandate former MLA Rachel Woods had successfully brought a safe leave bill, with aims similar to

the proposed emergency fund, through the relevant process, yet it had failed to be implemented. He stressed the need to keep up pressure and to continue supporting Women's Aid.

Councillor Douglas and Councillor McBurney gave their full support for pressing the Executive Office and the Department for Communities to do more.

Councillor W Irvine noted that referrals to North Down and Ards Women's Aid continued to increase while funding failed to keep up, and he stressed the importance of addressing this. He felt it was unacceptable for women to remain in an abusive relationship only because there was nowhere else to go, and hoped the Executive Office would act to address that.

Adding further support, Councillor Boyle questioned why it was so often the victim who had to leave her own home rather than the aggressor, asking why the aggressor should not be required to leave so that the woman and her family could remain.

In summing up, Councillor Wray thanked Members for the cross-party support, stressing that the motion was a joint one that could have come from any party and reflected a shared Council position. He acknowledged Councillor McKee's scepticism, noting Rachel Woods, but argued that the Council must keep trying rather than accept that nothing would change. Responding to Councillor Boyle, he acknowledged the question of why it was always the woman who had to flee, explaining that victims in coercive relationships sometimes needed to reach safety before legal proceedings against the perpetrator could follow, and that there was often only a small window of opportunity to leave; he maintained that a properly resourced Women's Aid and a dedicated emergency fund would provide vital support to enable that.

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

23. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were not items of Any Other Notified Business.

CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION

- a) Strategic Resource Requirements for Ards and North Down (Correspondence from Police Service of Northern Ireland attached)

The Director advised that after the Council's previous request, following significant antisocial behaviour in the Borough, the PSNI had provided the attached response in relation to its resourcing. It set out the actions it was taking and its continued collaborative approach with the Council.

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

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

ORDER OF BUSINESS

To facilitate the online attendance of the NCLT/Serco representative (Mr Chris Kelly), Item 27 was heard at this stage.

(Mr Chris Kelly joined the meeting, via Zoom – 9.41pm)

(Councillor Chambers withdrew from the meeting due to a declaration of interest in Item 27 – 9.41pm)

27. NCLT REPORT Q4 2025 - 2026

(Appendix XV- XVII)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 –3. Exemption: 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) provided Officers with quarterly reports on performance.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor W Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

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

(Mr Kelly left the meeting – 9.46pm)

24. EXTENSION OF CONTRACTS FOR THE SUPPLY AND DELIVERY OF HOME SAFETY EQUIPMENT

IN CONFIDENCE – DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that reducing accidental deaths and injuries in the home remained a significant priority. On average two people died each week in Northern Ireland as a result of an accident in the home. In fact, more accidents occurred in the home than anywhere else.

The 11 Councils provided Home Safety Checks aimed at those most at risk of a home accident, including babies and children under five, people over 65 and other vulnerable groups at greater risk (e.g. mental, physical or sensory impairment, economic deprivation, etc.).

The existing contracts were scheduled to expire on the 31 July 2026. All 11 Councils had confirmed that they were content to extend the existing arrangements. The contracted suppliers had also agreed to an extension for a further 12 months at the current rates.

Environmental Health and Regulatory Services was seeking approval to extend the contracts for a further 12 months in line with the provisions set out in the tender documentation.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves a 12 month extension of the contracts for Home Safety Equipment as detailed in the officer's report.

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

25. PEACEPLUS MINUTES (Appendix XIV)

IN CONFIDENCE – DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that minutes of the PEACEPLUS Partnership meeting held in Londonderry Park on 16th April 2026 were attached for approval.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the minutes from the PEACEPLUS Partnership on 16th April 2026.

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

26. PUBLIC SPACES CCTV REVIEW

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION**SCHEDULE 6 –3. Exemption: 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 Members were aware, Council currently operated and managed a city/town centre CCTV system.

In March 2025, following earlier agreement by Members, AECOM had completed a review of the current city/town centre CCTV system on behalf of Council and provided two main options.

In May 2025, Council had agreed that Option 2 would be explored further.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the information provided in this report.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that Council notes the report and further asks for a follow up report to come back regarding the June meeting with Police, prior to this meeting Council will emphasise the growing need for CCTV to be introduced in the small towns of Comber and Donaghadee and also at popular beaches to Police.

28. PCSP MINUTES
(Appendix XVIII)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION**SCHEDULE 6 – 7. Exemption: prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that PCSPs were local bodies in Northern Ireland that aimed to enhance community safety by addressing policing and safety issues through collaboration between elected officials and community members.

A meeting of the Ards and North Down PCSP had been held on 11th May 2026. At that meeting the minutes of meeting held on 23rd February 2026 had been approved. The minutes were attached as Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the minutes of the PCSP held on 23rd February 2026.

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

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.53pm

Unclassified

ITEM 8.4.1

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	24 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community Services (Interim)
Report title	Funding Update
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Table of Community Central Government Funded programmes
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 Justice Act (NI) 2011
Resource Implications	Budget and Staffing Narrative: Risk to Council of spending money it will not be able to claim back from central government
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 5. Safe, welcoming and inclusive communities that are flourishing If multiple:

Background

Members will be aware of the Funding update item that was discussed at the Active and Healthy Communities Committee meeting on 15th June 2026.

Council receives external funding on an annual basis from a number of central government departments including the Department of Justice, Department for Communities and The Executive Office. The funding delivers a range of community focused programmes including for example PCSP, Good Relations, including the Cultural Expressions Programme and the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Programme, as outlined in Appendix 1.

Key Issues

To date no letters of offer/comfort have been received for 2026 – 2027. Council also does not know how much funding will be granted or if the budget will be reduced this year.

Council has this week received a letter in relation to the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Local Change Fund stating that ***“By way of update on the budget position; as you may know, there is still no Executive agreement, therefore we are not yet in a position to issue Letters of Offer for the Local Change Fund”***.

Officers have been in regular communications with the relevant departments in relation to the funding, the position from the departmental officials is consistent across the Board that their budgets have not been agreed by Stormont.

The Chief Executive has also been in contact with the Permanent Secretaries from each of the Departments, DoJ, DfC and TEO, in relation to the difficulties the lack of a Letter of Offer or even a Letter of Comfort is creating.

Council is concerned about its ability to deliver Central Government funded community programmes. Detailed information on each of the programmes is attached in Appendix 1 including the total anticipated funding from Government for 2026/27. As outlined c£1m in central government funding is due to Council to delivery these programmes. Just over £350,000 is required to support the programmes from April – August 2026. Considering the potential implications of not being able to deliver these key community programmes, £217,592 of this funding is highlighted as high risk and is urgently required to support delivery of these programmes over the summer months. A further £108,000 is medium risk and £37,000 low risk.

Council cannot deliver the full programmes without the Government funding and officers have written to the departments again requesting confirmation that funding required in the short term could be guaranteed to provide Council with the reassurance and ability to support important programmes over the next few months. To date a response has not been received.

Summary

Members agreed at June's Active and Healthy Communities Committee to recommend that Council proceed, at risk, with the Good Relations Funding and £50,000 to assist PCSP and EVAWG over the summer and also to keep the other activity budgets under review and to ask for a fuller update report to come to Council.

Members will be aware that any distribution of funds without confirmation of funding from Government Departments will be at the Council's risk. Therefore, it is important that if Council takes a risk in this regard, that it seeks to minimise this risk as far as possible, by limiting the distribution of funds to only those programmes which are time critical. The Council should then reevaluate its approach at a future date when (i) another stage of criticality is reached for a particular programme, or (ii) Government funding is confirmed.

Members will note that to deliver all the outlined programmes up to the end of August requires a budget of c£633k, this being well over the total yearly budget Council has to support these programmes. However, the programmes deemed high risk, come to c£342k which could in the interim be covered by the Council budget. Note this relates to the totality of the Council's budget across these programmes being c£502k.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Considers** the report and **Agrees** to fund the programmes identified as high risk as outlined in the report, up to but not exceeding the total Council allocated budget and writes to the Permanent Secretaries in DoJ, DfC and TEO requesting urgent confirmation of the budgets, with a further report to be brought back to Council.

ANDBC 2026/27 Central Government Funded Community Budget

Section	External Funder & budget (£)	Council portion	Total budget	Detailed Programme	Risk RAG	Timeframe	Details	Funding required for July & August (Council)	Funding required for July & August (External)
PCSP	210,000 Joint Committee – DoJ/NIPB	107,000	317,000	Funds the delivery of the PCSP Action Plan	H	8 weeks to cover to end of August	4 tier secure scheme-funding needed to be able to support tender and fit equipment to DV victims, victims of crime and those living in fear in relation to recent unrest. Funding urgently required for Street Pastors tender to deliver street based support to statutory partners and to support PSNI programme of diversionary activity in the Borough in TP/ CIT areas over summer months	£15,000	£60,000
Good Relations (GR)	170,000 TEO -	56,000	226,000	Funds the delivery of the GR Action Plan including Cultural Expressions	H	Cultural Expressions July- £45,000	Funding required urgently for CE Programme to fund community festivals – community issues ref funding not confirmed	£19,000	£45,000

ANDBC 2026/27 Central Government Funded Community Budget

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EVAWG	300,000 (Momentum £72,000 / Change Fund £228,000) TEO	0	300,000	Funds the tiered grants programme and salary for new fixed term post to administer the Programme	M	LoO required to allow work to begin asap	Funding required to continue the momentum of awareness raising in the Borough and appoint staff member who has been successfully interviewed (Activity and Budget spend can begin in September)	£0 - Council does not match fund	£50,000
Advice services	225,184 DfC-	180,700	405,884	Advice, welfare and tribunal services – tender with CAAND	H	Funding required to allow for support for access to benefits, referral to foodbanks. Tender requirements council must fulfil.	Funding required to support tender to CAAND which supports those most vulnerable in our borough access benefits, funding and support	£90,000 – Q1 and Q2 tender award	Quarter 1 and 2 - £112,592
Neighbourhood Renewal (NR)	14,000 DfC	16,000	30,000	Salary for Neighbourhood Renewal officer	L	Salary – council can support in the interim	Officer provides admin support to the NR Partnership	£8,000	£7,000
Community Festivals	25,000 DfC	69,000	95,000	Council portion of funding has been administered to successful applicants	L	Some events have taken place. Number of events planned for summer in areas of deprivation.	Funding for a tiered grants programme to support neighbourhood and community events. LoO issued for Council portion of Budget, with DfC portion of budget outlined at risk.	£69,000 – has been allocated while awaiting DfC portion	Would require full budget to be fair to all grant recipients. £25,000

ANDBC 2026/27 Central Government Funded Community Budget

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CD Running costs	58,000 DfC	74,000	132,000	Running costs scheme launched on 15 th July, closing on 6 th July 2026.	M	Covers essential running costs for Community Groups	Covers insurance, running costs, etc for community groups (could allocate Council funding only – but would leave some groups at risk)	£74,000	Would require full budget £58,000
Totals	1,002,184	502,700	1,505,884					£275,000 (High risk £124,000)	£357,592 (£217,592 high risk)
								£632,592 (£341,592 – high risk)	

ITEM 8.5

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) meeting of the Corporate Services Committee was held at Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Tuesday 16 June 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman Smith

Aldermen: Brooks
Graham McRandal
McIlveen

Councillors: Chambers (7.10 pm) McCracken
Cochrane Moore
Gilmour
W Irvine
McBurney

Officers in Attendance: Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Head of Corporate Governance (A Curtis), Head of Finance (S Grieve), Head of Strategic Change (S Denny), Community Planning and Climate Change Manager (P Mackey), Head of HR (R McCullough), and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor S Irvine, Councillor Quinn and Councillor Thompson. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Chambers.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought declarations of interest and the following were noted.

Alderman McIlveen – Item 9 – ECNI Annual Equality Progress
Councillor Cochrane – Item 9 – ECNI Annual Equality Progress
Councillor W Irvine – Item 9 – ECNI Annual Equality Progress

Members were reminded that they could declare an interest at any point during the meeting.

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION

There were no Deputations.

4. DRAFT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2026/27

(Appendix I & II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that Members would be aware that the Council had a statutory duty under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to publish a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) each year, by 30 June, that sets out at least one of the main short-term issues (improvement objectives) it wanted to improve for people living and working in the Borough during the year ahead.

Key Issues

The annual Performance Improvement Plan was a mechanism to help deliver the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2028 and therefore the objectives within the annual Plan for 2026/27 continued to align with the priorities/outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan and the performance measures continued to be grouped under each of the seventeen Strategic Actions.

Therefore, the four high level Improvement Objectives in 2025/26 remained the same for 2026/27 and as follows:

1. We will increase economic growth by attracting more jobs and businesses.
2. We will reduce carbon emissions as we transition to net zero.
3. We will improve wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality.
4. We will be a high-performing organisation.

The measures under each of the high level objectives had been reviewed and updated detailing what improvements Services would undertake in 2026/27.

The selection of the improvement objectives and measures for inclusion in the 2026/27 Improvement Plan were informed by:

- Priorities/outcomes identified in the Corporate Plan 2024-28, which was based on input and feedback from Elected Members, officers, residents and stakeholders and in line with the Big Plan for Ards and North Down (2017-2032); and
- Improvement initiatives identified during the Budget and Service Planning process and Resident Survey.

The objectives and measures had been developed within the context of the Council's PERFORM framework ensuring:

- There were clear links to The Big Plan for Ards and North Down 2017-2032, Corporate Plan 2024-28 and Annual Service Plans;
- They were based on evidence provided by the residents of the Borough; and
- They were aligned to at least one of the seven aspects of improvement.

A number of measures were carried forward from 2025/26 under each of the objectives which aligned to feedback from NIAO regarding continuity and the ability to track performance on our objectives.

Whilst the Performance Improvement Plan focused specifically on the key areas identified for improvement this year, the Council was still seeking to bring about improvement in other areas. The plan was not designed to describe all of the Council's day to day work.

Next Steps

Subject to Council approval, the 2026/27 Performance Improvement Plan would be published on the Council's Website by the legislative date of 30th June 2026.

Summary

A public consultation was undertaken which involved 4 independent focus groups and an online survey published on the Council's consultation platform.

Based on the public consultation process, there was strong overall support for the Council's four performance improvement objectives proposed for 2026/27, with economic growth emerging as the clearest top priority across both the focus groups and the survey. Wellbeing and social inclusion also attracted very strong support, while net zero was generally supported but seen as a less immediate priority, and being a high-performing organisation was viewed as important but something residents largely expected as standard.

Detailed Consultation Report attached at **Appendix 2**.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the Draft Performance Improvement Plan for 2026/27 attached at Appendix 1 for publication.

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

Councillor McCracken asked about Item 1, Priority 1, noting that the aim was to stimulate economic growth within the Rate base. He highlighted that achieving that would require some rebalancing of activity within the organisation. He queried how much new human resource had been allocated to support this priority and whether there was a plan to reorientate existing staff to meet the demand. He expressed concern that, although the Council had secured a significant number of grants, which was to be welcomed, those were being delivered by the existing staff complement, with some teams already operating a small team. With further grants expected through additional Executive programmes he stressed that it would be important to rebalance staff resources to ensure delivery capacity.

The Director of Place and Prosperity would have been able to provide further detail, but the Director of Corporate Services explained that recruitment for a new Head of Service for that area had recently been completed. Without that role in place, there had been challenges in progressing a range of workstreams. In respect of broader resourcing, he and the Head of Finance had already highlighted the need to reorientate the Council's budget to support that priority, and some progress had been made toward meeting the target.

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

5. UPDATED SCHEME OF COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES FOR 2026-27
(Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that each year the Council must approve a scheme of allowances for Councillors before any payments could be made to Members. This year's scheme was approved by Council in March.

Key Issues

The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced recently the rate was to be increased for approved mileage allowance payments from 45p to 55p per mile. As the councillors' scheme of allowance was aligned to this HMRC rate, officers had prepared a revised scheme for the Council's consideration. It was estimated that an increase in this mileage rate would cost in the region of £600 per annum.

Next Steps

If approved the payments team would implement this new rate for future claims and pay any arrears due for claims submitted since April 2026. The Council's constitution and website would be updated accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the scheme of allowance v14.1 for 2026/27.

Proposed by Councillor McBurney, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen stated that he did not, and had never, claimed mileage, so the decision did not affect him personally. He reminded Members that the Council had taken a decision on this matter several years previously, agreeing to align mileage rates with HMRC levels, and that the current position was therefore consistent with that previous decision. He added that only a small number of Councillors claimed mileage and he did not believe the change would make a significant difference to the Council's budget.

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

6. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2026 – 2029
(Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Learning and Development Plan reflected and reinforces the approach to learning within the Corporate Plan, the Workforce Plan, the Organisational Development Strategy and the Strategic Change Service Plan.

As part of the Policy Review Procedure, consultation had occurred with management, trade union partners and the Staff Consultative Committee. The draft could be found in Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the Learning and Development Plan 2026 - 2027.

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

7. ROADMAP TO SUSTAINABILITY (Appendix V & VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Roadmap to Sustainability provided the Council's overarching framework for embedding sustainability across all services, aligning environmental, social and economic priorities.

As a cross-Council initiative, delivery of the roadmap was supported through:

- Directorate-led actions, and
- Existing strategies and action plans,

A review of the roadmap and its supporting arrangements had been undertaken to strengthen governance, improve clarity of reporting, update actions (and sub-actions) and support delivery.

Key Issues

As a relatively new service area within the council, the Climate Team led the delivery of the Roadmap to Sustainability, originally developed in 2021. While the plan ran through to 2028, this was considered an appropriate point to refresh governance structures and reporting mechanisms to improve oversight, strengthen accountability, and enhance the tracking of progress in line with current organisational priorities and resource capacity.

The updated Roadmap comprised two elements: an interactive online document (appendix 1) and an Action Tracker Spreadsheet (appendix 2). The interactive document provided a clear, high-level overview of how sustainability was embedded across the Council, including key actions and governance arrangements. The Action Tracker captured cross-Council actions and associated monitoring arrangements, aligning them with existing committee reporting structures to minimise duplication and providing clarity on reporting routes, timescales, status updates and responsible Heads of Service.

A simplified version of the Action Tracker (appendix 2) had been developed for Members to support scrutiny and decision-making and improve visibility of progress. A more detailed internal version continued to be used by officers, incorporating additional operational information. That approach ensured clarity without introducing unnecessary complexity.

The revised approach strengthened ownership of delivery by clearly setting out accountability at Head of Service level and supporting oversight through existing governance structures. Monitoring arrangements had been refined so that the Corporate Services Committee received an overarching update, while other committees continued to receive reports on actions within their remit. Actions reported through the Roadmap were expanded upon within this report, while those reported elsewhere were not duplicated.

Action to be reported via the Roadmap to Sustainability

Social Sustainability

Action 1 – Stand for Sustainability Awareness Campaign

- The Council's sustainability awareness campaign (in place since 2018) was being refreshed to increase its impact, with updated materials, greater visibility, and stronger engagement across the Borough.
- The campaign promoted sustainable behaviours within the Council and the wider community, including outreach at tourism events to raise awareness and encourage practical action.
- Work was ongoing to highlight simple, practical steps that individuals and communities could take to support sustainability.
- Opportunities to expand volunteering were being actively explored with partners, including new initiatives, partnerships, and frameworks to increase participation in sustainability-related activities.
- There was an opportunity to provide tailored training for elected members to strengthen understanding of resilience and sustainability, supporting decision-making and community leadership.

Action 2 – Resilient Communities

- Community resilience was being progressed as a Community Planning workstream, with a focus on targeted engagement and partnership working across the Borough.
- A Citizen Space survey (Big Climate Conversation) had been developed and promoted via social media to gather residents' views, experiences, and challenges relating to climate change and resilience.
- Additional in-person engagement, including on-street surveys, was planned to maximise participation and ensure a broad range of feedback.
- A series of workshops was being delivered with partner organisations to support knowledge-sharing and encourage community-led action, beginning with an event in partnership with the Over 50s Council.
- A Big Climate Conversation, to gather the views of Children and Young People was being planned for the autumn.
- Work was ongoing to align those activities with wider partnership networks, ensuring a coordinated and joined-up approach to strengthening community resilience.

Economic Sustainability

Action 7 – Work towards Ards and North Down as a Sustainable Tourism Destination

- Work had strengthened alignment between tourism, climate and community planning priorities, embedding sustainability principles into tourism activity and

promoting a shared vision for Ards and North Down as a sustainable destination.

- The Sustainable Tourism Group had agreed a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (2026–27), setting out actions, commitments and success measures.
- The Group brought together key partners across tourism, environment, community and economic sectors to support a coordinated approach.
- The Group had co-designed a Good Visitor Promise to promote responsible visitor behaviour and support the protection of local communities, environment and heritage.
- The Good Visitor Promise was launched in May 2026 and was being actively promoted through online platforms, partner channels, events and social media.
- Supporting communications materials had been developed, including an animation ([Good Visitor Promise](#)) and poster.
- Work had progressed on a Good Business Promise, providing a mechanism for tourism businesses to support the sustainable tourism ambition and align their practices with the Good Visitor Promise.
- Loughs and Legends (formerly the Sustainable Giants) had become formally constituted and had established governance and marketing sub-groups to support its development. It had progressed the creation of sustainable itineraries and worked in collaboration with SERC students to develop a basic website to showcase its offer. The group had also attended trade shows to raise its profile and was currently developing a social media marketing plan to communicate and promote its activities more effectively.

Environmental Sustainability

Action 8 – ISO 14001

- The Council continued to maintain its ISO 14001 Environmental Management System (EMS), ensuring that all required records were up to date and effectively managed in line with the standard.
- The programme of internal EMS audits was progressing as planned, supporting ongoing compliance and identifying opportunities for continual improvement. To support that, internal auditor training was delivered in February 2026 to strengthen capacity and capability within the organisation.
- Preparation for, and completion of, external audits was also being managed to ensure continued adherence to ISO 14001 requirements.
- Systems and processes were regularly reviewed to support sustained compliance, performance and maintenance of external accreditation.

Corporate Sustainability

Action 21 – Climate Change and Sustainability Policy Framework

- The Climate Change and Sustainability Policy Framework had been updated to reflect the Council's current approach to sustainability and climate action.
- It was approved by Corporate Services Committee in February 2026.
- The revised framework aligned with the refreshed Roadmap to Sustainability and associated governance arrangements.
- The revised Environmental Policy Statement was displayed across Council buildings to improve visibility and awareness.
- Internal communications had been used to promote the updated policy framework and increase staff awareness.

- The framework would continue to be reviewed periodically to ensure it remained aligned with organisational priorities and emerging legislative requirements.

Action 23 – Staff training on Climate Change and Sustainability

- A mandatory climate change and sustainability e-learning module was developed and successfully launched in November 2025, providing staff with a consistent baseline understanding of key issues and the Council's approach. In addition, an Environmental Management System (EMS) e-learning module had also been created to support staff awareness of EMS requirements and processes.
- Development of toolbox talks was currently underway in collaboration with the Estates team, supporting practical, role-specific guidance for staff.
- In-person training sessions, including tailored training for elected members, were being considered for delivery following the upcoming election period to ensure they were timely and aligned with Council priorities.

Action 24 – Facilitation of Climate and Sustainability Forum

- The Climate and Sustainability Forum (previously the Climate and Sustainability Champion Working Group) continued to play a key role in reviewing, updating and progressing roadmap actions. The group was relaunched under a new name in April 2026, with updated Terms of Reference to reflect its evolving role and priorities.
- Meetings were successfully held in January and April 2026, with representation from each Directorate, ensuring a collaborative, cross-Council approach to delivering sustainability objectives.

Next Steps

The roadmap to Sustainability would be updated every six months (June and November) and reported to Elected Members via the Corporate Services Committee. The internal Officer Climate and Sustainability Forum would review, update and add actions to ensure the Action Tracker captured the breadth of activity undertaken by the Council to deliver its statutory duty for sustainable development.

Summary

The Action Tracker provided a comprehensive, cross-Council overview of sustainability activity across four themes: social, economic, environmental, and corporate sustainability. It demonstrated a broad and active programme of work, with most actions progressing and delivery moving from strategy development into implementation. Social and economic actions were largely underway, environmental activity represented the most extensive programme with a mix of completed strategies and ongoing delivery, and corporate sustainability was well established through governance structures, with further work ongoing to embed training and organisational practices.

While most actions within the Action Tracker were progressing, a small number were either at an early stage or identified as delayed. Those were primarily within specific operational areas, including elements of waste management delivery and aspects of climate adaptation and training. Those actions were being monitored through existing governance arrangements, and updates would be provided through the relevant

reporting routes. At this stage, no significant risks to overall delivery had been identified.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves this report, the updated Roadmap for Sustainability and the new action tracker.

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

8. CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS ANNUAL UPDATE (Appendix VII & VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Council adopted the NIPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for the Local Government sector, providing a standardised approach to dealing with customer complaints across the public sector in Northern Ireland. In particular, the aim was to implement a standardised and consistent process for customers to follow which made it simpler to complain, ensured staff and customer confidence in complaints handling and encouraged public bodies to make best use of lessons learned from complaints. Customer Complaints statistics were published on the Council's website quarterly.

As part of the MCHP, the Council was required to provide an annual report to NIPSO and publish the results on its website for customers to view. The report must clearly document:

- the volume of complaints that had been received
- whether the Council had dealt with the complaints in line with the new MCHP
- any lessons learned from the complaint
- any actions taken to ensure the complaints did not recur.

Council officers had created a 'complaints dashboard' which showed key metrics like number of complaints, categories, resolution status and response times. Appendix 1 showed the dashboard for 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

It was important to learn from complaints and therefore officers had also documented the lessons learned. That was written in plain English and highlighted recurring issues, root causes, and actionable insights to improve processes and prevent future problems. Appendix 2 documented the complaint summaries, lessons learned and action plan for 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves this report be submitted to NIPSO.

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

Councillor W Irvine said it was good to see that so many complaints had been resolved at stage 1 and asked if that was better or worse than the previous year. The Head of Corporate Governance replied that was better in terms of complaints received

and compliance under the Council's commitments to the complaints process and its timelines.

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

(Having declared an interest in Item 9 Alderman McIlveen, Councillor W Irvine and Councillor Cochrane left the meeting at 7.09 pm)

(Councillor Chambers entered the meeting)

9. ECNI ANNUAL EQUALITY PROGRESS

(Appendix IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that as Members would be aware, Ards and North Down Borough Council prepared an annual report on the progress it had made on implementing the arrangements set out in its equality scheme to discharge its Section 75 statutory duties (Section 75 annual progress report).

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) had requested that all Councils complete a template to demonstrate progress on its implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties of The Northern Ireland Act 1998 and progress on implementation of positive duties under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order (DDO) 2006.

Next Steps

The completed Draft Annual ECNI Report 2025-2026 was attached in Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the Draft ECNI annual Report 2025-2026 as detailed in Appendix 1.

Councillor Gilmour asked to make an alternative proposal which was seconded by Alderman Graham;

To propose with the exception of page 17, question 11, remove the Orange Victims day event as an example of good practice.

She indicated that she would not elaborate too much because obviously the Council had previously discussed the Orange Victims Day event. When the discussions had taken place every party in the Chamber had disagreed with the fact that it was costing £6,000 and that was viewed as a waste of money. She therefore did not believe that should be included as best practice in the Council's response.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted with the exception of page 17, question 11, remove the Orange Victims Day event as an example of good practice.

(Alderman McIlveen, Councillor W Irvine and Councillor Cochrane returned to the meeting at 7.11 pm).

10. DAERA RURAL NEEDS ANNUAL PROGRESS

(Appendix X & XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that as Members would be aware, Section 1 of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 placed a duty on public authorities, including Councils, to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services. In carrying out that duty and in line with guidance issued by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Council carried out rural screening exercises on its policies.

A Rural Needs screening exercise was carried out simultaneously by officers when completing other screening of policies. The 2016 Act placed a further obligation on public authorities to compile information on the exercise of its functions under section 1 of the Act (i.e., information on completed screening exercises), and to report that annually to DAERA.

DAERA had produced a template for public authorities to complete when compiling the information for its annual return. DAERA then collated all the returns it received and produced an annual Rural Needs Monitoring Report. The Council's draft return for 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026 was attached to this report at Appendix 1 and provided detail on the rural screening exercises completed during this period.

Key Issues

DAERA had launched a reporting portal on 1 April 2026. The Council was currently working with officers in DAERA to ensure compatibility between the new portal and the Council's existing process. There was also a request to use the portal for this current return and again officers were working with DAERA to reach a suitable compromise without having to duplicate work already carried out by officers. See Appendix 2 for more details.

Next Steps

Officers requested approval to send Appendix 1 to fulfil the Council's obligations. Regardless of whether the portal was used or DAERA accept the current reporting format, the information would remain the same as in Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the Draft Rural Needs Report 2025-2026 as detailed in Appendix 1.

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

11. YEAR-END OUTTURN 2025-2026

(Appendix XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that each year a strategic budget report was brought to the Council four times

a year. This was the fourth and final report, which set out the final budgetary performance for the year and detailed the planned transfers to be made to the Earmarked Reserve.

Key Issues

This strategic budget report set out the key income and expenditure variances for the 2025/26 financial year and showed that budgetary performance was largely in line with expectations with a small surplus of £258k. That would allow the general fund balance to remain above the 7.5% target set out in the Reserves Policy.

Next Steps

The first budget report of the new financial year would be reported to the Committee in September 2026 covering the first four months of the 2026/27 financial year.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the strategic budget report and approves the amendment of the Reserves Policy to create a Waste Fund within the strategic reserves.

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

12. CORPORATE SERVICE PERFORMANCE JUNE 2026

(Appendix XIII & XVIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate 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 the 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 16 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 reports for October 2025 – March 2026 were attached in the below appendices:

Appendix 1 Community Planning and Climate
 Appendix 2 Communications and Marketing
 Appendix 3 Finance
 Appendix 4 Strategic Change
 Appendix 5 Corporate Governance
 Appendix 6 Human Resources

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report and Appendices 1-6.

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

13. CLIMATE ACTION

(Appendix IXX & XX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that this report presented the Council's first Annual Climate Action Report for 2025–26 (appendix 1 and 2) and provided Members with a high-level summary of progress, governance arrangements, and associated investment in delivering the Council's Climate Action (Mitigation) Plan and Climate Adaptation Plan.

The Council's Climate Action was informed by the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which placed duties on public bodies to contribute to emissions reduction targets and to prepare for the impacts of climate change, alongside requirements for monitoring, reporting, and transparency.

The Climate Action Annual Report formed part of the Council's response to these duties. It established an annual reporting cycle, providing a structured and transparent account of progress in delivering both the Climate Action (Mitigation) Plan and the Climate Adaptation Plan.

Summary of Progress

Steady progress had been made, but accelerated delivery would be required.

The Council had achieved an 11.54% reduction in emissions from the 2019/20 baseline, demonstrating continued progress in reducing emissions across its estate and operations. However, further acceleration would be required if the Council was to meet the 2030 target.

Strong governance and reporting arrangements were now in place.

The establishment of the Climate Action Board, alongside the development of the Carbon Dashboard and annual reporting cycle, provided a clear framework for oversight, monitoring, and accountability.

Climate action was being embedded across Council services.

Delivery was being progressed through existing service structures, aligning climate

objectives with asset management, service planning, and operational decision-making rather than through stand-alone programmes.

Adaptation was being addressed alongside mitigation.

Alongside emissions reduction, the Council was strengthening resilience to flooding, extreme weather and other climate risks through its Climate Adaptation Plan and Nature-Based Solutions.

Investment has been integrated into existing programmes.

Climate-related investment was being delivered through approved strategies, capital programmes, and existing budgets, with further investment areas identified for future decision.

Summary of progress (Mitigation and Adaptation)

This section summarised progress made during 2025–26 against the Council’s climate action priorities.

Energy management and the Council estate

The Council continued to manage energy use across its estate through established energy and environmental management arrangements. During 2025–26, that included ongoing monitoring of energy consumption, identification of efficiency measures, and alignment of climate objectives with estate management and capital planning processes.

In addition to reducing emissions, estate-related actions support climate adaptation by improving the Council’s ability to manage overheating, severe weather impacts, and future energy constraints. Embedding climate considerations within asset management helped ensure buildings remained safe, usable, and affordable to operate as climate risks increased.

Costs and/or savings

Energy management activity during the year was delivered largely through existing budgets and approved programmes, including established energy management and monitoring systems. As a result, no new or stand-alone climate funding was required in 2025–26. While precise savings attributable to individual actions were difficult to isolate, this approach supported ongoing efficiency improvements and helped avoid higher future costs associated with inefficient buildings and unmanaged energy use. Environment Committee (March 2026) agreed to annual carbon reduction targets across the Estates Energy Management Programme. A budget for 2026/27 had been secured and the report indicated a total budget of £3.4 million was required to implement all identified projects up to 2030.

Natural environment, woodland, and biodiversity

During 2026-26 the Council strengthened its approach to the natural environment, with a particular focus on trees, woodland, and green infrastructure. The Council made further use of improved data and evidence to support decision-making, including understanding the role of trees and green spaces in carbon sequestration, biodiversity, air quality, and climate resilience.

Nature-based actions played a key role in climate adaptation. Investment in trees, woodland and green infrastructure supported flood risk management, urban cooling

and biodiversity resilience while also delivering carbon benefits. Strengthening evidence and data on the Council's natural assets improved long-term resilience and supported informed responses to climate impacts already being experienced across the Borough.

Costs and/or savings

Investment during the year included previously approved expenditure on systems and tools to improve data quality and asset understanding. Those costs were modest and were agreed through Committee decisions.

Annually £30,000 was invested in delivering the tree planting activities of the Tree and Woodland Strategy.

A business case had also been approved to fund the purchase of additional land to increase the areas available for tree planting.

Fleet and Transport

During 2025–26, the Council continued to progress work to reduce emissions from its vehicle fleet, recognising that fleet and fuel use accounted for a significant proportion of the Council's operational emissions. Activity during the year focused on assessing realistic transition options, understanding infrastructure constraints, and managing fuel-related cost pressures while maintaining essential frontline services.

Work undertaken included further evaluation of alternative fuels and low-emission vehicle options, alongside early investigations into depot charging infrastructure. This work had confirmed that the pace and scale of change was influenced by external factors such as energy grid capacity and the availability and cost of alternative fuels. The work also had an adaptation dimension, as more resilient fleet planning helped maintain service delivery during extreme weather events and fuel supply disruptions.

Costs and/or savings

No new fleet-wide investment decisions were taken during 2025–26. However, reports to Members identified emerging cost pressures associated with alternative fuels, as well as the potential need for future capital investment in charging infrastructure. Those cost pressures were not currently committed and would require separate business cases and Committee approval. Over the longer term, reduced fuel consumption, lower maintenance costs, and improved price stability continued to be identified as potential benefits, but those had not yet been monetised.

The Roadmap to a Green Fleet included commitments to transition smaller vehicles, with the costs of replacement or leasing expected to be largely met through the existing vehicle replacement programme and its associated budget.

The cost of implementing the decarbonisation of larger vehicles within the Council fleet was currently unknown.

Governance, skills, and organisational capacity

Effective climate action during 2025–26 was supported through cross-service working and existing staff capacity rather than the creation of new delivery structures. Climate

considerations were increasingly embedded within service planning, estates management and operational decision-making.

The approach reflected the Council's intention to mainstream climate action across its functions and to align delivery with existing governance, financial and performance management arrangements.

Building organisational capacity and embedding climate considerations within decision-making also supported adaptation by improving the Council's ability to anticipate, manage and respond to future climate risks in a coordinated way.

Costs and/or savings

The primary costs associated with governance and delivery capacity related to existing staff roles and functions. Those were met from existing budgets. By embedding climate action within current structures, the Council had avoided the need for significant new overheads while reducing the risk of non-compliance and supporting more coordinated investment decisions.

Climate Investment and Financial Approach

In line with previous Member direction to provide clarity on the costs of delivering the Climate Action Plan, the report provided visibility of costs by drawing together climate-related expenditure from approved strategies, capital programmes, and existing budgets.

This approach ensured that:

- all expenditure had been subject to appropriate governance and Committee approval;
- climate action was delivered through mainstream service and financial planning processes; and
- Members had visibility of both agreed investment and emerging cost pressures.

Agreed Investment

The following headline investments had already been agreed by the Council and directly supported delivery of climate actions:

- **Energy Management / Sustainable Energy Strategy**
Investment of £3.4 million (to 2030) to support energy efficiency and renewable energy measures across the Council estate.
- **Tree and Woodland Strategy**
Investment of **£1 million** to support land acquisition, tree planting and long-term carbon sequestration and biodiversity outcomes.
- **Climate Ready Parks Action Plan**
Delivery was being progressed through existing parks and capital budgets, supporting climate resilience, green infrastructure, and flood management.
- **Fleet Replacement Programme**
Transition to lower emission vehicles was being progressed through the existing fleet replacement programme, with no separate standalone budget approved at this stage.

Due to uncertainties in how the larger fleet would be transitioned, including infrastructure requirements and wider market factors, it had not been possible to identify a single overall cost at this stage.

Those investment decisions, and any future decisions, would be reported to the associated Council committee.

Emerging Costs and Future Investment

The report identified a number of areas where future investment may be required, including:

- expansion of low-emission fleet and supporting infrastructure;
- depot and charging infrastructure requirements; and
- wider energy and estate decarbonisation measures.

Carbon Dashboard and Investment Planning

The Council had developed a Carbon Dashboard to support the monitoring and management of emissions across its estate and operations. The Dashboard provided a structured approach to tracking energy consumption, associated carbon emissions, and progress against the Council's emissions reduction targets.

The Dashboard was being further developed to incorporate planned and approved projects, including those funded through the Council's £3.4 million investment in energy management and estate decarbonisation. As part of this process, the Council was linking individual projects to:

- associated capital and revenue expenditure;
- projected carbon savings; and
- expected financial savings over time.

That would strengthen the Council's ability to understand both the carbon and financial impact of individual actions and programmes.

As the Dashboard was fully populated, it would provide a robust evidence base to:

- identify where the greatest emissions reductions could be achieved;
- assess the relative value for money of different interventions;
- understand payback periods and lifecycle costs; and
- track both projected and actual savings, including carbon and financial benefits.

That would support more informed decision-making and enable future investment proposals to be prioritised based on impact, value for money and deliverability, while ensuring alignment with the Council's emissions reduction targets and financial planning processes.

Summary

The Climate Action Annual Report demonstrated that the Council had started to make progress in establishing governance, planning, and initial delivery of climate action across its operations.

The next phase would require an increased pace of delivery, supported by continued integration of climate action into service planning, strengthened monitoring, and the development of future investment proposals where required.

The Annual Report formed part of the Council's response to the duties emerging from the Climate Act (NI), providing a structured record of actions taken and progress made during the year.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Alderman McRandal began by congratulating the Chair on his new role and stressed that work on Climate Action was very important. He thanked the Community Planning and Climate Change Manager for undertaking that to date and pulling it into the Climate Action Plan.

Councillor W Irvine suggested that, in terms of potential costs that would be coming to the Council, he was aware of the need for investment in fleet. He noted that if the Council were to transition its fleet, funding would be needed to support that. In the context of net zero, he questioned how affordable such a transition would be and said he did not want to see that financial pressure placed on ratepayers in future years.

The Community Planning and Climate Change Manager acknowledged that the fleet and its transition to net zero had always been recognised as a significant challenge. Plans were in place with the Head of Estates to begin transitioning the smaller vehicles. She added that, only the previous week, the team had advised that it was exploring the option of leasing an electric bin lorry next year to test its capabilities across the Council's various routes. She noted that this would be a substantial challenge but one that had been prioritised within the internal Climate Action Board, as it was essential for making meaningful progress toward a lower-carbon fleet.

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

14. PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2025- 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 and the Prudential and Treasury Codes issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), supported by guidance issued by the Department for Communities, required the Council to approve financial policies and strategies for its capital financing and treasury management activities. As a minimum, the Council was required to receive and approve annual capital and treasury management strategies at the commencement of each year, quarterly updates and an annual report after the close of each financial year.

This report met the last requirement of an annual report for the 2025/26 financial year. The purpose of this report was to highlight performance against the Prudential Indicators (PIs) which were set for capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury

management activities set out in the Council's annual strategies, which were approved in February 2025.

Key Issues

Capital - Expenditure & Financing

The PIs for capital expenditure and financing should ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of the Council were affordable, prudent and sustainable. Updates to those PIs were set out below.

Table 1.11 below summarised the total amount of capital expenditure incurred during 2025/26 compared to the original estimate approved by the Council.

	Estimate	Actual	Variance
Table 1.11	£m	£m	£m
Capital Expenditure 2025/26	26.264	12.045	14.219
Add Leases onto Balance Sheet	0.00	0.491	(0.491)
Total Capital Expenditure (inc. Leases)	26.264	12.536	13.728

The variance showed that the actual expenditure for the year was below the estimate by £13.7m. That was primarily due to programme slippages in the planned major capital schemes, i.e., Ward Main Development delay in starting works due to late design amendments, location problems with the Digital Innovation Hub and delay in the preliminary proposal for a 3G pitch at Portavogie. There were also underspends in operational budgets, such as less outlay in replacement vehicles, ICT hardware and artificial pitches.

During 2024/25 IFRS16 accounting standard was introduced. Right of Use (leased) assets, along with the liabilities had to be accounted for. That transition provided a clearer picture of the Council's financial health by ensuring all lease obligations were visible and the financing of that capital expenditure was accounted for. During the year, the Council renegotiated the Bangor Bay lease with Crown Estate and entered into a 4-year computer lease.

Table 1.12 below summarised how the capital expenditure for 2025/26 of £12.536m had been financed.

	Actual
	2025/26
Table 1.12	£m
Capital Expenditure	12.536
Financed by:	
Grants	(4.026)
Capital Receipts	(1.064)

Revenue/Reserves	(0.573)
Balance to be met from	6.873
Borrowings	6.382
Leases	0.491

The unfinanced balance of £6.873m required was to be met from borrowings and leases. That formed part of the Capital Financing Requirement (see 1.2 below) and was financed through an annual charge for minimum revenue provision (MRP).

Despite capital expenditure continuing to run behind budget, the Council charged the full amount of budgeted MRP to the comprehensive income and expenditure statement. That had the effect of smoothing capital financing costs over the longer term, by building up excess financing now which could be released in the future to mitigate the peak in future years. That approach was in line with the Council's budgeting strategy and assisted in ensuring that its capital investment programme was affordable, sustainable and also prudent. This 'reserve' stood at £4.5M and was built into future budgeting plans.

Capital – Capital Financing Requirement and External Borrowings

The Council's underlying need to borrow to finance capital expenditure was termed the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). It was simply a measure of the total cumulative historic capital expenditure which had not yet been met from either revenue or capital resources.

The CFR increased as new debt-financed capital expenditure was incurred and reduced as MRP (minimum revenue provision) was charged to revenue. See section 1.4 for further information on MRP.

Statutory guidance was that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, except in the short term. The actual positions on the CFR and Gross Borrowing at 31 March 25 compared to the estimates set were shown in table 1.21 below.

	Estimate	Actual
	31/03/26	31/03/26
Table 1.21	£m	£m
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	83.887	76.989
External Gross Borrowing	64.719	59.408
Under/(Over) Borrowing Requirement	19.168	17.581
Gross Borrowing within CFR	Yes	Yes

The difference between the CFR and the Gross Borrowing figures represented the Council's underlying need to borrow (£17.6m March 2026) and indicated that historic capital expenditure had been temporarily financed from internal revenue resources.

That had been made possible due to an increase in the Council's cash reserves in the current and previous years. The position had been similar for several years now with the Council last taking out long-term borrowings in November 2018.

In order to ensure that borrowing levels were prudent over the medium term, the Council's gross external borrowing should not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for the current and following two financial years. The forecast CFR for 31 March 2028 (based on the Council's latest approved capital investment plan) was £106.3m. In that regard, it was considered that the Council's borrowing level at 31 March 2026 of £59.4m was prudent.

When making borrowing decisions, management would continue to work with its treasury advisors, Arlingclose, to develop the most appropriate borrowing strategy. That was expected to consider the benefits, risks, and impacts of both short-term and long-term loans, with the aim of minimising long-term interest costs.

Capital - Debt and the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary

Council was legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit each year, known as the 'Authorised Limit'. In line with statutory guidance, a lower 'operational boundary' was also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit. The maximum gross borrowings, which included leasing, at any point during the year was £63m. That meant that the Council maintained its borrowings within both the Authorised Limit and the Operational Boundary set for the year, as shown in table 1.31 below.

Table 1.31	2025/26
Operational boundary – borrowing *	£ 83.9m
Authorised limit – borrowing ^	£ 88.9m
Maximum Gross Borrowing during 2025/26	£63.0m

* **The operational boundary** – the operational boundary was the expected borrowing position of the Council during the year and was based on expenditure and cash flow modelling. Periods where the actual position was either below or over the operational boundary were acceptable subject to the authorised limit not being breached.

^ **The authorised limit** - Section 13 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 required the Council to set an authorised limit for borrowing at the beginning of each financial year. During the year, the Council did not have the power to borrow above this level.

Capital - Revenue Budget Implications

Capital expenditure was not charged directly to the revenue budget. Instead, interest payable on borrowings and MRP (minimum revenue provision), together known as capital financing costs, were charged to revenue. Those financing costs were compared to the net revenue stream, i.e., the amount funded from District Rates and general government grants, to show the proportion of the net revenue stream which was made up of capital financing costs. The final position against the budget set for the 2025/26 year was set out in table 1.41 below.

	Estimate	Actual	Variance
Table 1.41	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26
Capital financing cost (£m)	£10.111m	£10.145m	£0.034m
Net Revenue Stream	£68.782m	£69.009m	£0.227m
Proportion of net revenue stream (%)	14.7%	14.7%	0.0%

Treasury Management – Debt Activity

Long-Term Loans During 2025/26, no new long-term loans were taken out and loan principal repayments of £3.6m were made against existing loans. That resulted in a level of long-term borrowings at 31 March 2026 of £53.3m, as shown in table 2.1 below.

Table 2.11				
Lender	Balance 01/04/25	New Loans	Repayments	Balance 31/03/26
Dept of Finance	£ 50.601m	£ -	(£ 2.593m)	£ 48.007m
Banks (LOBOs)	£ 6.275m	£ -	(£ 1.000m)	£ 5.275m
Totals	£ 56.876m	£ -	(£ 3.593m)	£ 53.282m

Short-Term Loans Council did not currently hold any short-term borrowings.

Treasury Management - Debt Related Treasury Activity Limits

The table below showed the position of all debt related treasury activity limits.

Table 2.21		
Interest rate exposures	Limit 2025/26	Actual at 31/03/26
Quantity of debt held at variable interest rates - upper limit	30%	0%
Quantity of debt held at fixed interest rates - upper limit	100%	100%

Table 2.22			
Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing	Lower Limit 2025/26	Upper Limit 2025/26	Actual 2025/26
Under 12 months	0%	15%	5.8%
12 months to 2 years	0%	15%	4.9%
2 years to 5 years	0%	20%	19.3%
5 years to 10 years	0%	30%	27.8%
10 years and above	30%	90%	42.2%

Treasury Management - Debt Rescheduling and Average Interest Rates

Officers were not able to avail of any debt rescheduling opportunities during the year as the differential of 1% between new borrowing rates and premature repayment rates on government loans did not create any viable options. At 31 March 2026, the average interest rate for the Council's total debt portfolio was 3.82%.

Treasury Management - Investment Activity

The objectives of the Council's investment strategy were safeguarding the repayment of the principal and interest on its investments on time, with the investment return being a secondary objective. The current investment climate continued to be one of overriding risk consideration, particularly that of counterparty risk. In line with advice provided by treasury management consultants, officers continued to implement an operational investment strategy of placing short-term investments with approved high-quality counterparties.

For the year to 31 March 2026, Council earned interest of £460k on investment deals with approved financial institutions, comparing adversely to the budget set for the year of £546k. That was due to falling interest rates during the year. The activity for the year was summarised in Table 2.31 below.

Table 2.31	Average Deposit Size	Average Term	Average Interest Rate	Interest Earned
CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund	£3.0m	Call A/c	4.46%	£124,167
State Street Global Advisors	£3.0m	Call A/c	4.03%	£122,899
Invesco Investment Mgt Ltd	£2.7m	Call A/c	4.07%	£110,161
Bank of Scotland	£1.6m	Call A/c	3.83%	£ 60,327
Barclays Bank	£1.6m	Call A/c	4.09%	£ 38,915
Santander	£0.4m	Call A/c	2.60%	£ 3,274
Totals				£459,743

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement included controls regarding diversification of balances among financial institutions to mitigate security risk. Those limits allowed for the higher of £3m or 30% of total investments to be held with one counterparty, except for periods of up to 4 days for administrative purposes. The Council did not breach this policy during 2025/26.

The total balance of funds held in investment accounted on 31 March 2026 was £8.0m. The table below showed the risk and return metrics on those investments against other NI Councils.

Table 2.32	Counterparties	Investments	
	Credit Rating	Liquidity	Rate of Return (%)
ANDBC	A+	100%	3.77%
NI Council Average	A+	54%	4.10%

Source: Arlingclose Ltd Local Authority Quarterly Investment Benchmarking report Mar-26

The Council's limit for total principal sums invested for periods longer than 364 days was £500k. The Council had not entered into any such investments.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

15. AI TELEPHONE TRIAL

(Appendix XXI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that the Council received over 36,000 incoming phone calls over a year.

Many incoming phone calls related to routine enquiries across a range of Council services, and staff time was often spent identifying the nature of the query, redirecting callers to the correct team, or repeating information that was already available on the Council's website. That could create avoidable delays for customers and place additional pressure on front-line services.

Key Issues

An AI-assisted contact solution could help by providing callers with quick and consistent answers drawn from approved website content, while also directing more complex enquiries to the appropriate service area. That would help reduce handling time, save staff effort and cost, improve the efficiency of call management, and enhance overall customer satisfaction by giving people faster access to the information they needed.

Next Steps

A SMART: Phone AI trial was available to Local Government. That was a structured trial of AI-powered customer service for councils. That enabled the Council to experience how the SMART: Front Door could transform citizen interactions across phone, chat, email, and web channels with no commitment to purchase the system.

Using real service areas and citizen enquiry types, it was configured in a trial environment that demonstrated measurable impact on the Council's operations.

The trial typically ran for 4–6 weeks, covering 5 key service areas determined by the Council.

A phone number was given to a number of internal (including Elected Members) and external stakeholder groups. Those groups used the phone number to seek answers to queries and report back. There would also be a 'talk to a human' option, which would also be used to determine the issues raised in the trial.

Appendix 1 showed the trial details.

Next Steps

The Council would commence a trial in September 2026 and would report on the outcome of the trial once completed to determine next steps.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Councillor W Irvine asked officers to outline how the system would work in practice and the Head of Corporate Governance explained that the trial would use a fake telephone number, with a character-based system responding across five key service areas. It would draw on information from the Council's website and provide automated text responses, with the potential to reduce around 50% of current phone calls, freeing staff time, and highlighting gaps in online information from the Council's website.

She encouraged all Members to engage with the trial, since the more information that could be collected during the trial period the better. Members noted that similar systems were being used already in other organisations.

Alderman McRandal asked whether the system had been well tested and officers confirmed that the provider chosen specialised in local government and the system was already being used in Derby and Bristol, giving confidence in its suitability.

Alderman McIlveen said it would be a useful way to address website deficiencies and referred to his ongoing difficulty in reaching the Waste and Cleansing team. The Head of Strategic Change referred to work on a bin-related digital widget, which had already shown positive impact. She said the main issue was call-waiting time, and the system could also support bulky waste and bin order requests for example. While some residents preferred personal contact, a dual approach could be transformative to the Council's business.

(Alderman Brooks left the meeting at 7.25 pm).

Councillor Chambers noted the trial was free and asked about future costs should it be adopted. Officers advised that any implementation would require a full business case, including cost-benefit analysis, and would form part of a major project aimed at improving customer experience.

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

16. NOTICE OF MOTION**16a Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McBurney and Councillor McCollum**

Following the deputation from pupils of Rathmore Primary School and Strangford College, which highlighted the importance of ensuring children and young people are included in decisions that affect them, this Council recognises that political literacy is

fundamental to a healthy democracy and to preparing the next generation for active civic participation. Accordingly, Council requests that Officers bring forward a report setting out options for the development of a children's political literacy project to be delivered in advance of the May 2027 election, including, but not limited to: support available from the Electoral Commission; opportunities for Council to deliver the project alongside identified suitable partners; a workshop explaining how government works in Northern Ireland; and the organisation of a mock election to enable children and young people to express their views on the issues that matter most to them.

Amendment

Following the deputation from pupils of Rathmore Primary School and Strangford College, which highlighted the importance of ensuring children and young people are included in decisions that affect them, this Council recognises that political literacy is fundamental to a healthy democracy and to preparing the next generation for active civic participation. Accordingly, Council requests that Officers bring forward a report setting out options for the development of a children's political literacy project to be delivered in advance of the next General Election, including, but not limited to: support available from the Electoral Commission; opportunities for Council to deliver the project alongside identified suitable partners; a workshop explaining how government works in Northern Ireland and Westminster; and the organisation of a mock election to enable children and young people to express their views on the issues that matter most to them.

In addition, Council notes the importance of Article 12 UNCRC and tasks Officers to examine ways to strengthen the involvement of children and young people in Council activity that directly or indirectly affects them.

Proposing the Motion Councillor McBurney said this followed from the Deputation made by the pupils of Rathmore Primary School and Strangford College, which had highlighted the importance of ensuring children and young people were included in decisions that affected them. She said this Council recognised that political literacy was fundamental to a healthy democracy and to preparing the next generation for active civic participation.

Accordingly, the Motion requested that officers bring forward a report setting out options for the development of a children's political literacy project to be delivered in advance of the next General Election, including, but not limited to: support available from the Electoral Commission; opportunities for the Council to deliver the project alongside identified suitable partners; a workshop explaining how government works in Northern Ireland and Westminster; and the organisation of a mock election to enable children and young people to express their views on the issues that matter most to them.

In addition, the Council notes the importance of Article 12 UNCRC and tasks officers to examine ways to strengthen the involvement of children and young people in Council activity that directly or indirectly affected them.

She said proposing this Motion was about something very simple: when decisions affect children and young people, they should have a meaningful opportunity to help shape them. She referred to the powerful message from the pupils of Rathmore

Primary School and Strangford College, and their Deputation had reminded the Committee of something important. Young people were not just the adults of tomorrow; they were citizens of today, with insight, experience and a clear stake in the future that the Borough was building and she put on record her thanks to Bruce and Poppy for that reminder.

The principle behind the Motion belonged to no one exclusively and should unite everyone since across parties, the Council spoke often about building stronger communities, improving trust in elected representatives, and preparing the next generation to play a full role in civic society.

She thought that if the Council was serious about those goals, then it must be serious about the participation of children and young people. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child made it clear that children and young people had the right to express their views on matters affecting them, and to have those views heard and taken seriously. That was not a token gesture; it was a democratic principle and a practical one too.

Councillor McBurney stressed that when young people were included meaningfully, the quality of decision-making improved. They brought lived experience, fresh thinking and a perspective that adults, however well-meaning, did not always see on our own. Evidence from organisations working internationally and across the United Kingdom showed that meaningful participation helped create better policy, strengthened trust in institutions, and equipped young people with the confidence, knowledge and skills to contribute positively to civic life. It was a process of empowerment, learning and shared responsibility, and its benefits did not end in youth but carried forward into adulthood, into volunteering, leadership, community action and democratic participation.

That was why the practical steps in the Motion mattered. A children's political literacy project, support from the Electoral Commission, partnership working, workshops on how government functioned here and at Westminster, and a mock election were not add-ons; they were ways of making democracy real, understandable and accessible. There was useful learning from the Save the Children's 2024 *Our Generation. Our Vote.* project too: its mock election worked because it was grounded in neutral political literacy work beforehand, and when young people were given that opportunity, they engaged seriously with real issues such as education, health, climate and the cost of living.

That was especially important in Northern Ireland, where recent Electoral Commission research found that young people wanted to take part in democracy, but many did not feel they had the knowledge or trusted information needed to engage confidently. The same research found that awareness of the Northern Ireland Assembly was lower than in the other devolved nations, at 46 per cent, while only around a third of under-18s recalled learning about politics at school, and nearly half reported seeing fake political information at least weekly. That wider evidence was reinforced by NICCY, which had said that meaningful participation was still too often inconsistent and treated as an afterthought, and by the Children's Law Centre, whose research showed that many children and young people in Northern Ireland still did not feel listened to by politicians and professionals.

Pivotal's work also informed that many young people want politics in Northern Ireland to move beyond old divisions and focus on the real issues shaping their future. Those findings should concern everyone. They underlined why early, meaningful engagement mattered, because if we strove for a healthier democracy in the years ahead, we must invest in understanding, confidence and participation now. It was for that reason that she asking Members to support this Motion to send a clear message that we do not simply talk about young people, but we will listen to them, learn from them, and work with them. By strengthening the involvement of children and young people in the decisions that affected them, we are not only respecting their rights; we would be investing in a more informed, more engaged and more resilient society for the future.

Seconding the Motion Councillor McCollum said that she was pleased to give it her support. She also explained that she had personal experience of a young person's interest in the political system since her youngest child was the real politician in her house, with past experience as Vice President of the Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland and now as a member of the NIYF executive committee. Through her, she knew that politically engaged young people were still in the minority, and that there was both a real gap in practical political education and a real appetite for it.

She wanted to recognise the Rights Respecting Ambassadors from Rathmore Primary School and Strangford College, who had visited the Council in April. They reminded everyone that decisions were made every day in this chamber and across public life which affected children and young people, yet too often they were not being given the information, space or opportunity to understand those decisions or influence them nor, they said, did we always make those decisions while looking through the lens of a child.

That was why political literacy mattered in her view. It was not about party politics or telling young people what to think but rather helping them understand how decisions were made, how government worked, how elections worked, and how they could express their views in a respectful, informed and democratic way.

The evidence showed that young people in Northern Ireland did want to take part in democracy, but many did not feel they had the knowledge or trusted information to do so confidently. Electoral Commission research published in March 2026 found that only around a quarter of those aged 18 and under recalled learning about politics in school in the previous year, while four in five said they should learn more about politics in school.

That mattered because young people were forming views in a world of fast-moving information, social media and misinformation. She explained that if we wanted them to vote when they were eligible, ask questions, challenge respectfully and contribute positively to civic life, we must give them the tools to identify reliable information and understand the democratic systems around them.

The Motion was practical because it asked for options, not a finished scheme. It asks officers to explore support from the Electoral Commission, suitable partners, and how the Council could support children and young people before the next General Election.

A workshop explaining how government worked in Northern Ireland and at Westminster would be valuable. Councils, the Assembly, Westminster, Ministers, Departments, MLAs, MPs and Councillors could feel confusing even to adults so young people deserved clear, age-appropriate explanations too.

She considered a mock election would also be powerful because it turned democracy from an abstract idea into an experience. Young people could discuss issues, consider different viewpoints, cast a vote and see how results were counted, while expressing the issues that mattered most to them.

The Council was well placed to help since it was a tier of government closest to our communities, and decisions made here shaped places and services that children and young people used every day such as parks, leisure facilities, town centres, environmental work, community planning and local regeneration. If young people could see that connection, democracy became real.

The Motion also rightly referred to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, giving children the right to express themselves and be listened to. That is not a token gesture it was a standard to work towards. That meant asking where Council decisions directly or indirectly affected children and young people, how they were heard from them early enough to shape those decisions, and how to make participation accessible for pupils of different ages, young people with additional needs, young carers, rural young people and those who may not already be confident speaking up.

That was the spirit of the Motion. It was about building knowledge before young people reached the ballot box, but it was also about recognising that they had views now on climate, transport, safety, play, facilities, mental health, education, community spaces and the future of their towns and villages.

She concluded that to create a healthy democracy we should not wait until young people are old enough to vote before we start explaining democracy to them but rather we should help them understand it, practise it and believe that their voice had value.

For those reasons, she supported the Motion and commended it to the Council.

Councillor Moore added her support saying that the Motion demonstrated how engagement could be encouraged and she thought that the Council had the power and opportunity to carry out that engagement. She thought the Motion was an incredibly powerful way to include younger people and she hoped other Committee Members would also see the value in it and add their support.

Alderman McIlveen welcomed a report being brought to the Committee but noted that much of what was being called for in the Motion was already in place. He had three young children and was aware that this was taught in schools at different levels. However, there were things that did happen and could be teased out further and he explained that he had often been invited to schools himself to speak of his role as an elected representative and was aware of schools running mock elections. Young people were also being encouraged to engage through programmes such as school councils and Eco Schools so he urged caution to those who believed that nothing

happened in relation to democracy at school since he had witnessed good engagement. While welcoming a report being brought back he was not sure this was a good use of the Council's money and was not part of the Council's overall responsibility.

Councillor Gilmour noted as her colleague Alderman McIlveen had already pointed out, a number of projects already occurred so it would be important not to replicate that to preserve rate payers' money.

In summing up Councillor McBurney thanked Members for their contributions and took on board the point that there was already work being undertaken but she recognised that not all young people were engaged with it so it was important to take steps to address that.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor McBurney, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

17. LAND AT DICKSON PARK, BALLYGOWAN (Appendix XXII & XXIII)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE.

Council was asked to agree grant a right of way as part of a land transaction. The recommendation was that Council agreed to the request.

The recommendation was AGREED.

18. REQUEST TO GRANT LICENCE TO ULSTER UNIVERSITY FOR STUDY AT CLOUGHEY BEACH (Appendix XXIV & XXV)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE.

Council was asked to grant a licence to the University of Ulster for a study at Cloughey Beach.

The recommendation was that Council agreed to the request.

The recommendation was AGREED.

19. REQUEST FOR A LICENCE FOR NATIVE OYSTER DISEASE TESTING SITES

(Appendix XXVI – XXVIII)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE.

Council was asked to agree to consent to a licence to DAERA for native oyster disease testing site.

The recommendation was that Council agreed to the request.

The recommendation was AGREED.

20. LAND ACQUISITION AT AMBLESIDE, BANGOR

(Appendix IXXX)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE.

An amendment was proposed to the effect that the Council continue to explore options for concluding the gift of land.

The amendment was AGREED.

21. REQUEST OF LEASE OF LAND AT NEWTOWNARDS ROAD, DONAGHADEE

(Appendix XXX)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE.

The Council was asked to approve a lease of land at Newtownards Road, Donaghadee.

It was recommended that the Council approve the request.

The recommendation was **AGREED**.

22. PARENTAL AND MISCARRIAGE LEAVE POLICY

(Appendix XXXI)

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

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6b – order or direction under any statutory provision

The recommendation was that the Council adopts a change to internal policy for Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay.

The recommendation was **AGREED**.

23. RESPONSE TO BUDGETING NOTICE OF MOTION 708

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

The report responds to the notice of motion "*Council aims to reduce its level of rates increases in future years by introducing a zero-based budgeting process, completing the ongoing review of planned capital expenditure and undertaking an in-depth engagement process with ratepayers/residents to explain our current strategy and to obtain feedback and input to the next rates process.*"

The recommendation was that the Council notes this report.

The report was **NOTED**.

24. ABSENCE REPORT Q4 2025 2026

(Appendix XXXII – XXXIV)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 1 – relating to an individual

This report gave an update and detailed analysis of the Council's % absence figures both for Quarter 4 and the overall annual % absence figure for the 2025/2026 leave year.

The recommendation was that the Council notes this report.

The report was **NOTED**.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.37 pm.

Unclassified

ITEM 9

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	24 June 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Report title	Deputation Request from Bangor Chamber of Commerce
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Deputation Request Form
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment If multiple:

Background

A deputation request has been received from Frank Shivers and Alison Blaney on behalf of Bangor Chamber of Commerce.

The attached request form states that Bangor Chamber of Commerce wish to make the deputation to a relevant committee or full Council regarding the proposal to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) for Bangor.

The deputation request form is attached at Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Considers the deputation request.



Deputation Request Form

A 'deputation request' refers to a person or group of persons asking to appear in person before the Council or a Council Committee in order to address the Council or Committee (as the case may be) on a particular matter.

The procedure governing deputations is contained within section 12 of the Council's Standing Orders, a copy of which is set out below.

If you wish to make a deputation request, please complete this form and return it to Ards and North Down Borough Council via the following email address: member.services@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk, providing us with a contact email or postal address and contact telephone number when doing so (please do not include your personal contact details on this form – see privacy notice below).

Please note that it will be for the Council to decide whether to accede to your request and, if it does, to determine when and where the deputation will be heard. The Council will draw upon the information you provide in this form in order to reach its decision, therefore you are encouraged to clearly outline the topic of your request and the reason why you wish to raise the matter before the Council or a Committee.

Applicant Details

We apply to Ards and North Down Borough Council to make a deputation and should this application be successful, I/we agree to comply with section 12 of the Council's Standing Orders.

Name of person(s) making the deputation request:	Frank Shivers Alison Blaney
Date of request:	The next meeting discussing Bangor BID
If making the deputation on behalf of an organisation or a group of individuals, name of the organisation / individuals:	Bangor Chamber of Commerce
Name of Committee (if known) to which you wish to make your deputation:	Whatever relevant Committee or full council

Please summarise below (continuing onto an additional page if required) the subject matter of your deputation request and the reason why you wish to raise the matter before the Council or a Committee.

I am writing on behalf of the Bangor Chamber of Commerce board regarding the proposal to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) for Bangor.

After considering the proposal and discussing it at the board meeting, the Chamber voted not to support introducing a BID in Bangor at this time.

Our principal concern is the additional financial burden that a BID levy would place on local businesses and ratepayers. Businesses across Bangor continue to face significant economic pressures including rising operational costs, inflation, energy prices, staffing challenges, and already high rates bills. As an organisation, the Chamber is actively lobbying for a reduction in the rates burden on businesses, not the introduction of further mandatory charges.

We also have serious concerns regarding the projected scale and impact of the proposed BID. Based on the figures presented, the anticipated annual income would be less than £100,000. In our view, this level of funding would be insufficient to deliver the meaningful transformational change that Bangor town centre requires. There is a risk that businesses would incur additional costs without seeing measurable or substantive improvements in return.

In addition, many of the activities proposed under the BID appear to duplicate work that is already being undertaken by existing organisations, including the Chamber, council initiatives, and other local stakeholders. We believe efforts should instead focus on strengthening coordination and support for existing structures and partnerships rather than creating an additional layer of administration and cost.

Finally, we do not believe the current proposal adequately reflects or represents the wider business community in Bangor. A proposal of this significance requires broad engagement, consensus, and confidence from local businesses, and we do not believe that threshold has been met.

The Chamber remains committed to working constructively with Ards and North Down Borough Council and other partners to support Bangor's regeneration, economic development, and town centre recovery. However, we believe alternative approaches that do not impose additional compulsory costs on businesses would be more appropriate and more widely supported.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our views and would welcome continued dialogue on practical measures to support Bangor's business community.



Extract from Ards and North Down Borough Council's Standing Orders, Version 12, January 2025

12. Deputations

(1) Deputations, from any source, shall only be admitted to address the Council provided the Chief Executive has received seven working days notice of the intended deputation and a statement of its objective, and subject to the agreement of the Council.

(2) In the case of an emergency, deputations, from any source, shall only be admitted to address the Council provided the Chief Executive has received one working day's notice of the intended deputation and a statement of its objective, and subject to the agreement of the Mayor.

(3) The deputation shall be confined to the presentation of a statement, or copy of resolutions, and shall not make more than two short addresses by any two members of the deputation. The totality of the address shall not exceed 10 minutes followed by a maximum 15 minutes question and answer session.

(4) Deputations should not be repetitive and, where possible, issues of a similar or linked nature should be contained in one deputation. Where a deputation has made a presentation to the Council, the Council will decline to accept another deputation on the same issue from the same individual or group for a period of six months.

(5) No further discussion or proposals beyond questions shall take place at a Council or Committee meeting until after the deputation has withdrawn (members of the deputation will remain subject to Standing Order 8). Any subsequent proposal made should be limited to a request for officers to bring back a report on the matters raised by the deputation.

Privacy notice – how we will use information about you

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a Data Processor under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for the personal data it gathers when receiving and administering deputation requests.

You are providing your personal data to the Council whose lawful basis for processing it falls within the following three categories:

- a) **Consent** - you consent to the information being processed for the specific purpose of the Council considering your deputation request;
- b) **Public task** - the processing is necessary in order for the Council to consider your request in line with its Standing Orders which were established under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014; and
- c) **Legitimate interests** - the processing is necessary for your legitimate interests (or the legitimate interests of a third party) in order that Council may consider your deputation request.

The personal data you provide when making a deputation request may be shared internally within the Council with staff who are involved in decision making and administration in respect of Council and Committee meetings. This includes both the data contained within this form and any other data, such as an email address or other contact details, we may gather when you send the form to us.

The information you provide on this form only will be provided as a report to Council and potentially thereafter as a report to a Committee (depending on whether Council accedes to your request). Any such report will not usually be heard 'in confidence' and therefore the report will also be published on the Council website prior to the meeting. Members of the press and public may attend the Council (and Committee) meeting at which the report is discussed. An audio recording and written minute will be made of the meeting and both will be published on the website.

Your personal data will not be shared or disclosed to any other organisation without your consent, unless the law permits or places an obligation on the Council to do so.

Personal data is held and stored by the Council in a safe and secure manner and in compliance with Data Protection legislation and in line with the Council's Records Retention and Disposal Schedule.

If you have any queries regarding the processing of your personal data, please contact:

Data Protection Officer
Ards and North Down Borough Council
City Hall, The Castle
Bangor
BT20 4BT
Email: dataprotection@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
Tel: 0300 013 3333

Unclassified

ITEM 10

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	24 June 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Report title	Schedule of Meetings 2027
Attachments	Appendix I - Schedule of Meetings 2027
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Multiple Multiple If multiple: all

Background

Members will find attached a schedule of meetings for 2027.

Members will be aware that the Local Government election is currently scheduled for 6 May 2027. Dates of meetings have been altered to take this into account, with the Annual Meeting proposed for Wednesday 26 May and an additional Council meeting to take place on Wednesday 2 June.

Members will also note due to the timing of the Local Government election, apart from Planning Committee there will be no Committee meetings in April, and no Committee or Council meetings in May, apart from the AGM. In line with Standing Orders and the Council's Scheme of Delegation the Chief Executive, or nominated Director, has delegated authority to exercise the functions of the Council except those which are reserved to the Council pursuant to Section 7 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

In addition, the Council meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday 15 December rather than 22 December, due to its proximity to the Christmas holidays.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Notes** this report.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL**SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS FROM 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2027**

Please note that all Meetings will commence at 7.00pm unless otherwise stated.

JANUARY 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Wednesday 6 January	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 7 January	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 12 January	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 13 January	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 27 January 8pm	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
FEBRUARY 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 2 February	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 3 February	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 4 February	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 9 February	Corporate Services Committee	City Hall, Bangor
Wednesday 10 February	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 24 February	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
MARCH 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 2 March	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 3 March	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 4 March	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 9 March	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards

Wednesday 10 March	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Monday 22 March	Audit Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 24 March	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
APRIL 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 6 April	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 28 April	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
MAY 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Wednesday 26 May	Annual Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
JUNE 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Wednesday 2 June	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
Tuesday 8 June	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 9 June	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 10 June	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 15 June	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 16 June	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Monday 21 June	Audit Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 30 June	Council Meeting	Church Street, N'Ards
JULY 2027		
Tuesday 6 July	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 28 July	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
AUGUST 2027		
Tuesday 3 August	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 25 August	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
SEPTEMBER 2027		

Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 7 September	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 8 September	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 9 September	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 14 September	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 15 September	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Monday 27 September	Audit Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 29 September	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
OCTOBER 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 5 October	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 6 October	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 7 October	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 12 October	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 13 October	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 27 October	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
NOVEMBER 2027		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 2 November	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 3 November	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 4 November	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 9 November	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 10 November	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 24 November	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
Tuesday 30 November	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
DECEMBER 2027		

Date	Meeting	Venue
Wednesday 1 December	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 2 December	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Monday 6 December	Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 7 December	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Monday 13 December	Audit Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 15 December	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor

Unclassified

ITEM 11**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	24 June 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Report title	Battle of the Somme Pilgrimage - Update
Attachments	
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who have opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans and investment If multiple:

Background

At the February meeting of the Corporate Services Committee, it was agreed to send a small delegation to attend the commemoration events and wreath laying at the Thiepval Monument, Ulster Memorial Tower and the Memorial at Guillemont, to mark the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July. The delegation is scheduled to depart on 29 June and return on 3 July 2026.

It was agreed to nominate a Member to attend alongside the Mayor, the Chief Executive (or their nominee) and one other Officer.

Key Issues

It was previously agreed that Councillor Ashe would attend as the nominated Member. However, Councillor Ashe is no longer available to do so, and the nomination therefore returns to Council for consideration. Councillor Moore has confirmed she is available to attend, and it is therefore recommended that the composition of the delegation be amended to replace Councillor Ashe with Councillor Moore.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Agrees** to the nomination that Councillor Moore attend the anniversary commemorations of the Battle of the Somme 2026.

Unclassified

ITEM 12

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	04 June 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Report title	Changes to the Standing Orders
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Proposed changes (in body of report) Appendix 2 - Special Meeting Requisition Form - DRAFT
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening carried out – Screened out
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 7. Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation If multiple:

Background

In line with the Policy Development Process, the Standing Orders are reviewed every three years or as required.

Key Issues

The full list of proposed changes are outlined in Appendix 1 within this report.

Members should note that in line with the proposed change to Standing Order 3, it also proposed to introduce a Special Meeting Requisition Form which can be found at appendix 2.

Updated training on Standing Orders for Members and Officers is currently being reviewed and will be rolled out in due course.

Next Steps

Members will be aware that when making these decisions, any motion to add to, vary or revoke these Standing Orders will, when proposed and seconded, stand adjourned and be referred without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council and any resultant amendment will be ratified at an ordinary meeting of the Council.

Therefore, these Standing Orders will be stood down for discussion at the next meeting on 29 July 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Considers** the recommended changes to the Standing Orders as set out and agrees that they are stood down without debate for one month, being brought back to the Council meeting in July 2026.

Appendix 1

Glossary of Terms

For the purposes of submitting an item of business (a Notice of Motion, an amendment, a call-in requisition, **a Special Meeting requisition, or speaking rights at a Committee**), the day of submission is excluded from the definition of a Working Day. Days in which Meetings of the Council are held are not included in the definition of a Working Day.

3. Convening Special Meetings

The Mayor of the Council may call a meeting of the Council at any time giving 5 working days' notice. In the event of an emergency where it would not be pragmatic to await 5 working days before holding the meeting, or in exceptional circumstances, the meeting may be called with 24 hours' notice.

(2) The Mayor may call a meeting of the Council if a requisition for such a meeting, signed by eight Members, is presented to them; and; if they refuse to call a meeting on such a requisition or if, without so refusing they do not call a meeting within the period of five working days from the date of the service of the requisition on them, the eight Members may, on that refusal or on the expiration of the five working day period, call a meeting of the Council. **Members should complete a copy of the Special Meeting requisition form when doing so.**

Where a meeting is called by the Mayor or Members further to such a requisition, the meeting shall be called in accordance with Standing Order 3(1).

Upon receiving the requisition, the Mayor shall make a decision as to whether or not to call a meeting as soon as reasonably practicable, but in any event a decision if being made should be given within five working days.

11. Attendance of Members at Committees

Any Elected Member may attend a Committee meeting of which he/she is not a Member but may not take a Council seat within the main meeting area and instead should sit in the public gallery save where he/she wishes to speak on an item or items.

To register an interest to speak, a Member should submit a request in writing to the relevant Director **by 5pm** at least one working day in advance of the date of the Committee meeting at which they wish to be heard.

13. Order of Business

Subject to any statutory requirements to the contrary, the order of business at every meeting of the Council shall be as follows:

- a) Apologies;
- b) declaration of Members' interests;
- c) Mayor's Remarks;

- d) confirmation of the Minutes of the last stated meeting and of all adjourned meetings and special meetings held since the last stated meeting;
- e) matters arising;
- f) adoption of the minutes of the proceedings of any Committees and consideration of reports, if any, from such Committees;
- g) requests for deputations;
- h) business required by statute to be transacted at the meeting;
- i) reports on decisions/recommendations subject to the reconsideration procedure;
- j) ~~correspondence~~ **items circulated for information;**
- k) sealing of documents, and
- l) consideration of motions of which due notice has been given, in the order in which they have been received.

14. Minutes of the Council

14.1 Keeping of; as evidence; etc.

- (1) Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the Council, or of a Committee or sub-Committee, shall be drawn up and entered in a bound book kept for that purpose.
- (2) No discussion shall take place upon the previous month's Council **or Special Council** Minutes except upon their accuracy or matters for information.
- (3) Any minute purporting to be signed as mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) shall be received in evidence without further proof.
- (4) Until the contrary is proved, a meeting of the Council or of a Committee or Sub-Committee thereof in respect of the proceedings of which a minute has been so made and signed shall be deemed to have been duly convened and held, and all the Members present at the meeting shall be deemed to have been duly qualified, and where the proceedings are proceedings of a Committee or Sub-Committee, the Committee or Sub-Committee shall be deemed to have been duly constituted and to have had power to deal with the matters referred to in the minutes.

[Paragraphs 10(2) and 10(3) of Schedule 5 to the 2014 Act applies].

17 Motions

17.1 On notice

- (8) If a notice of motion fails to be considered at a meeting of the Council/relevant Committee, such a notice of motion will only be included on the Summons Paper for the following meeting if submitted in writing to the Chief Executive by the Member

concerned not later than five working days, at least, before the Council relevant meeting.

(12)(a) Substantial amendments made by the proposer and seconder of a notice of motion must be submitted in writing to the Chief Executive by 5pm at least ~~five calendar days~~ 3 working days in advance of the date of the Council or Committee meeting which they will be heard.

(b) Substantial amendments to a notice of motion by any Member other than the proposer and seconder must be submitted in writing to the Chief Executive by 5pm at least one working day in advance of the date of the Council or Committee meeting at which they will be heard. Any such amendment will be debated at the Council or Committee meeting in the order in which they have been received by the Chief Executive.

22. Decision Logs

(4) If an ~~invalid~~ **admissible** requisition for a call-in of a decision recorded in a Council or Committee decision log has been received by 5pm on the fifth working day after the relevant decision log has been issued, implementation of the decision, or the tabling of the decision for ratification by Council, must be postponed until the decision has been reconsidered in line with Standing Order 23.

26. Rescission of a Preceding Resolution

(1) No motion to rescind any resolution passed within the preceding six months, and no motion or amendment to the same effect as one which has been rejected within the preceding six months, shall be proposed by a Member unless the notice thereof given in pursuance of Standing Order 17.1 bears the names of at least 15% (6 Members) of the Members of the Council. Such Motions, including the names, shall be entered by the Chief Executive in their proper place upon the Summons Paper in the order in which they are received.

(2) When any such motion or amendment has been disposed of by the Council, it shall not be open to any Member to propose a similar motion within a further period of six months.

(3) This Standing Order shall not apply to motions moved in pursuance of a recommendation of a Committee or a Call-in.

(4) Voting on such a motion will be by a simple majority vote.

27. Members' conduct

27.6 Conduct during the meeting

Members must have due regard to the provisions of the Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors in relation to their conduct during the whole proceedings of a meeting of Council or Committee. In relation to Planning Committee meetings, Members must also have due regard to:

Annex 1 Protocol for the Operation of Ards and North Down Borough Council Planning Committee

~~Annex 2 Protocol for Virtual Planning Committee Meetings~~

31. Delegated Authority

In the event of any civil emergency or any situation in which urgent actions are required to ensure the continued delivery of Council services and statutory functions and it is either not reasonably practicable to convene a meeting of Council or Committee, or if any such meetings if called are inquorate, the Chief Executive or any Director nominated ~~by him~~ **by them** may exercise all or any of the functions of the Council except those which are reserved to the Council pursuant to Section 7 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. Any decisions taken pursuant to this Standing Order will be reported to the relevant Committee or Council at the next available meeting. This Standing Order may be read alongside the Council's Scheme of Delegation but operates separately to it.

Special Council Meeting requisition form

Standing Order 3, Convening Special Meetings, provides that the Mayor of the Council may call a meeting of the Council at any time giving 5 working days' notice.

In the event of an emergency where it would not be pragmatic to await 5 working days before holding the meeting, or in exceptional circumstances, the meeting may be called within 24 hours' notice.

The Mayor may call a meeting of the Council if a requisition for such a meeting, signed by eight Members, is presented to them; and; if they refuse to call a meeting on such a requisition or if, without so refusing they do not call a meeting within the period of five working days from the date of the service of the requisition on them, the eight Members may, on that refusal or on the expiration of the five working day period, call a meeting of the Council.

Where a meeting is called by the Mayor or Members further to such a requisition, the meeting shall be called in accordance with Standing Order 3(1).

Upon receiving the requisition, the Mayor shall make a decision as to whether or not to call a meeting as soon as reasonably practicable, but in any event a decision if being made should be given within five working days.

To make such a requisition, Members should fill in the form below.

We, the undersigned request that the Mayor convene a Special Meeting of the Council for the following reasons:

Details of the Requisition

	Print name	Signature
Councillor		
Councillor		
Councillor		
Councillor		
Councillor		
Councillor		
Councillor		
Councillor		

Date of submission: _____

Unclassified

ITEM 13

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	24 June 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Report title	Update on the Joint Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government Elections 2027 from the Secretary of State
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Letter from the Secretary of State to the Chief Executive
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Other Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962, Elections Act 2022
Resource Implications	None Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 3: Social 7. Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation If multiple:

Background

The Chief Executive received a letter dated 10 June from The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which sets out a number of key issues in advance of the joint Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government elections scheduled for 6 May 2027.

Key Issues

The Secretary of State intends to address a number of issues through secondary legislation relating to the two standalone elections taking place on the same day. The proposed legislation is expected to resolve matters including:

- Arrangements for polling cards, polling stations, ballot boxes and the ballot verification process. Although not referenced in the letter, Members should note that the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland will launch an eight-week public consultation on its draft Polling Place Scheme on 31 July and will also engage with political parties in advance of its launch.
- The timetable for verification and count arrangements, including amendments to the provisions governing the date on which councillors take office following the election. It is proposed that councillors will take office on the seventh day after the election.
- Changes to the election timetable to help alleviate operational pressures on those delivering the election, including provision for the Assembly to dissolve on 23 March 2027.
- Additional forms of accepted voter identification in Northern Ireland.
- An increase in the candidate expenditure limits for local election candidates.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council **notes** the contents of this report and the letter attached at Appendix 1.



Northern
Ireland
Office

The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP

Secretary of State for
Northern Ireland

1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Erskine House
20-32 Chichester St
Belfast
BT1 4GF

E: correspondence@nio.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/nio

Follow us on X @NIOgov

Susie McCullough
Chief Executive, Ards and North Down Borough Council
Town Hall, The Castle
Bangor,
BT20 4BT

By Email: Susie.McCullough@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

10 June 2026

Our reference: MC/26/413

Dear Susie,

I am writing regarding the forthcoming Northern Ireland Assembly and local council elections, both of which are scheduled to take place on 6 May 2027.

The law currently requires that the elections be conducted as two stand alone elections held on the same day, resulting in a duplication of processes and considerable inefficiencies. I intend to resolve these issues through secondary legislation.

The legislation will allow the Government to combine the two polls and for the Electoral Office to operate more efficiently and reduce administrative pressure. My officials have engaged closely with the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland on the proposed legislation.

My intention is to replicate many of the provisions that were legislated for previously, when Assembly and local elections were last held on the same day in 2011, to include:

- 1 poll card per voter;
- 1 Polling Station per voter;

- Different colour ballot papers for local and Assembly ballots;
- 1 Ballot Box in each Polling Station;
- A combined ballot verification process - this means electors will place both ballots in one ballot box which are later separated by count centre staff ahead of the separate count processes;
- 1 Register per Polling Station, and;
- Joint instructions for voters in polling booths.

My intention is to also prescribe the timetable for verification and the count. The intended timetable is as follows:

- Friday 7 May (verification of ballot papers Local Elections / Assembly Elections) & Stage 1 of Assembly Count;
- Saturday 8 May (further stages of Assembly Count through to close);
- Sunday 9 May (no public process: movement of Ballot Boxes to Local Government count centres);
- Monday 10 May (Local Council Count – Day 1);
- Tuesday 11 May (Local Council Count – Day 2);

The longer count process will also require amending a provision that sets out the day that councillors take office following the 2027 election. The law currently sets out that councillors should take office on the fourth day following an election. I intend to amend this, for the 6 May 2027 elections only, so that councillors should take office on the seventh day after the election, which will be Thursday 13 May 2027. This will only apply for the combined 2027 election and will revert to the fourth day thereafter.

As it stands, these elections will see a shorter than usual timetable, which has the potential to create challenges for those responsible for the delivery of the elections. To alleviate some of these pressures, my intention is to extend the election timetable for both the Assembly and local elections taking place on 6 May 2027. This will mean dissolving the Assembly on the 23 March rather than 31 March in 2027. My officials have engaged closely with the Assembly Speaker's office, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Electoral Commission on this matter. We do not anticipate that this will have any negative impact on Assembly business, which is scheduled to have concluded before this date, and it will provide critical additional time for the administrative processes that are critical to the success of our elections. The local election period will be aligned with the Assembly election period.

I intend to add the HM Armed Forces Veteran Card, the Proof of Age Standards Card (PASS card), the Commonwealth Passport, and the Blue Badge to the list of accepted voter ID in Northern Ireland ahead of the May 2027 elections. These forms of ID are already accepted in polling stations in GB and adding them to the list of accepted voter ID in Northern Ireland will improve the accessibility of elections in Northern Ireland.

I also intend to uprate candidate expenditure limits for local election candidates, bringing the amount that local election candidates in NI can spend on campaigning to the same level as in England. This change will ensure fair candidate spending limits for NI local elections that reflect changes in the value of money since they were first set. Candidate spending will continue to be regulated by the Electoral Commission (EC) in the usual way.

My officials are working towards laying the various pieces of legislation in the coming months to allow sufficient Parliamentary time for debate before these come into force well ahead of the May 2027 elections. It is important to note that all of the above remains subject to parliamentary time and approval.

I hope that this letter provides helpful clarification of the Government's intentions on this matter. I understand that the Chief Electoral Officer will be providing further detail on operational planning for the elections.

I look forward to working with you to make these elections a success.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Benn', written in a cursive style.

**THE RT HON HILARY BENN MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

Unclassified

ITEM 14

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	4. Exemption: consultations or negotiations
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	25 June 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	A Public Consultation on the Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland 2026-2029
Attachments	Appendix 1: NIO Consultation paper on the Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland 2026-2029 Appendix 2: Local Growth Fund Consultation Response
File Reference (if applicable)	N/A
Legislation	Other
Resource Implications	None Narrative: Consultation paper
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 1: Economic 3. A thriving and sustainable economy If multiple:

Background

As part of the 2025 Spending Review, £43 million per annum has been provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for the Local Growth Fund for Northern Ireland 2026-29 and has set allocations for two different types of spending: Resource and Capital spendings.

The aim of the consultation is to determine how the Capital Funding for 2026/27 should be apportioned, as well as how the Capital and Resource funding for the remainder of the spending review period should be allocated.

The response to this consultation has been developed at a workshop in Craigavon on 28th May 2026 with the Department for the Economy, the Northern Ireland Office in an observer capacity and representatives from the eleven local Councils in Northern Ireland present. The consultation was submitted to SOLACE on 5th June 2026 for consideration and further Ards and North Down specific comments were added as highlighted in Appendix 2.

The response to this consultation needs to be submitted by the deadline of 26th June at 5pm.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Approves the report and submits this response subject to additional comments and ratification by the Council.



Northern
Ireland
Office

A public consultation on the Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland 2026-2029

8 May 2026

Public Consultation: The Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland (2026–2029)

Northern Ireland Office (NIO)

Introduction

1. In the 2025 Spending Review, the UK Government announced a new targeted approach to local growth funding, comprising a set of interventions to drive growth and strengthen communities across the UK.
2. The Local Growth Fund forms part of this approach, with a focus on supporting each nation to deliver long-term investments for sustained economic growth. Through this Fund, the UK Government is investing in transformational programmes and projects that will create lasting jobs and opportunities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland¹.
3. The UK Government is dedicated to working in close partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive to build a modern, dynamic and resilient economy that delivers long-term prosperity for every community.
4. Underpinned by over £129 million in UK Government funding over the next three years, the Local Growth Fund represents a significant pillar of this commitment - providing targeted investment to empower local delivery partners to address specific structural challenges that limit growth but also build on opportunities for development.
5. This consultation invites you to share your views on our proposed strategic framework for the Local Growth Fund to help shape how that investment is targeted to ensure maximum impact across Northern Ireland.
6. Taking forward the insight gathered from consultation, the Northern Ireland Office will work closely with the Northern Ireland Executive to design an Investment Plan for the Local Growth Fund. This Plan will set out details on the priorities, eligible initiatives and delivery approach and, by aligning to the Programme for Government 2024-2027², will complement Northern Ireland Executive funding. Detailed delivery approaches will be designed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Executive.
7. We recognise that there has been much discussion over the Resource and Capital split for the Local Growth Fund, especially compared to previous funds such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. However the aim of this consultation is to determine how the Capital funding for 26/27 should be allocated, as well as how the Capital and Resource funding for the remainder of the spending review period should be allocated.

¹ Further details of the overarching Local Growth Funding framework for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales can be found [here](#)

²

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/programme-government-2024-2027-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most-documents>

The Local Growth Fund: Core Priorities and Funding

8. As part of the 2025 Spending Review, £43m per annum has been provided by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for the Local Growth Fund for Northern Ireland 2026-29 and has set allocations for two different types of spending, in line with the profile detailed in Table 1, below:

Resources - Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit (RDEL) - funding, for example, for day-to-day operational costs, such as staff costs for employability programmes, training delivery, business advice, and ‘wraparound’ support services.

Capital - Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (CDEL) - funding, for example, for long-term investment in physical assets, such as digital infrastructure, wastewater facilities, transport, and workspace development.

Table 1: Local Growth Fund - Funding allocation £m 2026-27 to 2028-29³

	25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29
CDEL	3.8	27.4	27.5	29.8
RDEL		11.8	15.5	13.2
Total	3.8	39.2	43	43

9. There are three pillars to be considered as part of the Local Growth Fund; **enabling local growth infrastructure, support for business, and skills and employment**. Taking this forward, the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Executive departments have, based on the analytical evidence, identified two core priorities for the Local Growth Fund to target and provided the following funding allocations:

Enhancing productivity - through business support and promoting innovation, infrastructure investment and skills enhancement.

Promoting active participation in the workforce - through investment in economic inactivity provision, social enterprise support and social inclusion, including working with employers.

Table 2: Proposed funding allocation £m (including resource and capital spending) across the two priorities, 2026-27 to 2028-29⁴

Theme		25-26	26-27	27-28	28-29	Total allocation	% of total allocation
Enhancing productivity	CDEL	3.8	13.7	13.8	14.9	46.2	35.8
	RDEL		2.5	3.3	2.8	8.6	6.7
	Sub total	3.8	16.2	17.1	17.7	54.8	42.4

³ Figures are shown in £m and rounded to the nearest £0.1 million. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

⁴ The total funding allocation includes the Northern Ireland share of funding derived from the Pride in Place Programme (Phase 2) and Pride in Place Impact Fund for 2025-26 to 2028-29, that will be delivered as part of the Local Growth Fund, including the £3.8m for 25/26. Figures are shown in £m and rounded to the nearest £0.1 million. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Promoting active participation in the workforce	CDEL		13.7	13.8	14.9	42.4	32.8
	RDEL		9.3	12.2	10.4	31.9	24.7
	Sub total		23.0	26.0	25.3	74.3	57.6
Annual total		3.8	39.2	43.0	43.0	129.0	100

10. The 2026/27 RDEL allocations are a reflection of the joint agreement between the UK Government and NI Executive in December 2025 for this funding to be used to deliver £9.3 million to economic inactivity projects and £2.5 million for Go Succeed (which are now in delivery). Capital funding that was made available in Northern Ireland for 2025/26 has been utilised by the Executive to progress a community based workspace project to support economic growth in North Belfast⁵.

11. As such, this consultation seeks views on Resource funding (RDEL) from 2027/28 to 2028/29 and Capital funding (CDEL) from 2026/27 to 2028/29.

The evidence for investment: Addressing Northern Ireland’s challenges and supporting opportunities for growth

12. To understand why we have chosen our proposed priorities, we must look at the current position of the Northern Ireland economy. While showing resilience and periods of strong growth in recent years, economic performance in Northern Ireland has been variable as the economy faces deep-seated structural weaknesses.

The productivity gap

13. For over two decades, NI’s economic expansion has been disproportionately driven by employment growth (61% of total growth) rather than labour productivity (39%)⁶. This imbalance has left NI’s productivity 12% below the UK average, ranking it 8th out of 12 UK regions⁷.

Sectoral imbalance: the economy has shifted from higher-productivity sectors (e.g. manufacturing) to lower-productivity, labour-intensive services (e.g. hospitality and administrative support). The economy also has a relatively low proportion of employment in sectors that have experienced stronger growth across the UK such as ICT and professional services.

‘Back office’ functions: even within high-growth areas like professional services, productivity lags the UK average by 15 percentage points, reflecting a high concentration of lower-value ‘back-office’ activities.

⁵ [Major investment to drive economic development in North Belfast | Department for the Economy](#)

⁶ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2025) [Deconstructing Economic Growth in Northern Ireland](#). From 2000-2022, employment growth occurred at a similar pace to median across UK regions but annual productivity growth of 0.5% was lower than the median rate (0.8%) across the 12 UK regions.

⁷ The Productivity Institute (2025) [Northern Ireland Productivity Dashboard 2025](#)

Public sector concentration: as of December 2025, public sector jobs accounted for 27% of total employment, highest among UK regions and significantly higher than the UK average of 18%, highlighting the need to stimulate private sector innovation⁸.

Sub-regional variations: while NI productivity performance has been a longstanding challenge, variations across sub-regions within NI also show greater distance from the UK average and additional challenges for progressing economic growth⁹.

The demographic challenge: a shrinking labour supply

14. The 'employment-led' growth model of the past is reaching its structural limit. We can no longer rely on a growing population to drive the economy.

Stagnating growth: NI's population is projected to increase by just 3.6% by 2050, a stark contrast to the 12.7% projected for the UK and 19.9% for Ireland¹⁰.

The 2034 turning point: natural change (births vs. deaths) is forecast to turn negative by 2034¹¹. With unemployment already at a historic low (2.2%¹²), labour shortages will become a severe constraint on growth unless we increase productivity.

C. Economic inactivity and the skills mismatch

15. Northern Ireland possesses a high level of 'latent employment'- people who want to work but face significant barriers.

The UK's highest inactivity: At 26.7%, NI's economic inactivity rate is the highest in the UK (UK average: 20.7%)¹³. Notably, of those who are inactive, 16.2% would like to work (i.e. currently want a job) while 50% expect to work at some point in the future (i.e. would definitely or probably work again), representing a massive untapped resource¹⁴.

The health barrier: 36.2% of NI's inactive population cite long-term sickness or disability- equating to 9.6% of the total working-age population¹⁵. NI also faces the largest disability employment gap in the UK (44 percentage points vs. 29 UK average)¹⁶.

⁸ ONS, [Public sector employment](#), 19 March 2026

⁹ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2025) [Delivering balanced regional growth in Northern Ireland](#), May 2025

¹⁰ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2024) [Northern Ireland Demographics 2050 - Implications for public policy and infrastructure investment](#), August 2024

¹¹ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2024) [Northern Ireland Demographics 2050 - Implications for public policy and infrastructure investment](#), August 2024

¹² NISRA (2026) [Northern Ireland Labour Market Report](#), 19 March 2026

¹³ NISRA (2026) [Northern Ireland Labour Market Report](#), 19 March 2026

¹⁴ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2026) Labour Market Intelligence Portal, Labour Force Survey analysis Q4 2025.

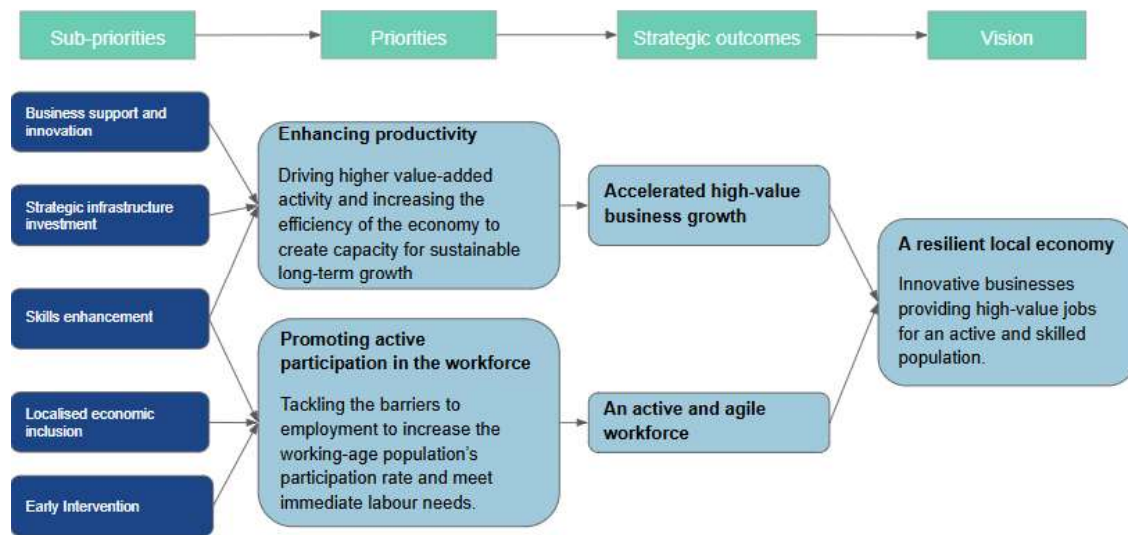
¹⁵ NISRA (2026) [Northern Ireland Labour Market Report](#), 19 March 2026

¹⁶ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2023) Maximising potential: A review of labour market outcomes for people with disabilities in Northern Ireland

The skills gap: NI has the second-lowest percentage of bachelor-level (RQF 4) qualifications in the UK. By 2033, an annual undersupply of 7,000 individuals educated to RQF Level 3 or above is projected, alongside an oversupply of those with low or no qualifications¹⁷.

Our proposed strategic framework: Two priorities for growth

- 16. To address the structural challenges identified in the economic data, the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive propose a dual strategy - pursuing productivity-led growth as the long-term anchor, while simultaneously promoting active participation in the workforce to ensure maximum employment growth.
- 17. In the Local Growth Fund, these two priorities are self-reinforcing. Productivity creates the high-wage jobs that make work attractive while greater workforce participation ensures the supply of an active and agile workforce that businesses need to expand.
- 18. Under this approach, the proposed framework aims to ensure that we are not just creating more jobs, but better jobs, while ensuring that every person in Northern Ireland has a pathway to participate in that prosperity in their local area.



Priority 1: Enhancing productivity

The goal: To support the transition of Northern Ireland towards a high-value, productivity-led economy.

We propose targeting investment toward three sub-priorities as drivers of productivity:

¹⁷ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2025) [Skills Barometer: 2023-33](#)

Sub-priority 1.1 – Business support and innovation

Core focus	Northern Ireland suffers from lower levels of enterprise and innovation activity compared to the rest of the UK. We propose focused support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to help them to innovate, adopt new technologies, expand into export markets and move up the value chain. This includes support for innovation ready businesses, as well as start ups, self-employment initiatives and those at the early stages of developing new ways for growing their business.
Proposed activity	Business and start up advice, grants and support for research and development and digital transformation

Sub-priority 1.2 - Local infrastructure investment

Core focus	Growth-driving sectors require high-quality foundations of infrastructure and transport connectivity. Northern Ireland contains significant sub-regional disparities where poor connectivity hampers productivity and median wages.
Proposed activity	Investment in digital and transport connectivity to support regeneration, improve location attraction, and ensure low productivity areas (including areas with high levels of rurality) are not left behind. Support for local water and wastewater infrastructure (including flooding prevention) to protect or unlock land for new social housing, industrial and commercial development (including site assembly and new business premises). Utilising infrastructure investment to harness the potential of a green growth economy, including investment in carbon-neutral technologies.

Sub-priority 1.3 - Skills enhancement (RQF Level 3+)

Core focus	By 2033, NI faces an annual undersupply of 7,000 workers with mid-to-high level qualifications. We must close this gap to sustain a high-value economy.
Proposed activity	Tailored skills interventions specifically aligned with high-growth sectors like ICT, professional services, advanced manufacturing, and the green economy.

Priority 2: Promoting active participation in the workforce

The goal: To tackle the high rate of economic inactivity (26.7%) and ensure that growth reduces regional disparities and social exclusion.

With 50% of the inactive population expressing a desire to work, there is a massive 'latent' workforce. To support moves toward employment, we propose a multi-agency approach focusing on three intervention areas:

Sub-priority 2.1 - Education, skills, and reskilling

Core focus	Economic inactivity is inextricably linked to low educational attainment and NI currently shows the highest rate of inactivity in the UK for individuals with qualifications below NQF Level 2. Breaking this cycle is essential for both the individual and the wider economy.
Proposed activity	Expanding access to adult education and reskilling opportunities designed specifically to bring people back into the labour market.

Sub-priority 2.2 - Localised economic inclusion

Core focus	Economic inactivity is often concentrated in specific geographic clusters with high levels of deprivation, social exclusion and low levels of connectivity ¹⁸ .
Proposed activity	Working with a range of stakeholders, including local employers, to support innovative, granular solutions tailored to local community needs. This includes support for the social enterprise sector, which acts as an engine for local growth by employing those who face the highest barriers to the labour market.

Sub-priority 2.3 - Early Intervention: Addressing NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)

Core focus	The most effective way to reduce long-term inactivity is to stop it before it starts. Entrenched barriers often begin when young people disengage from education.
Proposed activity	Dedicated programmes to prevent young people from becoming NEET, focusing on areas with historically low educational attainment.

Delivery and governance

¹⁸ Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2024) [Economic inactivity Who, what, where, why?](#)

19. We recognise that Northern Ireland requires a delivery model that is agile, locally informed, and avoids unnecessary bureaucracy.
20. Across the UK, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will maintain oversight of the overall Local Growth Fund and is responsible for periodic reporting to the UK Parliament on the Fund. In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive departments and their Accounting Officer(s) will plan and oversee delivery of the Fund, with the exception of the delivery of skills and employment support and business advice in 2026-27, which will be managed by MHCLG directly.
21. Reporting and Monitoring arrangements for the fund, as well as progress metrics, are set out in the Local Growth Fund (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) Technical note.¹⁹
22. Following final agreement of the strategic framework and outcomes, taking forward input from the consultation process, the NI Executive as Accountable Fund Lead will be responsible for managing the delivery of the Local Growth Fund to ensure alignment with local expertise. In accordance with the activities to be supported under the Fund, the NI Executive will allocate the funding to delivery organisations through a range of approaches, including commissioning and competition where appropriate.
23. To ensure transparency and rigorous management of public funds:

Partnership Group: A cross-sectoral group of partners from the public, private and third sector will provide advice and insight on delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation: Robust and effective monitoring and evaluation play a crucial role in the success of all policy and investment delivery. It is vital we adopt a culture of continuous review and improvement to learn from previous experience, build on what works, and ensure value for money. As Accountable fund lead, the Northern Ireland Executive will develop guidance to support effective monitoring and evaluation and ensure that funded projects will be subject to regular reporting to ensure they meet stated outputs, outcomes and impacts. The Northern Ireland Executive will promote transparency in that data and coordinate an independent evaluation of the Local Growth Fund.

Compliance and equality

24. As part of our commitment to a fair society, the Local Growth Fund will be developed having regard to the following assessments:

Section 75 (NI Act 1998)

25. The proposed framework for the Local Growth Fund has undergone an initial Equality screening ([here](#)). The preliminary findings suggest that the plan's focus on Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce will have a broadly positive impact across all Section 75 categories by creating economic opportunity.

¹⁹ [Local Growth Funding framework for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales](#)

26. As details of the specific programme interventions under the Local Growth Fund are established following the consultation exercise, a detailed monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed. The Local Growth Fund will be subject to a process of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including assessment of equality impacts.

Alignment with the Windsor Framework

27. In accordance with Article 2 of the Windsor Framework, the UK Government ensures that no diminution of rights, safeguards, or equality of opportunity (as set out in the relevant part of the 1998 Agreement) results from the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. The interventions funded under this plan will be managed to ensure they uphold these non-diminution commitments. The Local Growth Fund will also be subject to a process of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, including assessment of upholding rights and safeguards guaranteed under Article 2.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

28. As per the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, there is a need to consider how the plan, and subsequent delivery, will give due regard to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.
29. With a focus on Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce, the Plan has the potential to target particular barriers to development in rural areas and ensure they have the same growth opportunities as those in urban centres.
30. As details of the specific programme interventions under the Local Growth Fund are established following the consultation exercise, a Rural Needs Impact Assessment will be conducted. Further to this, a monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed to track and assess the impact on an urban/rural basis.

Consultation questions

31. This consultation will respect the Fair Funding principles outlined in the 'Partnership Agreement between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland.'
32. The focus of this consultation is to ensure the most effective and efficient use of public funds for maximum impact and value to Northern Ireland. This consultation will not consider the overall level of funding for the Local Growth Fund.
33. Within this framework, we are seeking your views to refine the proposed strategic framework for the Fund. Your responses to the following questions will be instrumental in ensuring that our interventions are practical, impactful, and tailored to the unique needs of Northern Ireland's economy.

The strategic priorities

Do you agree that the two core priorities - Enhancing Productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce - are the correct priorities for the Local Growth Fund over the next three years?

Looking at the proposed activities under each priority, is the indicative balance of funding between the priorities appropriate? If not, what should it be? (To note: this question is not asking about the total Resource and Capital funding split for the Local Growth Fund but is asking about the proposed funding balance between the two priorities, Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce).

Priority 1- Enhancing productivity

Which of three sub-priorities identified (Business support and innovation, Strategic infrastructure investment, Skills enhancement), or others, would you focus on to deliver higher value-added activity and increase the efficiency of the economy?

How can the Local Growth Fund best support SMEs and business start ups to grow and move up the value chain, including engaging in Research and Development?

Regarding local growth infrastructure, which specific local barriers (e.g., wastewater, flooding, transport, digital, green energy) are most significantly preventing business growth in your local area?

Priority 2 - Promoting active participation in the workforce

What specific support is most needed to help those currently economically inactive move toward employment, including self-employment and starting their own business?

What specific adult education or reskilling models have proven most effective at re-engaging those with qualifications below NQF Level 2?

What capital programmes / projects can best promote active participation in the workforce?

Delivery and equality

Which organisations are best placed to deliver each sub-priority of the fund and why? (For example, NI departments, local government, third sector organisations, the private sector, education providers).

Are there opportunities to better align with existing or planned provision (For example by boosting an existing local or NI project or initiative)?

Are there any groups protected under Section 75 who may be adversely affected by the proposed sub-priorities set out in this proposed Framework? Are there opportunities for promoting good relations?

The Local Growth Fund aims to promote regional balance. Are there any further considerations we should give to ensuring support benefits rural communities as per the

Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016? How can we ensure that investments in infrastructure and skills are delivered in a way that effectively supports rural communities and businesses?

How to respond

34. This consultation will remain open for 7 weeks. This timeframe allows for a robust engagement process that provides stakeholders the opportunity to share their views, while ensuring we can act swiftly to finalise the design of the Investment Plan and commence implementation as soon as possible.
35. Please submit your responses by **5:00pm on Friday, 26 June 2026**
36. Please provide your comments to the questions outlined in Section 7 using the response form [here](#) and send it to any of the following:
 - **Email:** NILGFconsultation@nio.gov.uk or
 - **Post:** Northern Ireland Office, Erskine House, 20-32 Chichester St, Belfast, BT1 4GF
37. To ensure we capture the most comprehensive evidence within this timeframe, we are also conducting a series of targeted engagement sessions with representative bodies and stakeholder organisations across each sector (i.e. the public, voluntary / community, and business) to supplement the public consultation process.

Appendix 2: Local Growth Fund Consultation Response

Consultation Questions

Strategic Priorities

Question 1.

Do you agree that the two core priorities - Enhancing Productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce - are the correct priorities for the Local Growth Fund over the next three years?

Enhancing Productivity

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X			

Supporting comments:

Supporting evidence reinforces the fact that this has been an ongoing challenge in NI for some time and needs to be the focus of collective investment and support across wider government investment. Given the limited resources available in this programme, it will be important to consider how investments can add value rather than duplicating existing activity.

Productivity improvement is a key driver for DfE investment in Local Economic Partnerships. As a result, local councils will be progressing a range of interventions to drive productivity improvements across the region, so it will be important to consider how any new activities can complement or add value to existing provision.

It is difficult to argue against the focus on productivity but it is important to be realistic about what impact a two-year programme can have on productivity outcomes. These investments need to be longer-term with investment at an appropriate level to be able to effect real change

Productivity should not be understood solely in terms of business output or inward investment, but also through the quality, accessibility and adaptability of local places. Many towns and cities have challenges with vacant and derelict units on our high streets. These under-utilised spaces present an opportunity to support local enterprise, create flexible workspaces and support skills development and start up activities. Re-purposing these spaces can help create a more resilient local economy, reduce dereliction and provide accessible employment opportunities closer to where people live.

As far as Ards and North Down Borough Council is concerned, it is a high priority as the Borough has a concentration of large manufacturing, food and creative companies where productivity improvements have a substantial multiplier effect.

Productivity is a key improvement driver for the Ards and North Down Local Economic Partnership, and the recently approved action plan contains a series of interventions which aim to drive productivity improvements, and it is crucial to determine how the new LGF will complement that

work.

Promoting Active Participation in the Workforce

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	X			

Supporting comments:

Promoting active participation in the workforce complements and supports the focus on enhancing productivity and can make a critical contribution to driving local growth.

The nature of the challenge is significant across all NI but there are particular pockets – in both urban and rural areas – where resources need to be focused to ensure optimal impact. Likewise, there are key target groups – particularly young people and those who are disabled – that will require focused support and we would encourage focused investment on these groups.

Activities to support labour market participation are more likely to utilise revenue rather than capital funding. However, given the balance of this fund, consideration may need to be given to wider investments that promote labour market engagement (supporting infrastructure; investment in facilities) rather more traditional support mechanisms. While 57% of the indicative allocation towards this priority is capital funding, it is unclear from the consultation document what types of eligible capital expenditure can be incurred within this priority. Clarity on potential “capital” activities in this area would be helpful.

Promoting active participation in the workforce should also focus on reducing structural barriers to employment through targeted investment plans than support and grow the existing ecosystem. This includes enhancing existing economic centres, addressing long term vacancy and dereliction, improving access to public transport and active travel infrastructure and supporting development that provides homes close to employment and educational opportunities and local services.

This priority is important for Ards and North Down Borough Council as active participation in the workforce is essential to support the ambitions to improve productivity. Economic inactivity is still an issue in the Council area and the recent research and strategic assessment carried out for the LMP shows significant skill gaps in our economy. The number of young people considered as NEETS sits at 5.8% and although this percentage has decreased in the last six years, it is still significant and early intervention is required to address how we can reach out to this group and build bridges between them and local employers. Clarification on the type of eligible capital expenditure for this priority would be welcome.

Question 2.

Looking at the proposed activities under each priority, is the indicative balance of funding between the priorities appropriate? If not, what should it be? (To note; this question is not asking about the total Resource and Capital funding split for the Local Growth Fund but is asking about the proposed funding balance between the two priorities? Enhancing productivity and Promoting active participation in the workforce);

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
			X	

Supporting comments:

The indicative balance of revenue funding between the two priorities appears to be inconsistent with potential eligible areas of spend, as outlined in the consultation document. This is particularly relevant given the capital/revenue split as the interventions and indicative activities to support active participation in the workforce are largely revenue based, yet revenue funding represents only 43% of eligible expenditure at present.

Across the two priorities, we also note that the indicative allocation for priority 1 is around 42% of available budget with 58% of the budget proposed for priority 2. Given that there is a much broader spectrum of eligible capital activities aligned to priority 1 measures, we would propose that these figures are reversed. This is less a comment on the relative merits of the priorities and more a reflection of the most appropriate spend on eligible activities aligned to each of the individual priorities.

Place-based interventions that can support a mixture of priority 1 and priority 2 activities could provide more flexibility in the types and range of services supported. Funders may wish to consider whether there are mechanisms for supporting projects that address both priorities – this might enable investment in a more coherent programme of support. Local councils would be well placed to advise further on the potential nature of these place-based approaches and they would align well with both LEP and LMP activities currently being delivered across all council areas.

Ards and North Down Borough Council welcomes capital investment in businesses and start-ups but there is still a proven requirement for substantial revenue funding to support mentoring support and to encourage innovative start-ups to get involved in research and development and to undergo digital transformation. Similar revenue investment is required to support growth companies through advice and mentoring. Ards and North Down Borough Council would be well placed to explore how place-based approaches could address both priorities as they would align with the work of the LMP, LEP, Community Plan and local regeneration.

Priority 1- Enhancing productivity

Question 3.

Which of three sub-priorities identified (Business support and innovation, Strategic infrastructure investment, Skills enhancement), or others, would you focus on to deliver higher value-added activity and increase the efficiency of the economy?

(insert an X under the relevant heading)

Business support and innovation	X
Strategic infrastructure investment	X
Skills enhancement	X

Supporting comments:

All three elements are complementary and can make a valued contribution to driving local growth. Some specific commentary from councils on the relevant sub-priorities outlined:

Business support and innovation: we endorse the focus on support for SMEs, helping them to innovate, adopt new technologies, expand into export markets and move up the value chain. This is consistent with the Go Succeed model developed and delivered by councils under the Shared Prosperity Fund. Councils have taken a continuous improvement approach to this model and have begun the process to look at the evolution of the service, focusing more on driving value and focusing resources more purposefully on those businesses that have the potential to innovate, create jobs and support reinvestment across the region, while structuring the support through a place-based lens. Councils are open to engagement on further evolution of the service in line with funder needs, including targeted support for digital transformation and improving innovation-readiness.

Strategic infrastructure investment can be a primary focus for delivering higher value-added activity and increasing the efficiency of the economy, particularly where it supports the regeneration and reuse of vacant and derelict spaces. However, this should be closely aligned with business support, innovation and skills enhancement to maximise long term impact. Vacancy and dereliction continue to undermine the economic potential of many of our towns and cities. Poor quality and under-used environments can deter private sector investment, reduce investor confidence and create a perception of decline that is not helpful to innovation or business growth. Concentrated vacancy can also contribute to anti-social activity, reduced footfall and weaker community confidence, further limiting economic activity and place attractiveness. The Local Growth Fund presents an opportunity to address this challenge through targeted regeneration and infrastructure investment that enables the productive reuse of existing buildings and sites.

Investment in sustainable transport and active travel infrastructure should also be considered part of the strategic infrastructure investment, as improved accessibility is essential for connecting people to employment, education and services. Better connected and revitalised city centres are more likely to attract businesses, retain talent and support higher productivity sectors.

Skills enhancement: we agree that targeted skills interventions – particularly at level 3 and above – are critical for driving productivity. We understand that low skills levels are not consistent all across

the region and will be a more significant issue for some areas than others. However, we also understand that the overall skills profile is improving and that the number of people with no or low skills is decreasing. While apprenticeships and vocational skills in key growth areas are critical, consideration needs to be given to how these pathways can be more inclusive (e.g. individuals that do not have L2 English and Maths cannot currently engage on an apprenticeship programme). Given the prevalence of small businesses in Northern Ireland, consideration may also have to be given to more flexible solutions e.g. shared apprenticeship models. It is also important to note that the current skills landscape is already complex so consideration should be given as to how any LGF-supported activities can add value rather than generate further confusion.

Ards and North Down Borough Council supports all three sub-priorities as they are interrelated and cannot be considered in isolation. They all work hand in hand to improve the two measures of productivity and promoting active participation in the workforce.

A strong business support environment is essential to drive future growth in Northern Ireland. Focus should be placed firstly on revenue funding to encourage start-ups and support scalable, growth-oriented firms to expand their workforce. This investment will be necessary to stimulate demand in infrastructure and additional staff. Emphasis must be placed on enhancing the business start-up and growth ecosystem within NI, consulting with industry to establish the key parameters for programme development that will make a real difference in helping them to grow, scale up and employ more staff.

Given the strong agri-food, manufacturing and creative sectors in the Borough, it is felt that targeted business support and productivity programmes will help local businesses to scale up, grow, innovate and export. This will in turn create higher value jobs and increase the Borough's GVA.

In terms of infrastructure, the Borough is experiencing some constraints including digital connectivity, transport, connection or re-connection to utilities such as water when a building has not been occupied for a number of years. Capital investment would assist with such issues. This would require a coordinated approach between the LGF, relevant departments and the Council. It is clear that the development or re-use of commercial buildings designed with high specifications, in line with environmental priorities and well connected both digitally and to the utilities would attract further private sector investment and improve long term competitiveness.

Ards and North Down Borough Council faces skills shortages in key sectors of the economy and has pockets of economic inactivity which are referred to as red zones. Skills development, employability pathways and workforce participation programmes are essential to ensure residents can access new opportunities and employers can grow. Structural changes to traineeships, apprenticeships including supports for employers, community-based delivery and the adoption of shared apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship models need to be considered to ensure NEETs have the opportunity to receive the necessary supports to gain and sustain employment. This in turn will create an employment pipeline in the Borough which will address the skills gaps and address issues highlighted by local employers such as the inability to recruit and retain staff.

Question 4.

How can the Local Growth Fund best support SMEs and business start-ups to grow and move up the value chain, including engaging in Research and Development?

Answer:

There are a number of factors that need to be considered if SMEs are to grow and move up the value chain, including engaging in R&D. These include:

1. Enable Accessible, Locally Delivered Support

Go Succeed has created a single entry point in the ecosystem with an in-built triage system to provide businesses with the support that they need in a time that works for them. This “funnel” creates a clear entry point into innovation, with the potential to add value through wider “add-on” services such as grants for innovation, digital transformation and R&D. The “packaged” support of mentoring and grant support makes it easier for the SME to apply the learning in the business and improves the likelihood of success. Councils are well positioned to act as trusted intermediaries, ensuring that innovation support reaches businesses that would not otherwise engage.

2. Invest in Place-Based Ecosystems and Enterprise Infrastructure.

Supporting businesses to move up the value chain requires strong local ecosystems. The Fund should:

- Support sub-regional sectoral clusters aligned with local strengths (e.g. agri-food, advanced manufacturing, tourism, digital and creative industries)
- Support innovation diffusion activities within capital investment projects – including those aligned to City and Growth Deals – in order to maximise SME access to and uptake of these resources. These centres – by their nature can support enhanced engagement in R&D activities.

As far as Ards and North Down Borough Council is concerned, the Local Growth Fund can best support SMEs and start-ups by combining targeted business support, access to innovation and R&D resources, skills development, and suitable infrastructure. This includes helping firms adopt new technologies, providing small-scale innovation funding, creating collaboration opportunities with colleges and universities, developing technical and leadership skills, and ensuring access to flexible workspace and digital infrastructure. Together, these interventions help businesses improve productivity, innovate, and move up the value chain.

The Council has been implementing the Go Succeed service along with the other NI Councils since 2023 and this service could be enhanced to include more elements of innovation and digital transformation to propose a comprehensive growth orientated service. The grant element of the service could be reviewed to propose an enhanced grant to companies engaging in research and development.

Question 5.

Regarding local growth infrastructure, which specific local barriers (e.g., wastewater, flooding, transport, digital, green energy) are most significantly preventing business growth in your local area?

Answer:

While it is clear that wastewater/flooding issues are impacting development projects all across NI, it is important to consider what realistic impact LGF investment can have in addressing these challenges. Instead, it may be more appropriate to focus resources on areas of potential opportunity to support growth e.g. regenerating places through investment in and redevelopment of vacant and/or underutilised buildings and sites. These spaces can negatively affect perceptions of place quality and investor confidence discouraging private sector investment and limiting the attractiveness of areas for new and expanding businesses. In many locations prolonged vacancy

contributes to reduced footfall, blight, anti-social activity and declining commercial vitality, creating an environment that is not supportive for innovation or economic growth.

Another significant barrier is transport connectivity and accessibility. The lack of affordable public transport, poor pedestrian infrastructure and underdeveloped active travel networks can restrict access to employment, reduce labour mobility and make it more difficult for businesses to retain and attract workers. This particularly affects those without access to private vehicles, including young people, lower income households and older residents.

There is also a shortage of flexible and affordable commercial spaces suitable for start-ups, SME's and hybrid working models. Many existing vacant buildings could be repurposed to provide working hubs, innovation spaces or mixed-use developments but barriers relating to funding, infrastructure readiness and site assembly can sometimes delay or prevent development.

In many rural areas of NI such as Ards and North Down, digital connectivity can present a significant challenge, and not all premises are sufficiently equipped with fast connections despite the rollout of initiatives such as Project Gigabit. Additional innovative solutions should be designed to overcome this connectivity barrier and allow rural communities to contribute to economic growth.

Another barrier identified in Ards and North Down is energy security and this applies to all council areas. The grid capacity has limitations and investment in renewable energy such as battery storage could support energy supply and make enterprise zones more energy independent.

To address these barriers the Local Growth Fund should support integrated regeneration projects that combine infrastructure investment, sustainable transport improvements, digital connectivity and adaptive reuse of vacant assets. A place-based approach of this nature would help create more attractive, accessible and productive environments for businesses and communities alike. Local councils are well placed to advise further on appropriate approaches to support growth in local areas and it may be possible to utilise existing mechanisms such as LEPs to direct and support investment decisions in this space.

Priority 2 - Promoting active participation in the workforce

Question 6.

What specific support is most needed to help those currently economically inactive move toward employment, including self-employment and starting their own business?

Answer:

Local councils highlight the need for targeted, flexible, place-based support to address the wide range of barriers faced by economically inactive individuals. Key priorities include tailored, locally delivered employability support comprising:

- Community-based outreach through trusted local providers to engage individuals furthest from the labour market
- Personalised mentoring, coaching, and confidence-building programmes to support progression
- Ensuring access to flexible, wraparound support including childcare, transport assistance, and health and wellbeing services
- Long-term engagement rather than short, time-limited interventions
- Focus on progression rather than “into work/jobs created” as an appropriate outcome

measurement, with greater consistency in how this is measured.

Local councils consider that LGF activities supported under “Promoting Active Participation” should focus on outreach and engagement support and that outcomes should be appropriate and aligned to this support i.e. job outcomes are not always an appropriate outcome to evidence the impact of this work. This will also help streamline the support ecosystem with the LGF-funded activity focusing on the “supply” side (reaching out to engage key target groups; providing key employability support and helping address barriers to progression) while the LMP activities operating in all councils areas will then focus more on the “demand-side” activities i.e. working with employers to design and develop employment support interventions for those further from the labour market and create/ring-fenced specific job roles for individuals that are successful in interviews for those roles. Engagement between the supply and demand support is obviously critical but we consider that, with greater role clarification in the way that we have described it, this can be achieved – thereby creating more effective local solutions and a clearer understanding of outputs attributable to respective investment sources. It is important to note the funding-dependent nature of LMP delivery and the fact that councils are working on annual funding cycles while trying to provide long-term, flexible support in line with participant needs.

Regarding pathways into self-employment and enterprise, there are many examples across councils of how Go Succeed support has worked alongside other interventions such as LMP activity to support self-employment for those who are furthest from the labour market. Given councils’ delivery across both areas, there is the potential to explore opportunities for further collaborative activity in this space, based on our learning.

Ards and North Down Borough Council has been engaged in supporting those currently economically inactive, especially since the creation of the LMP in 2021. Specialised wrap around support is central to any employability programmes aimed at this group. However, the LMP has struggled to provide a constant and un-restricted service given the uncertainty around funding and the delay in allocating it. Despite the success demonstrated by the LMP and its demonstrable impact on the local economy, it is clear that additional, long-term support is required to make a difference.

The most effective support for economically inactive people combines wrap-around help to remove practical barriers, community-based employability programmes, employer-led skills training, and tailored pathways into self-employment. This includes barrier and transport support, one-to-one mentoring, digital skills training, start-up support, micro-grants, and strong employer engagement with in-work support. Together, these interventions help people build confidence, gain relevant skills, and move into sustainable employment or start their own business.

As wrap-around support is tailored to the individual, it can help individuals who are facing multiple challenges (trauma, disability, neuro-diverse conditions etc) to engage in learning/training in a non-academic and non-threatening environment and start building soft skills which will open progression pathways. This requires revenue funding and the LGF should take this into consideration.

Self-employment can be an option for those who are economically inactive as it offers more flexibility than traditional employment. The individual can choose how much and when they want to work. It is also a suitable option for those living in remote and rural areas such as the peninsula.

Given the track record of the Ards and North Down LMP and its work with those who are economically inactive, it is felt that this model could be integrated into future delivery of the LGF.

Question 7.

What specific adult education or reskilling models have proven most effective at re-engaging those with qualifications below NQF Level 2?

Answer:

There is a strong and effective community-based support infrastructure all across Northern Ireland that has significant experience in engaging and working with individuals who are far from the labour market. They employ a range of approaches that have been shown to be effective including:

- Community-embedded learning provision
 - Delivery in familiar, non-formal settings (community centres, libraries, local hubs) to reduce stigma and build trust
 - Outreach-led engagement through local networks and grassroots organisations.
 - Informal “first step” programmes that ease learners back into education.
- Bite-sized and flexible learning models
 - Short, modular courses that allow incremental achievement and build confidence
 - Flexible scheduling (part-time, evening, blended/online delivery) to accommodate caring responsibilities and health barriers
 - Recognition of prior learning to support quicker progression
 - Introduction of digital badges to track progression pathways and enable those with no or low skills levels to build a strong “skills passport” (now being developed across all LMPs)
- Essential skills integrated with vocational pathways
 - Combining literacy, numeracy, and digital skills with practical, work-related training
 - Providing 1-2-1 support to ensure progression into further training, apprenticeships, or employment.
- Wraparound and personalised support
 - Dedicated mentoring and pastoral support to address confidence, motivation, and personal barriers
 - Access to childcare, transport assistance, and wellbeing services
 - Ongoing learner tracking to support retention and progression
 - Benefit assurance to guarantee job seekers that their benefits will not be detrimentally affected when in training
 - Barrier payments to provide some funds to job seekers/inactive participants to allow them to access the training/support provided (transport/childcare/access NI etc)

Councils have also developed specialisms and expertise on working with these individuals to create sustainable employment opportunities. Through strong partnerships with local businesses, they have developed effective interventions that include:

- Employer-connected models
 - Co-designed programmes with local employers to support real job outcomes
 - Creating inclusive pathways – developing non-traditional pathways into jobs in key growth sectors
 - Inclusion of work placements, site visits, and guaranteed interviews where possible
- Stepping-stone pathways to enterprise
 - Introductory enterprise and self-employment programmes for those less suited to traditional employment, aligned to the Go Succeed model.
 - Practical, supported routes into micro-business or freelancing

Ards and North Down Borough Council notes that the current focus in the consultation is largely on re-skilling but our view is that the critical outreach and engagement work and support to address barriers is critical – even ahead of the skills support. Not all participants have a positive experience of education and skilling and may be hesitant to undertake any further qualification or training. Engagement prior to actual re skilling is therefore essential to convey the message that re-skilling is accessible to all. Re-skilling can come once the participants are engaged and confidence has been built to help them consider skills development and potential labour market engagement.

It is felt that the most effective way of re-engaging with those with qualifications below NQF Level 2 is through the tested delivery model adopted by the LMP.

The LMP uses community-based learning, embedded essential skills, employer-led sector programmes and wrap-around support. These approaches build confidence, remove practical barriers, and provide clear, achievable routes into work, training, or entrepreneurship.

One key element of success is engagement with local employers to identify their needs and tailor the solutions to these needs. It is also crucial to educate the employers to ensure that they understand the needs of those who are economically inactive so that they can put in place reasonable adjustments that will make the relationship successful for both parties. The outcome of this should be quantifiable and result in the development of new skills or new pathways to employability.

Question 8.

What capital programmes / projects can best promote active participation in the workforce?

Answer:

The most effective capital programmes will be those that adopt a place-based integrated approach by combining regeneration, connectivity, skills infrastructure and sustainable transport to create attractive accessible opportunities and economically active communities. A “Centre First” approach of enhancing existing economic centres will provide the added benefits of a clustering of economic, employment and opportunity with quality place-making to strengthen the existing offer while delivering on growth ambitions.

A key priority should be the regeneration and repurposing of vacant and derelict buildings within cities and neighbourhoods. Bringing these spaces back into productive use can create community services, mixed use developments, childcare provision, training hubs and workspaces that support local employment and economic participation. Repurposed buildings could provide much needed homes for key workers and affordable accommodation in accessible locations close to employment and public transport.

As noted above, the consultation document does not currently suggest that these types of interventions might be eligible for support under priority 2. As a result, councils consider that it is important to be realistic about the scale of capital investment that can be delivered under this priority measure.

Delivery and equality

Question 9.

Which organisations are best placed to deliver each sub-priority of the fund and why? (For example, NI departments, local government, third sector organisations, the private sector, education providers).

Answer:

Councils have detailed knowledge of local conditions, community needs and spatial priorities and are well positioned to co-ordinate and oversee delivery of many of these activities. They have already worked with partners to agree a series of strategic interventions required to unlock inclusive growth and regeneration within the boundary through the Community Planning Process. It is important to consider how LGF resources might be allocated to support delivery rather than reinventing the wheel.

Local Authorities are also experienced in delivering agile programmes that deliver outcomes at scale, in conjunction with Executive Departments, and in conjunction with the private and third sectors.

Sub-priority 1.1 – Business Support and Innovation – Councils are well placed to support core service delivery through their evolving Go Succeed model. This has created a strong track record of delivery and is built on a strong partnership involving the 11 councils working closely with DfE; Invest NI and the FE colleges as well as a wider support network to ensure effective local coverage in keeping with the Minister for the Economy’s priorities around sub-regional growth, driving entrepreneurship and productivity improvements.

Sub-priority 1.2 – Local infrastructure investment – the delivery lead will depend on the specific infrastructure element to be supported. For example, councils may work with DfC on local regeneration support but green growth investments may be led by Invest NI or academic/skills partners.

Sub-priority 1.3 – Skills enhancement – DfE is likely to be the lead partner on this element but we would propose close collaboration with councils (specifically relating to LMP activities).

Sub-priority 2.1 – Education, skills and reskilling – DfC is likely to have a view on the most effective deployment but councils will have a direct role in advising on potential local solutions. The LMP provides a mechanism for this engagement at local level – ensuring that resources are most effectively deployed. DfE may also become engaged around reskilling support – particularly where this is supporting progression.

Sub-priority 2.2 – Localised economic inclusion – this falls directly within the scope of LMPs and they would be best place to guide and support delivery.

Sub-priority 2.3 – Early intervention – DfE (and potentially DE/EA) may be best placed to advise on prioritisation. Delivery support could be channelled through LMPs and/or CPPs – depending on how significant this challenge is in local areas.

While the Executive Departments have a key role to play within the delivery of the LGF, the administration of the fund should be agile and streamlined without putting undue burden and time delay on the delivery agents. Councils worked very closely with MHCLG on the Shared Prosperity Fund, and the administration approach adopted – commissioned service delivery from MHCLG to councils – provided an effective delivery model. Consideration should be given to the role of Local Authorities managing the LGF directly – particularly in those areas identified above where, in our

view, they should have a lead role. Existing partnership-based structures such as LMPs and LEPs have the advantage of building off mature collaborative working arrangements to tackle locally identified challenges that can both drive productivity and promote active participation in the workforce.

Question 10.

Are there opportunities to better align with existing or planned provision (For example by boosting an existing local or NI project or initiative)?

Answer:

There are significant opportunities to align the Local Growth Fund with existing local and regional regeneration initiatives to maximise impact, avoid duplication and accelerate delivery outcomes.

Opportunities include:

Local Economic Partnerships – projects are coming forward across all 11 council areas and are focused on productivity improvements (alignment with priority 1)

Community Planning Partnerships – all local Community Planning Partnerships will have agreed a series of prioritised interventions to support place-based growth for their respective areas. These are likely to include activities across both priority areas.

Shaping Sustainable Places – this emerging policy approach from DfC, DfI and DAERA represents a more collaborative, engaged model for developing solutions to specific place-based challenges through funding local physical and infrastructure projects. Potential for alignment with priority 1.2 Opportunity to support the evolution and growth of Go Succeed (particularly relating to sub-priority 1.1). There is a track record of delivery and an existing partnership in place – as well as strong political for the future development of this service.

Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) and Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) are existing structures that will already be involved in service design and delivery in local areas. Consideration should be given to utilising these structures through a commissioning process to target resources in local areas in line with agreed Fund priorities.

Question 11.

Are there any groups protected under Section 75 who may be adversely affected by the proposed sub-priorities set out in this proposed Framework? Are there opportunities for promoting good relations?

Answer:

Groups that may face barriers include disabled people, older people, young people, carers, individuals on lower incomes, people living in rural areas and those without access to private transport. If investment is concentrated in specific places or focused on particular sectors there is a risk that some communities and individuals could become further excluded from employment opportunities – hence the need for targeted outreach and engagement.

The framework presents significant opportunities to promote good relations if investment is

delivered through a place-based and inclusive approach. Regeneration projects, shared public spaces, travel infrastructure and community facilities can help create more connected and accessible environments that encourage social interaction and shared use across different communities. Investment in accessible city centres and neighbourhoods, public realm improvements and integrated transport can support greater participation and reduce social isolation.

There are also opportunities to promote good relations through collaborative delivery models involving local government, education providers, the third sector and community organisations. Existing partnership-based structures such as LEPs and LMPs can ensure that this approach is embedded in service design and that there is a level of public accountability for all actions.

Question 12.

The Local Growth Fund aims to promote regional balance. Are there any further considerations we should give to ensuring support benefits rural communities as per the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016? How can we ensure that investments in infrastructure and skills are delivered in a way that effectively supports rural communities and businesses?

Answer:

The LGF needs to take account of the particular barriers faced by rural communities and businesses. While the Fund seeks to promote regional balance, this should include ensuring that rural areas can access and benefit from investment on an equal basis. Regeneration funding has often been more limited in rural areas than in urban areas.

- Ensure funding is accessible to both rural and urban communities, with delivery models that reflect local need
- Address barriers to participation, including the capacity of smaller rural organisations to engage with funding opportunities
- Take account of the future Rural Policy and align investment approaches accordingly

The most acute and widespread barrier to development is wastewater infrastructure capacity. In many parts of the borough, wastewater treatment works are operating at or near capacity, limiting the ability to connect new commercial developments, they have a direct and immediate impact on local economic growth, delaying or preventing investment. These constraints are largely a result of strategic investment and network planning issues and are primarily the responsibility of NI Water rather than the Council.

In the specific case of Ards and North Down Borough Council, the overall statistics look relatively healthy in terms of employment and claimant count, education and deprivation, however, some parts of the Borough, especially the peninsula (rural) have higher levels of unemployment and deprivation. The Fund should map the investment required to address these pockets of deprivation to target specific needs identified by local councils through their LMPs/Community Plans and PCSPs. The information held by local government is key to drive the interventions where they are needed in rural areas.

Question 13.

If you have any related comments which have not been addressed in the above questions, please use this space to share them.

Answer:

We are mindful of the time pressure on spend and would encourage NIO to move at pace in securing agreement around the investment plan in order to move forward on delivery.

We note the annual funding allocations (both capital and revenue) and would ask NIO to explore opportunities for flexibility across each spend year. This is particularly important given the capital-focused nature of the programme and the need for flexibility in these schemes, including working across financial years.

We welcome the proposed establishment of the Partnership Group to “provide advice and insight on delivery”. It is regrettable that this Partnership Group will not be established until after the adoption of the investment plan, and therefore partners will not be able to influence the content of the plan. Local Government was an active contributor on the SPF Partnership Group and we would welcome the opportunity to participate in the LGF Partnership Group structure.

Unclassified

ITEM 16**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	24 June 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Report title	Notice of Motion Status Report
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Notice of Motion Tracker
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None
	Narrative:
Screening Requirements	<i>The Council will commit to consider the implication of all reports under the categories of Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability:</i> Screening of report not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Multiple Multiple If multiple: all

Background

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 Council **Notes** this report.

To	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 has been presented to them. Council is awaiting their decision, which will be brought back to Council as soon as it is available.	Adele Faulkner (Director of Active & Healthy Communities)	
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 May 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	Report back after rates set for 2027/28 Feasibility study agreed. Linked to Muckers Dog Park proposal. 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)	
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 April 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	Report back when EA confirms its intentions Officers still awaiting response from EA at June 2026 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. April 2026 - Advice now received on other requests, update report to be presented to Corporate Committee	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
586	Corporate Services	16.10.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Martin	That this Council, further to recent positive discussions with landowners, agrees to reexamine the April 2014 decision of North Down Borough Council to accept a gift of open space at Ambleside, Bangor, which was never completed and tasks Council Officers to bring back a report looking at (i) acquiring the land and (ii) options around future uses for the land.	Council October 2023 Corporate Services Committee November 2023 Corporate Services Committee September 2024	Dec 2026 : 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 provided a report to Council's solicitor on the likelihood of Council achieving Good Title on the land at Ambleside and this looks positive. We are waiting for the Council's solicitor to provide advice on the Council's next steps and this will be in the next few weeks. March 2026 update : The Council's solicitor has advised that they are happy to rely upon the expertise of the former Registrar of the Land Registry, in that the risk to The Council is much lower than previously anticipated and the former Registrar's positive view on The Council achieving Good Title on the land at Ambleside. Officers shared this view and have instructed the solicitor to contact the sellers' solicitor to move this towards completion as soon as possible. April 2026 update: Officers received an update that one of the two landowners is still considering the matter (to dispose of the land to the Council), whilst one is ready to proceed. The Council's solicitor has given them a one-month deadline to move matters forward or the Council will withdraw. To date £1,700 of legal costs have been incurred on the matter and we await an up-to-date bill which will include the advice from the former Registrar of the land registry.	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
595	Environment	16.11.23	Councillor McCracken & Councillor Blaney	This Council recognises the importance of Bangor's early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council requests that officers bring back a report which evaluates how the physical link between two main sites, Bangor Abbey and the North Down Museum, could be improved, to include the renovation and potential remodelling of Bell's Walk, with consideration for improved wayfinding and lighting. The motion also requests that officers consider how Bangor Castle Gardens and The Walled Garden could be better incorporated into the walking route, and how the overall attraction could be packaged to create a more complete tourism and placemaking experience.	Council 29.11.2023	Update report to be brought to June 2026 EC NOM assigned to EC 01.10.2025 following transformation Initial report to December 2024 C&W Committee Second report to June 2025 C&W Committee.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
599	Active & Healthy Communities	21.11.23	Councillor Cathcart & Councillor Gilmour	"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)	Council 20.12.23 Community & Wellbeing Committee January 2024 and April 2024 and June 2024 and September 2024 Corporate Committee September 2024	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. Update to September A&HC Committee	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	

619	Environment	29.05.24	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson	<p>That this Council notes with concern the temporary closure of Groomsport Tennis Courts due to issues around the safety of the playing surface.</p> <p>Further to this Council tasks officers to bring back a report on Tennis Court maintenance throughout the Borough and will commit to ensuring all our Tennis Court facilities are properly maintained and are fully accessible to all. Council will also promote the use of Tennis facilities in the Borough as we approach the spring/summer season.</p>	<p>Council 29.05.24 Item 20.1</p> <p>Community & Wellbeing 15.01.25 Item 5</p> <p>Environment Committee 07.01.26 Item 8</p>	<p>Parks and Regeneration have met to discuss - alternative funding streams being investigated. Report back when further information is available.</p> <p>Agreed at EC 07.01.26: That the Development of the Greyabbey MUGA Project be delivered as a joint Village Renewal and Parks Project with progress report coming to the Council.</p> <p>Agreed at C&W 15.01.25: 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.</p> <p>Assigned to January 2025 C&W Agenda. Moved to EC due to restructure.</p>	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
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>	Council - May 2024 - Corporate Services Committee June	<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> <p>March 2026 update: 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. A site meeting took place in early March with representatives of the group and the Estates team to discuss the next steps for the construction of the Memorial and landscaping of the site.</p> <p>April 2026 update: As March update - The group has fundraised £8,000 towards the project, but the balance, which the Council agreed to pay, is likely to be in the region of £30,000.</p>	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance) & Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
629	Environment	19.08.24	Councillors Gilmour, Hollywood, McClelland 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</p> <p>3 December 2025 (Item 6)</p>	<p>Update report to be brought to June 2026 EC subject to agreement with CCVA</p> <p>Update report at EC December: ALTERNATIVE RECOMENDATION 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)	

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) 8 April 2026 (Item 6)	<p>Report to September 2026 in advance of Business Case</p> <p>Agreed at April 2026 EC - based on Option 1:</p> <p>That the Committee notes the report and tasks Officers to prepare a business case for the investment that would be required to introduce pedestrian access at Holywood and Millisle HRCs. A further report, including analysis of demand, is to be presented to Committee in advance of the business case being considered during the 2027/2028 rates setting process.</p> <p>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</p> <p>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</p>	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	
638	Place & Prosperity	22.10.2024	Councillors Harbinson & McCracken	<p>That this Council should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare a visual map for all public sector land in Bangor City Centre and Ards Town Centre and colour code holdings that are potentially connected with future developments (even if not yet fully agreed), including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizen's Hub and the Council's Car Park Strategy. This includes public land belonging to the Council and NI Executive Departments. 2. To further identify public sector land that is currently unproductive and outside the scope of wider strategies, which could be made available for future private sector development. This includes land that is either vacant, contains empty or derelict buildings, or contains buildings that are under-utilised or dated to the point that redevelopment is required. The map should also include land that is facilitating meanwhile use. 3. Prepare a summary report to highlight how unproductive public sector land could be re-purposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive disposal policies. 	Place & Prosperity Committee November 2024 (Item 14.2) Council October 2024 (Item 23.5)	<p>Report brought to 7 May P&P Committee 2026 and ratified by May Council</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 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>	Director of Place and Prosperity	
640		05.11.2024	Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Adair	<p>That this Council condemns the failure by the UK Government to prioritise farming families and the rural economy as part of the Autumn Budget; notes with deep concern the decisions to introduce new thresholds for Inheritance Tax and Agricultural Property Relief, which will jeopardise succession planning on farms and discourage investment in many farm businesses.</p> <p>Further to this, Council calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals to mitigate the impact of these damaging policies on local farms, as well as avoid significant increases in food prices; further commits to engage with the Chancellor at the earliest opportunity and demonstrate his absolute support for farmers affected by this budget and further calls on the Minister to work with the Minister of Finance to deliver an early and firm commitment to farming families that current levels of financial support will not only be maintained but increased in the next financial year.</p>	Council meeting 27.11.2024 - Heard and agreed.	Letter sent to Minister on 9 December and response received 13 January. Report to go to January Council.		

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	Options agreed with stakeholders - report to EC after 27/28 rates agreed 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	Place & Prosperity	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 P&P 11.6.26 as part of LAG Minutes Place and Prosperity Committee now progressing this Update report to be brought to EC May 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.	Director of Place & Prosperity	
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	Report to March A&HC Committee. Update to June A&HC Committee.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
671	Active & Healthy Communities	20.05.25	Councillor Kendall and Councillor McKee	Responsible Dog Walking in Public Spaces. This Council, as a 'Dog Friendly Borough' recognises the increasing use of public parks and footpaths by professional and recreational dog walkers, and the need to balance animal welfare, public safety, and the enjoyment of public spaces for all of our Borough's residents. This Council notes that: Multiple dogs under the control of a single individual may pose challenges to effective management and public safety. Excessive numbers of dogs being walked simultaneously can lead to increased risk of dog fights, interference with other park users, fouling, and uncontrolled behaviour; There has been an increasing number of professional dog walkers, offering services within the Borough and there is a lack of licencing, registration or other requirements which may lead to inadequate insurance, training and experience, adding further potential risks to people and pets; and Many local authorities across the UK, including our neighbour Belfast City Council, have introduced limits on the number of dogs that may be walked at one time. The Council therefore resolves to: Produce a report outlining the costs and steps required to introduce a local restriction under the relevant 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. Mandating that professional dog walkers must have dogs on leads at all times to ensure dog control and accountability for dog behaviours. 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. 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.	Council 25.06.25 Environment Committee - September Item 20.1	Agreed to adopt NOM at September EC Assigned to September 2025 EC Agenda. Moved to A&HC due to restructure. Update to March 2026 A&HC Committee. Letter sent to Andrew Muir 12.02.26 by CE. Update to May A&HC Committee. Consultation published June 2026.	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services	

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> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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 4.9.25 Council 25.06.25	<p>Report to be brought to future Committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Re: commercial marketing plan, update report to P&P in first quarter of 2026. <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>	Council 25.06.25 Environment Committee - September Item 20.2 Environment Committee 03.12.2025 Item 3 Environment Committee 04.02.26 Item 4	<p>Update report to be brought in 2027</p> <p>Agreed at EC 04.02.26: AMENDMENT AGREED. That we accept officer proposal with the addition of a review in one year's time to ascertain usage and value for money</p> <p>Report brought to December 2025 EC: ALTERNATIVE RECOMENDATION 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 Assigned to September 2025 EC Agenda</p>	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)
678	Corporate Services	21.07.25	Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers	<p>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</p>	Council 30.07.25 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	<p>March 2026 update: The Lands team are looking at options and a report will be brought back to committee. The Lands policy was reviewed and will form part of the update.</p> <p>April 2026 update: Report brought to Corporate Committee in April 2026.NOM now closed. Remove from Tracker in May.</p>	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)
680	Active & Healthy Communities	05.09.25	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Edmund	<p>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.</p>	Council 24.09.25 - October Active and Healthy Communities Committee	<p>Leisure Officers to progress. Report to June Committee</p>	Anton Cozzo (Head of Leisure)
681	Corporate Services	09.09.25	Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Cathcart	<p>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.</p>	Council 24.09.25 - October Corporate Services Committee	<p>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. NAC attended March Council for Deputation. Remove from tracker after ratification by April Council.</p>	CEX Office
682	Corporate Services	17.09.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Gilmour	<p>Council recognising the importance of Holywood as a Garrison town, seeks in conjunction with the Craigavad and Helen's Bay Branch of the Royal British Legion, to bring a military event to Holywood.</p>	Council 24.09.25. Corporate Services Committee	<p>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.</p> <p>January 2026 update : Meeting has taken place, draft plan proposed, facilitator to confirm with relevant parties . Further meeting to confirm arrangements in March and report will be brought back then.</p> <p>April 2026 update: Plans progressing and report will be brought to Committee as soon as they are confirmed with all parties.</p>	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	Report to be brought to September 2026 EC Agreed to adopt NOM at November EC 2025 - 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 Irvine	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. Therefore, this councils resolves to: 1. Write to the Ministers for Justice, Communities, Finance, DAERA, and Health, calling for: 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. 2. Promote public awareness of the connection between domestic abuse, coercive control and animal abuse, in collaboration with statutory agencies and animal welfare organisations. 3. Encourage engagement and collaboration within all Councils and other key stakeholders to support the implementation of Ruby's Law in the community to protect animals and people.	Council 29.10.25 AHC	Report to March 2026 A&HC Committee. Update to September A&HC Committee	Gareth Kinnear (Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services)	
686	Corporate Services	15.10.25	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Gilmour	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.	Council 29.10.25 Corporate Services Committee	Reply received from Justice Minister and report to CS Feb 2026. Further response from the Chief Executive sent following meeting. Letter from Justice Minister reported and agreed at April Corporate Services Committee. To be removed following ratification after April Council meeting.	CEX Office	
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. Report to March A&HC Committee. Further report on completion of re-structure.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
692	Active & Healthy Communities	12.11.25	Councillor McKee and Councillor Kendall	This Council notes with deep concern the recent deaths of two-family dogs in our Borough, linked to panic caused by fireworks and the many other animals that suffer year on year. We recognise the severe distress fireworks cause to people, pets, livestock, and wildlife, and the growing public concern over unregulated use. We express our sympathies to the affected families and commend local animal welfare groups for their ongoing support. This Council writes to The Department of Justice to request the commission of an urgent review of Northern Ireland's fireworks legislation, to include: Further that Council works with AND PCSF to explore how we can effectively tackle the antisocial behaviour associated with fireworks.	Council November 26.11.25 Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Officers to progress. Letter to go to DoJ when Call in expires after Jan 2026 Council. To go to next PCSF Committee (ND to action).	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services & Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community)	
693	Corporate Services	26.11.25	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.	Council December 2025 Environment Committee 7 January 2026 Item 9.2	Report to be brought to a future meeting of the Corporate Services Committee to include legal advice regarding responsibility for the sea defence wall. NOM reassigned to Corporate Services Committee 11.02.2026 April 2026 update : Seeking legal advice, report will be brought back as soon as possible. Agreed to adopt NOM at January 2026 Environment Committee	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates) Alison Curtis (Head of Administration)	

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 against appropriate organisations; options to improve paternity leave policy for council employees; projected costings of these options; and anything else officers deem prudent.	Council December 2025 and Corporate Services Committee January 2026	Corporate Committee decision 13 January 2026 decision to defer. On CS February 2026 agenda. 9.3.2026 - Ratified minute sent to Head of HR.	Head of HR	
697	Active & Healthy Communities	08.12.25	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 adaptations.	Council December 2025 and Active and Healthy Communities Committee Jan 2026	Deferred to February A&HC Committee and adopted. N Dorrian has letter drafted and will send to CE for approval.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
698	Active & Healthy Communities	09.12.25	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: <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 they will be allocated an officer within council who will act as the only point of contact between the group and Council. 	Council December 2025 and Active and Healthy Communities Committee Jan 2026	Report to June A&HC Committee & Head of Finance to attend committee meeting.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
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	Methodology to identify ANDBC's anti-poverty levers across all council services has been developed and is currently being tested. Workshops will be used across all services areas to gather additional information. Final ratified minute sent to Community Planning Manager	Community Planning Manager	
700	Environment	10.12.25	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.	Council January 2026 Environment Committee 04.02.26 Item 9.1	Report to be brought in Autum 2026 Assigned to February 2026 EC Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
702	Environment	20.01.26	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 has not had the desired impact in other areas. Basic maintenance and upkeep of our public realm particular 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.	Council January 2026 Environment Committee 04.02.26 Item 9.3	Report to be brought to June 2026 EC Assigned to February EC Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries) Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates) Keith Patterson (Head of Waste & Cleansing)	
703	Active & Healthy Communities	20.01.26	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 personal freedom. This Council recognises that the motivation for 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 by establishing femicide as a distinct criminal offence, we send a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated and that the lives of women have inherent value deserving of specific legal protection.	Council January 2026 and Active and Healthy Communities February 2026	Agreed to adopt Notice of Motion at February AHC Committee. Nikki Dorrian to draft letter to Stormont.	Nikki Dorrian (Interim Head of Community and Culture)	
707	Environment	17.02.2026	Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Brooks	That this Council notes with deep concern the recent destruction caused to bushes, trees and wild grass in The Commons, Donaghadee. Further to this, Council agrees to write to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, calling upon him to designate The Commons, Donaghadee as either an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), or another appropriate form of protected status, in order to help safeguard this important green space.	Council February 2026 Environment Committee 04.03.26 Item 14.2	Agreed at May 2026 EC to note the report and response from DAERA Council wrote to DfI 08.04.26 - response received 21.04.26 Agreed to adopt NOM at March 2026 EC Assigned to March 2026 EC Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	

708	Corporate Services	18.02.2026 and amended sent 11.03.2026	Alderman Smith and Councillor Chambers	Council aims to reduce its level of rates increases in future years by introducing a zero based budgeting process, completing the ongoing review of planned capital expenditure and undertaking an in-depth engagement process with ratepayers/residents to explain our current strategy and to obtain feedback and input to the next rates process.	Council March 2026 Corporate Committee	On Corporate Services Committee agenda for meeting on 14 April 2026.	-	
709	Corporate Services	10.03.2026	Councillor McClean and Councillor Gilmour	That this Council, mindful of our close connections to the United States and our role in their history, commits to mark and celebrate the United States Semiquincentennial. Officers should consider options for events of different scales, including the theming of an existing event in the calendar, as well as exploring options to collaborate on an event of an appropriate level that complements the proposals of other councils (Causeway Coast and Glens, Antrim and Newtownabbey, Lisburn and Castlereagh) and would run in the latter half of this year.	Council March 2026 Corporate Committee	On Corporate Services Committee agenda for meeting on 14 April 2026.	-	
710	Place & Prosperity	11.03.2026	Councillor W Irvine and Councillor S Irvine	This Council commends the continued work and dedication of the South East Fermanagh Foundation (SEFF). For many years, the organisation has provided invaluable support, advocacy, and practical assistance to victims and survivors across Northern Ireland ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are not forgotten. We agree to display the SEFF memorial quilt at a suitable location in the borough to honour innocent victims, educate the public about the impact of the Troubles, and ensure the legacy and memory of those lost continues to be recognised.	Council 25 March 2026 April Place & Prosperity Committee	Agreed at April P&P and ratified at April Council Ratified by March 2026 Council and referred to April P&P	Director of Place and Prosperity	
711	Active & Healthy Communities	13.03.2026	Alderman Cummings and Councillor Douglas	That this council recognises the Invictus Games, Birmingham 2027, a multi sports event, for wounded, injured and sick military service personnel, both serving and veterans, is being hosted in the UK for the first time since the inaugural games. Further, that we task officers to engage with Invictus Games to explore how we might facilitate additional training for Northern Ireland competitors in advance of the games, offering the best opportunity for local veterans and participants to attain the peak level of fitness, and to identify potential funding sources to assist in minimising the cost attributed to commuting to and from the mandatory national training camps, as required by all registered participants.	Council March 2026 Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Report to September A&HC Committee.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
712	Environment	16.03.2026	Councillor Edmund and Alderman Adair	That this Council is deeply concerned at the impact of the change to Isle of Man's visa requirements on the Northern Ireland fishing fleet. The changes which mean that overseas crew require an Isle of Mans work visa rather than the transit visa or UK skilled worker visa and therefore cannot fish within the Isle of Man 12 nautical mile limit, effectively excluding the Northern Ireland fishing fleet from its fishing traditional waters. Council requests that officers write to the Manx Government, to highlight the damage to the Northern Fisheries and Fish Processing Industry and request that the relevant measures are taken by the Manx Government to reverse the impact of these changes.	Council March 2026 Environment Committee	CX Letter sent to Chief Minister's Office IOM 11.05.26 - response rec'd from IOM Minister 21.05.26 - update report to be brought to June EC NOM agreed at April 2026 EC Agreed to refer NOM to April 2026 EC	Graeme Bannister (Director of Environmental Services)	
713	Environment	17.03.2026	Councillor McCollum and Councillor Wray	That this Council notes the profound impact on the Clondeboy Community of the tragic death of 16 year old DICE leader and Army Cadet Jaidyn Rice on the 8th July 2025 and further notes the terrible loss of seven other lives on roads in our Borough during 2025, the highest of any Council area. Further that this Council tasks officers to work with the Rice family to create a bench honouring Jaidyn's contribution to her community, such bench to be a place of reflection, connection and outreach, in an agreed location and incorporating Council's Here to Help app for signposting to vital support services around the Borough.	Council March 2026 Environment Committee	NOM agreed at April 2026 EC Agreed to refer NOM to April 2026 EC	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
714	Environment	25.03.2026	Alderman Graham and Councillor Gilmour	Council notes the extension to the platform at Helen's Bay Station to enhance the safety of high numbers of visitors at peak times. To cope with such influxes of visitors, Council writes to Translink and requests that it provides toilet facilities at the railway station.	Council April 2026 Referred to Environment Committee May 2026	CX Letter sent to Translink 05.06.26 - acknowledgement rec'd 08.06.26 Agreed at May 2026 EC Referred to EC at April 2026 Council	Graeme Bannister (Director of Environmental Services)	
715	Active & Healthy Communities	1.04.2026	Alderman McRandal and Councillor McCollum	This Council acknowledges that the decision taken in January 2026 to adopt Queen's community centre as the preferred site of the proposed Hollywood screen industries innovation hub has the potential to remove an important community asset from Hollywood. Council therefore resolves to undertake an exercise to assess the need for community space in Hollywood, with a report assessing need to be brought back to the relevant Committee.	Council April 2026 - Referred to Active & Healthy Communities Committee May 2026			
716	Environment	2.04.2026	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson	That this Council notes the need for adequate coastal defences and the ongoing issues affecting Donaghadee Harbour. Council further acknowledges the continued work and contribution of Donaghadee Sailing Club and Donaghadee Community Development Association in seeking solutions to these challenges. It further notes that significant engagement has already taken place with some public representatives and government bodies to this regard. Council therefore agrees to instruct officers to engage with counterparts in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to explore the potential for Shared Island Funding as a means of supporting the delivery of necessary coastal defence infrastructure	Council April 2026 - Referred to Environment Committee May 2026	Agreed at May 2026 EC Referred to EC at April 2026 Council	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	

717	Planning	13.04.2026	Councillor Moore and Alderman McDowell	<p>This Council notes the findings of the recent report presented to Planning Committee Members in March 2026 on wastewater capacity constraints, including the identification of closed catchments within parts of the Borough, the impact on planning and regeneration activity, and the wider challenges arising from longstanding underinvestment in wastewater infrastructure.</p> <p>Council further recognises that, while the report establishes the existence and significance of these constraints, further detailed evidence is required to fully understand the borough-wide impact and to support effective engagement with relevant agencies and the Department for Infrastructure, and to identify potential council-led solutions.</p> <p>Council agrees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To task Council officers to prepare a detailed, borough-wide assessment identifying all locations affected by wastewater and sewage capacity constraints, including mapping of closed catchments, constrained wastewater treatment works and network limitations. To quantify the impact of these constraints on Council priorities, including town centre regeneration, the Empty to Energised programme, business development, housing delivery and the non-domestic rate base. To compile evidence, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Northern Ireland Water, on the frequency and location of wastewater system failures, including out-of-sewer flooding and Unsatisfactory Discharges, and the associated environmental and ecological impacts across the Borough over the past ten years. To write to SOLACE seeking information on how other councils are evidencing and responding to wastewater capacity constraints, including approaches taken in Belfast City Council, Newry, Mourne and Down, and Mid and East Antrim. 	Council April 2026 - Referred to Planning Committee May 2026	Agreed at May Planning and ratified at May Council	Director of Place and Prosperity
718	Corporate Services	14.04.2026	Councillor Morgan and Alderman McAlpine	<p>That this council strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) by the DUP in the Assembly and Executive; further condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the Lough Neagh crisis, the illegal dump at Mobuoy and wider environmental degradation, but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards; notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained within the New Decade, New Approach Deal; agrees that it is undemocratic for an IEPA to be unilaterally vetoed by one party which represents a minority in the Assembly as a whole; agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask him to urgently convene a process of institutional reform, in consultation with the Irish Government and local parties, to remove blockages and vetoes from Stormont's system of government; and to ask the Secretary of State to take meaningful steps to ensure that commitments in New Decade, New Approach are implemented.</p>	Council April 2026 - Referred to Corporate Services Committee May 2026		
719	Active & Healthy Communities	21.04.2026	Councillor McClean and Councillor Cathcart	<p>That Council acknowledges the significant reduction in fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling offences since the service was brought in-house; sets out the reasons for this performance and commits to an improvement plan; that this plan be reviewed in six months following its presentation; and that, following this review, considers any further options for improvement including different service model delivery.</p> <p>The improvement plan should seek as a minimum to achieve previous enforcement levels for FPNs issued, ensure cost control (including the option of penalty reductions for swift payment), drawing upon best practice elsewhere to include prevention and communication.</p>	Council April 2026 - Referred to Active & Healthy Communities Committee May 2026		
720	Environment	24.04.2026	Councillor Edmund and Alderman Adair	<p>That this Council task officers to bring forward a costed programme of works to bring slipways and harbours in Council ownership or control up to an appropriate standard in order that they can be utilised by leisure users as part of our wider tourism offering and to investigate appropriate funding streams to deliver this.</p>	Council May 2026 referred to Environment Committee June 2026	On June EC Agenda Referred to EC at May 2026 Council	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)
721	Environment	14.05.2026	Councillor W Irvine and Councillor S Irvine	<p>This Council recognises the service and sacrifice of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), including those from the Borough and surrounding areas who served with dedication during a difficult period in Northern Ireland's history.</p> <p>Accordingly, tasks officers to bring back a report this Council on providing a memorial bench within Clandeboy Cemetery, Bangor, dedicated to the memory and service of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. The proposed bench should provide a dignified place for remembrance and reflection for families, veterans, and members of the wider community.</p>	Council May 2026 referred to Environment Committee June 2026	On June EC Agenda Referred to EC at May 2026 Council	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)

Corporate Services
Community & Wellbeing
Environment
Place & Prosperity
Planning