

September 24th, 2026

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 30th September 2026** at **7:00 pm** in **Hybrid - City Hall, Bangor & via Zoom**.

Agenda

Agenda

(Attached)

Attachment: C 2026.09.30 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 September 2026**

(Copy to follow)

6. **Minutes of Council Meeting held on 23 August 2026**

(Copy attached)

Attachment: C 2026.08.26 Council Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: C 2026.08.26 MinutesPM.pdf

Page 5

7. **Minutes of Committees**

(Copy attached)

7.1. **Environment Committee dated 2 September 2026 (Copy attached)**

Attachment: EC 2026.09.02 Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: EC 2026.09.02 MinutesPM.pdf

Page 16

7.2 **Place & Prosperity Committee dated 3 September 2026 (Copy attached)**

(Copy attached)

Attachment: PP 2026.09.03 Minutes.pdf

Not included

7.3. Corporate Services Committee dated 8 September 2026

(Copy attached)

Attachment: CS.2026.09.08 Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: CS.2026.09.08 Minutes PM.pdf

Page 150

7.4. Active & Healthy Communities Committee dated 9 September 2026

(Copy attached)

Attachment: AHC 2026.09.09 Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: AHC 2026.09.09 Minutes PM.pdf

Page 174

7.5. Audit Committee dated 21 September 2026

(Copy attached)

Attachment: AC 2026.09.21 Minutes.pdf

Not included

Attachment: AC 2026.09.21 Minutes PM.pdf

Page 231

8. Courses and Conferences

8.1 NILGA Conference 2026

(Copy Attached)

Attachment: 8.1 NILGA Conference October 2026.pdf.pdf

Page 242

Attachment: 8.1 Appendix - NILGA Conference October 2026.pdf

Page 243

9. Call for Evidence for Regional Balance Bill

(Attached)

Attachment: 9. Regional Balance Bill - Call for Evidence Response.pdf

Page 244

Attachment: 9.1 Regional Balance Bill as Introduced.pdf

Page 250

Attachment: 9.2 Regional Balance Bill Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.pdf

Page 262

10. Business Growth Accelerator Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability

(Attached)

Attachment: 10. Business Growth Accelerator & NDVR Consultation Response.pdf

Page 274

Attachment: 10.1 LPS Business Growth Accelerator Consultation Paper.pdf

Page 280

11. SIB Waste Specialist - Contract Extension

(Attached)

Attachment: 11. SIB Waste Specialist - Contract Extension.pdf

Page 298

Attachment: 11. Appendix 1 Draft Operational Partnership Agreement 2026-2028.pdf

Page 301

12. NI Veterans Awards

(Attached)

Attachment: 12. NI Veterans Awards 2026.pdf

Page 312

Attachment: 12. Appendix 1 Invite for NI Veterans Awards 2026.pdf

Page 314

13. Sealing Documents

14. Transfer of Rights of Burial

15. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)

(Attached)

Attachment: 15. Notice of Motion Status Report.pdf

Page 316

Attachment: 15.1 Appendix 1 NoM Tracker.pdf

Page 318

16. Notices of Motion

16.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers

This Council notes the offer from a local elected representative who wishes to personally donate a piece of infrastructure to the town of Donaghadee.

Council recognises that public donations can enhance our local spaces, but notes that clear guidance

ensures these fits align with Council standards, maintenance capabilities, planning legislation and legal requirements.

Consequently, this Council requests that relevant officers investigate and report back on the appropriate, formal channels through which such a donation can be officially proposed, assessed, and progressed. This report should outline the necessary compliance criteria, installation requirements, and corporate governance steps required to successfully cooperate with the donor and bring this project to fruition.

16.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Smith and Councillor Newman

In line with the Council's Corporate plan to support economic sustainability within the Borough, the recent business start up and growth figures are extremely encouraging. However, in the context that Ards and North Down has the lowest GDP/head in Northern Ireland, the lowest GVA growth, has 9% of NI's population yet only 3% of its exports and less than 1% of R&D spend, yet historically has received the least Invest NI support of any Council area, that Council requests a deputation from Invest NI to hear directly on how they are supporting the Council's ambitious business growth targets, including what resources and programmes they are dedicating to the Borough. Furthermore, Council also writes to the Economy Minister to request a meeting to discuss how her Department can provide a fair share of resources to support business investment and employment growth in our Borough.

16.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Hollywood

That this Council:

Condemns Michelle O'Neill's participation in and endorsement of the memorandum agreed in Cardiff by Sinn Féin, the SNP and Plaid Cymru, which calls upon the British Government to prepare for, plan and facilitate constitutional change in each jurisdiction;

Rejects the memorandum's assertion that "Westminster's time is coming to an end and its attempt to present constitutional change as inevitable;

Affirms that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland;

Reaffirms the principle of consent, under which Northern Ireland's constitutional status can change only with the consent of a majority of its people;

Rejects any attempt by Sinn Féin to portray its objective of removing Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom as the position or collective voice of the people of Northern Ireland;

And accordingly calls upon the Chief Executive to write to the First Minister:

1. Expressing this Council's condemnation of her participation in and endorsement of the Cardiff memorandum;

2. Reminding her that the jurisdiction in which she holds office is Northern Ireland, whose present constitutional status is as an integral part of the United Kingdom; and

3. Reaffirming that Northern Ireland's constitutional future will be determined by the people of Northern Ireland in accordance with the principle of consent, and not by declarations agreed between Sinn Féin, the SNP and Plaid Cymru.

This Council reaffirms its support for Northern Ireland's continued place within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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

Items for Approval

17. Greenway Network Project: Appointment of Consultancy Services

(Attached)

Attachment: 17. Greenway Network Project Appointment of Consultancy Services.pdf

Not included

18. Westwinds Community Centre - Request for Licence

(Attached)

Attachment: 18. West Winds Community Centre - Request for Licence.pdf

Not included

Attachment: 18. Appendix 1 - Photograph of Wall - request re West Winds Community Centre.png

Not included

19. BBC Request Donaghadee Community Centre - Request for Licence

(Attached)

Attachment: 19. BBC Request - Donaghadee Community Centre.pdf

Not included

Attachment: 19. Appendix 1 - Photograph of Wall - BBC request Donaghadee Community Centre.pdf

Not included

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

23 September 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, 30 September 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 September 2026 (Copy attached)
6. Minutes of Council meeting dated 23 August 2026 (Copy attached)
7. Minutes of Committees (Copies attached)
 - 7.1. Environment Committee dated 2 September 2026
 - 7.2. Place and Prosperity Committee dated 3 September 2026
 - 7.3. Corporate Services Committee dated 8 September 2026
 - 7.4. Active and Healthy Communities Committee dated 9 September 2026
 - 7.5. Audit Committee dated 21 September 2026 (Copy to follow)
8. Courses and Conferences
 - 8.1. NILGA Conference 2026 (Correspondence attached)
9. Call for Evidence for Regional Balance Bill (Report attached)

10. Business Growth Accelerator Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability (Report attached)
11. SIB Waste Specialist - Contract Extension (Report attached)
12. NI Veterans Awards (Report attached)
13. Sealing Documents
14. Transfer of Rights of Burial
15. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)
16. Notices of Motion

16.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Brooks and Councillor Chambers

This Council notes the offer from a local elected representative who wishes to personally donate a piece of infrastructure to the town of Donaghadee.

Council recognises that public donations can enhance our local spaces, but notes that clear guidance ensures these gifts align with Council standards, maintenance capabilities, planning legislation and legal requirements.

Consequently, this Council requests that relevant officers investigate and report back on the appropriate, formal channels through which such a donation can be officially proposed, assessed, and progressed. This report should outline the necessary compliance criteria, installation requirements, and corporate governance steps required to successfully cooperate with the donor and bring this project to fruition.

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16.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Holywood

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This Council further reaffirms its support for Northern Ireland's continued place within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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

Items for Approval

17. Greenway Network Project: Appointment of Consultancy Services (Report attached)
18. Westwinds Community Centre – Request for Licence (Report attached)
19. BBC Request Donaghadee Community Centre – Request for Licence (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	Councillor C Kennedy
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

ITEM 6

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on Wednesday 26 August 2026 commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair: The Mayor (Councillor Blaney)

Aldermen:	Adair	McDowell
	Armstrong-Cotter	McIlveen
	Brooks (Zoom)	McRandal
	Cummings (Zoom)	Smith
	McAlpine (Zoom)	

Councillors:	Ashe (Zoom, 7.13pm)	Kerr (Zoom 7.14pm)
	Boyle	McBurney
	Brady	McClellan
	Cathcart	McCollum
	Chambers	McCracken
	Cochrane	McKee
	Douglas	Moore
	Edmund	Morgan
	Gilmour	Newman
	Harbinson	Quinn
	Hennessy	Smart
	Hollywood (Zoom)	Wray
	Irvine, S (Zoom)	
	Irvine, W	

Officers: Chief Executive (S McCullough), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Director of Environmental Services (G Bannister), Head of Communications and Marketing (C Jackson), Democratic Services Officer (R King), Democratic Services Officer (J Alexander)

1. PRAYER

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited the Chief Executive to read the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies at this stage. Apologies had been received from Alderman Graham, Councillor Kendall and Councillor Thompson.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor sought Declarations of Interest and the following were declared:

Councillor Chambers – Item 8.1 – NCLT Deputation Request.

NOTED.

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

The Mayor advised Council that it had been a summer of achievements for Bangor and the Borough. First, he congratulated Groomsport on winning Ireland's best kept small town award which was a great recognition of the many wonderful volunteers who had worked throughout the year to keep Groomsport looking so well. He also congratulated Donaghadee on being named finalists in the same category.

The Mayor also offered congratulations and best wishes to Bangor Aurora who had been shortlisted for Centre of the Year at the 2026 UK active awards.

Next, congratulations were offered to swimmer Jack McMillan who had spent most of his young life training at Aurora. The Mayor noted that it was wonderful to see Jack add to his gold medals with two gold medals at the recent European Championships in Paris.

Finally, the Mayor advised that, although Rhys McClenaghan and Eamon Montgomery did not win medals this year at the European Athletics Championships, they were to be congratulated for their respective achievements: Rhys for reaching the Pommel Horse final, and Eamon for reaching his first European floor championships.

NOTED.

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

(Appendix I)

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

The Mayor spoke with enthusiasm on several engagements which he had attended and highlighted some of the engagements which had taken place during August 2026, ably assisted by the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Cochrane.

The month's engagements included an incredible experience where the Mayor was chieftain for a day at the Ulster Pipe and Drum Major Championships and took the salute, which he found truly touching. A memorable day.

There were also events with RCCE with music from multiple venues. It was Bangor at its best. August's engagements also included:

- Numerous regattas across the Borough showcasing a wide range of boats, yacht races and reflecting the seafaring culture across Ards and North Down.
- The GP14 World Championships which took place at the Royal North of Ireland Yacht Club in Holywood. The event welcomed competitors who travelled from Russia, Italy, and South Africa to compete. The Mayor congratulated the volunteers involved.
- The Ards Peninsula Kite Festival at Ballywalter was another highlight as the Mayor was accompanied by his son, Elliott, who flew his first ever kite. It was a great family event.
- The Mayor, accompanied by Councillor Smart, had an interesting day learning about growing vegetables, different growing techniques, and soil types at the Ards Allotment Open Day.
- Bangor Drama Club celebrated their 90th anniversary with an incredible Exhibition at the North Down Museum which the Mayor encouraged Members to visit.
- The Mayor also attended and started the Six Counties Tractor Run from Newtownards in aid of Cancer Focus. The event had a wonderful turnout.
- The Mayor and Councillor Gilmour entertained the North Down Friends of Marie Curie at the City Hall, and everyone enjoyed a great evening.
- A highlight for the Mayor was the opening of two new businesses in the Borough, namely Drysdale Ceramics in Bangor and Soulmates in Donaghadee; two fantastic businesses, both independently owned. He asked Members to join him in wishing both businesses the very best as they began trading in the Borough.
- The Mayor and Chief Executive met with the Chinese Consulate General, General Lee. He noted that several companies in the Borough were already exporting to the Chinese market with more trying to enter that market.
- The Mayor also met with the new Consul General of India and noted the new India-UK trade deal. The Mayor, Chief Executive, Director of Place and Prosperity, and Bangor and Newtownards Chamber of Commerce will work together with a view to ensuring that businesses in the Borough maximise the export opportunities that were available through meeting these consulates.

Finally, the Mayor was delighted to invite Joshua McCready, his grandparents and cousin for coffee in the Mayor's Parlour where the Mayor presented Joshua with his Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. It was great to be able to celebrate such a lovely achievement.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the information be noted.

6. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING DATED 29 JULY 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Copy of the above minutes.

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

(Councillor Kerr joined the meeting remotely at 7.14pm)

7. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

7.1. MINUTES OF PLANNING COMMITTEE DATED 4 AUGUST 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Copy of the above minutes.

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

8. DEPUTATION REQUESTS

(Having declared an interest in Item 8.1, Councillor Chambers left the meeting – 7.09pm)

8.1. NCLT (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Chief Executive detailing that a deputation request had been received from Iain Greenway on behalf of Northern Community Leisure Trust. The attached request form stated that Northern Community Leisure Trust wished to make the deputation to the Active & Healthy Communities Committee regarding its annual report of achievements and progress in 2025/26. The deputation request form was attached at Appendix 1.

The Trust provided leisure services in North Down, under contract to the Council (in particular at Bangor Aurora, Queen's Leisure Centre, and Bangor Sportsplex). We had completed an annual report of our achievements and progress in 2025/26 and wished to provide the Committee with a presentation on this progress, and the opportunities to build on it by continuing collaboration across the Borough between outsourced and in-house service provision, in line with the intent of the September 2026 Council Motion and decision.

There was a paper on Trust progress to the Committee quarterly, but this was generally taken late in the agenda without substantive discussion; but the services provided by the Trust were a vital and substantial part of the activity to deliver the Council's Leisure Strategy, so we sought opportunity to enable a more substantive Committee discussion.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers the deputation request.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McRandal, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the Deputation be referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

(Councillor Chambers returned to the meeting – 7.10pm)

8.2. BANGOR BID (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Chief Executive detailing that a deputation request had been received from Mo Aswat & Noelle McAloon on behalf of Bangor Business Improvement District Steering Group. The attached request form stated that they had been commissioned by the Bangor BID Steering Group to make the deputation to the relevant committee regarding the development of a Business Improvement District (BID) for Bangor.

Mo Aswat was Director of The Mosaic Partnership, who had developed over 150 BIDs in the UK and all 8 in Northern Ireland. We had been commissioned by the Bangor BID Steering Group to advise on the development of the BID. Noelle McAloon was the Manager of the Enniskillen BID, one of the earliest and most successful BIDs in NI, established in 2017 and renewed again by businesses in 2022.

The development of a BID in any location was intensive and involved many parties. The intention was to brief Councillors firsthand on the development of the Bangor Business Improvement District including the project timetable and work. The level of business engagement, the role of the Council, both statutory and discretionary, and to show the potential benefits of the BID, through the experience of Enniskillen.

It would also provide an opportunity for Councillors to question the organisers and raise any issues that they might have.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers the deputation request.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the Deputation be referred to the Place and Prosperity Committee.

(Councillor Ashe joined the meeting remotely at 7.13pm)

8.3. REGIONAL ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY LIMITED (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Chief Executive detailing that a request had come from Mr Suneil Sharma at the Regional Asset Management Strategy Limited requesting a deputation to be heard at full Council, as per the attached request form. Mr Sharma had also communicated to officers that he wished, should the request be accepted, that it be heard in confidence.

C.2026.08.26PM

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The request was regarding a proposal for a joint requisition of the Flagship Shopping Centre between the Council and Regional Asset Management Strategy Limited and to relocate the council offices onto a redeveloped Flagship site.

Key Considerations

Members would be aware that Council approved an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the rationalisation of the Council's civic/office accommodation options to better meet the post RPA needs of the Council and offer better value for money to the ratepayer and regeneration opportunities for the Borough.

Following the approval of the OBC, a site selection and scoring exercise was undertaken to establish the availability/suitability of sites and options for a lease /purchase and a refurbish/new build Civic Headquarters, located within either Bangor City Centre or Newtownards Town Centre boundaries. This process resulted in Council agreeing to take forward two sites in Bangor City centre for further consideration, these being the Queen's Parade site or the former Flagship Centre.

Based on an analysis of both site options, Council approved in August 2025 to progress with the Queens Parade site as the preferred option, with new headquarters to be located on Main Street. Discussions with the developer, and the Department for Finance (DoF) as a potential partner who would bring c400 Department for Education employees along with Council's c400 employees into the city centre, are progressing in this regard.

Members would also be aware of the need to follow DoF guidance to Local Authorities in Northern Ireland to ensure best value was achieved in either the purchase or sale of land/assets and that an OBC would be required for any site purchase. Members would further be aware of their legal obligations under the Procurement Act, in terms of partnering with a commercial developer/company. Direct negotiations with any party without the prior advertisement of the potential opportunity was contrary to the general procurement principle of transparency and raises questions as to the ability to achieve and demonstrate value for money.

Next Steps

Council to consider the request for a Deputation to be heard at full Council in September, in confidence.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers this request.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the Deputation request be Noted.

(Councillor Kerr left the meeting remotely at 7.19pm.)

9. CONSULTATION ON TOBACCO AND VAPES: PACKAGING, APPEARANCE AND DISPLAY

(Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the purpose of the report was to present an update in response to the Notice of Motion and requesting Approval of said consultation response.

Background

The UK Government and devolved administrations were committed to creating a smoke-free UK and reducing the harms associated with tobacco use, vaping, and nicotine addiction. Smoking remained the leading cause of preventable illness and premature death in Northern Ireland, contributing to over 2,000 deaths annually and exacerbating health inequalities. Although the use of heated tobacco products remained relatively low, awareness and availability of these products continued to increase. Importantly, there was no safe level of tobacco consumption, and all tobacco products posed a risk to health. While vaping was recognised as less harmful than smoking, it was not risk free. The increasing use of vaping and nicotine products among children and young people had become a significant public health concern.

Evidence indicated that product packaging, flavours, appearance, and ease of access could increase the appeal of these products to children and young people. In response to these ongoing public health concerns, the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 was introduced to strengthen the regulation of tobacco, vaping, and nicotine products across the UK. The Act created a smoke-free generation by prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. It also strengthened enforcement powers and provided for further controls on the sale, advertising, promotion, packaging, appearance and display of tobacco, vaping, and nicotine products. These measures were intended to reduce the appeal, accessibility, and uptake of such products, particularly among children and young people.

Purpose of Consultation

This consultation sought views on proposals relating to packaging, appearance and display of tobacco, vaping, and nicotine products, with the aim of reducing their appeal and visibility, particularly among children and young people. Information relating to the consultation was available via this link [Tobacco and vapes: packaging, appearance, and display - GOV.UK Key Areas New Packaging Requirements](#).

The consultation sought views on introducing standardised packaging requirements for tobacco products that were not already subject to such controls, as well as cigarette papers, herbal smoking products, heated tobacco devices, vaping, and nicotine products. Views were also sought on restricting flavour descriptors used for vaping and other nicotine products.

New restrictions on the Appearance of Vapes and Heated Tobacco Devices

The consultation proposed to introduce UK wide restrictions on the appearance of heated tobacco devices and vapes, including proposals relating to:

- Colours, images, and branding
- Digital screens on devices;
- Devices imitating other products

New restrictions on Product Displays The consultation also proposed restrictions on how cigarette papers, herbal smoking products, heated tobacco devices, vaping and nicotine products could be displayed in shops across the UK. Views were sought on which products should be covered and the nature of any display restrictions that should apply. Next Steps Environmental Health and Regulatory Services had prepared a draft consultation response, attached as Appendix 1. It reflected the regional position agreed through the EHNI Tobacco Control and Consumer Protection Subgroups and addressed the key public health and regulatory considerations arising from the consultation. The proposed measures were consistent with the objectives of the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026, supporting reduced smoking prevalence, prevention of youth uptake of vaping and nicotine products, and improved public health outcomes. The draft response generally supported measures to reduce the appeal of these products, particularly to children and young people, and addressed relevant policy and enforcement issues. Please note that some questions were excluded from the draft response, as they were optional requests for information on the individual submitting the response, and these would be left blank.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the proposed consultation response, attached.

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

10. SEALING DOCUMENTS

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

- a) Grants of Rights of Burial
D41452 – D41496
- b) Duplicate Grant:
David Hodgen – Redburn 3131
- c) Grave re-allocation:
Ian McKnight – Loughview C 118
- d) Bangor Waterfront: UWPR ICT Contract documents
- e) Ards and North Down Borough Council Publish Path (Ballywalter Road, Millisle) Extinguishment Order 2026

11. TRANSFER OF RIGHTS OF BURIAL

The Chief Executive notified Members of the following Transfer of Rights of Burial:

- Cecil Todd – Mark Robinson – Redburn 3135
- Ellen McGreechan – Charles McGreechan – Movilla 59 221
- Anne Johnston – Stephen Eadie – Redburn 1941
- Anne Johnston – Stephen Eadie – Redburn 1942
- Anne Johnston – Stephen Eadie – Redburn 1943
- Ronald Johnston – Stephen Eadie – Redburn 1944
- Ronald Johnston – John Eadie – Redburn 1945
- Ronald Johnston – John Eadie – Redburn 1946
- Stephen McCaughey – Charles McCaughey – Movilla 50 207

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the Transfer of Rights of Burial be agreed.

12. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Chief Executive detailing that attached was 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 the Council notes the report and that the recommendation be adopted.

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

13. NOTICES OF MOTION

13.1. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Douglas and Alderman Cummings

That officers were tasked with engaging with boxing clubs and groups in Comber to explore how the Council could assist those clubs and groups and encourage growth of the sport in the town and further that officers look at a feasibility study into the development of the sport.

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

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

On the night of 15th-16th April 1941, as the Luftwaffe attacked the city of Belfast, fourteen bombs also fell in the town of Bangor, killing 5 local residents. During the course of the raid, 35 Bangor residents sustained injuries. Carnegie Library was set up as a temporary morgue for the fatalities.

As part of the current Cathedral Gardens redevelopment, there would be a fitting memorial to those who lost their lives in the Belfast Blitz. The casualties in Bangor would not be named.

On the basis that there appeared to be no knowledge of any memorial to the people who lost their lives here in Bangor. Officers were tasked with a report on the potential for a memorial or suitable plaque within Ward Park, Bangor (with the inclusion of the Carnegie Library), marking the local loss of life.

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

13.3. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Boyle and Alderman McAlpine

That officers brought back an options paper as to how Council could assist the Portaferry Gala Fest Committee & Community, to recognise the forthcoming very special occasion within the Borough involving the 60th anniversary of Gala Week taking place in July 2027.

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

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

14. NEW CEMETERY - LAND AT BALLYMACORMICK ROAD, BANGOR

(Appendix VII – VIII)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Council has been endeavouring to identify a suitable site for a new cemetery to service the needs of the Borough for many years. A report on the matter was discussed at the March 2026 Meeting of the Corporate Services Committee, when the history of a site search was given.

Officers required a decision to be made to proceed to acquire the land and instruct the solicitors acting for the Council to engage with the solicitors for the vendors to complete the purchase.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Brooks, seconded by Councillor McCracken, that Council agrees to acquire the 22.6 acres of land at Ballymacormick Road, Bangor with each party being responsible for their own legal and valuation costs and that steps be taken to ensure a Planning Application is submitted at the earliest possible date.

15. ENFORCEMENT ISSUES AT CONWAY SQUARE (Appendix IX – X)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

The Council was asked to agree to the proposed extent of adoption of land around Conway Square by the DfI.

It was agreed to refer the matter back to the Local Action Group.

NOTED.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.52pm.

EC 02.09.2026

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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 2 September 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Cathcart

Aldermen: Adair
Armstrong-Cotter

Councillors: Ashe (7.30 pm Zoom) Harbinson (7.06 pm Zoom)
Blaney Kendall (Zoom)
Brady Newman
Douglas Wray
Edmund

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

1. APOLOGIES

The Chair sought apologies and those were noted from Aldermen Cummings, McAlpine, McRandal and Councillor Boyle.

NOTED.

At this point Councillor Cathcart gave a special welcome to Councillor Kendall, saying that he, along with the Committee, gave her their very best wishes for her medical treatment and she remained in their thoughts and prayers going forward.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest and none were given.

NOTED.

3. GLENFORD PARK PLAYPARK PROVISION

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Members would be aware that the site of the former Ards Leisure Centre was vested by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) in May 2021 for use as a Park and Ride scheme. Glenford Play Park was currently located within the area, shown shaded purple in the image below. To facilitate the Park and Ride scheme, it was agreed that it was necessary to relocate the play park to a new location. After detailed discussion, it was agreed that would be within the existing site, as outlined below.



The Council had recently received the payment in respect of the site, together with compound interest. The planning permission granted for the site included provision for a new play park at the William Street entrance, outlined in red in the image below.



Next Steps

The Council was currently awaiting final design drawings for the play park site. The land required for the play park was to be transferred back to the Council at no cost.

To ensure that the new play park could be installed in a timely manner in line with Dfl's build programme, it was proposed that £170,000 from the compensation and interest payment be allocated to facilitate the relocation and installation of the play park.

In the meantime, the Council had been granted a Licence of the area of land delineated red on the map below, located at the north-west corner of the site, for use as an informal play area. A draft licence was issued by Dfl several years after the site was vested.

Land and Property Services (LPS) was appointed by Dfl to assess a licence fee, which had been set at £3,300 per annum from the date of vesting. The terms of the licence had not yet been agreed by the Council's solicitor and, accordingly, no licence fee had been paid pending receipt of the compensation monies and interest from the Dfl.



Summary

The licence terms and associated fee had yet to be formally agreed. In addition, the final extent of the play park footprint remained subject to agreement and transfer back of the land to the Council. It was proposed that £170,000 from the compensation and interest payment was allocated to facilitate the relocation and refurbishment of the play park.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the allocation of £170,000 from the compensation and interest payment received from Dfl to fund the relocation, installation and refurbishment of the new play park at Glenford.

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

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the proposal and expressed her delight that it had finally come to fruition. She noted that her colleague, Alderman McIlveen, had worked extremely hard to secure and maintain this provision within the area. She thought that the Council had acted appropriately and thanked officers for their work in bringing the matter forward. She added that there was strong support across the town, particularly given the need for this provision in that part of Newtownards, and commented that the investment would be money well spent.

The Chair concurred, noting that the funding was being provided by the Department for Infrastructure and represented proceeds from the sale of land in the area, which he described as a positive outcome.

Councillor Douglas seconded the recommendation and thanked officers for the work undertaken. She welcomed the fact that the proceeds would be reinvested in Newtownards rather than being absorbed into the Council's general fund.

Alderman Adair also welcomed the outcome. He acknowledged that while many might claim credit for the success, those who had worked tirelessly on the ground understood the effort involved in achieving it. He paid particular tribute to Alderman McIlveen for his work in relation to Glenford and described the reinvestment in Newtownards as an excellent result. He commended the sustained efforts that had contributed to delivering a positive outcome.

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

4. LOUGHRIES PLAY PROVISION UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that a previous Notice of Motion was agreed by Council in October 2022:

“That Council task officers to carry out a review of Play Provision in Loughries with a view to its inclusion in the Councils Play Strategy going forward.”

A report was brought to the Council in November 2022 with the following recommendation which was agreed with an amendment:

“It is recommended that Council review the potential for play provision for Loughries in the future when the thresholds as outlined above have been met unless provision is made as a result of the planned discussion with others outside of Council. Council notes the report and will review Play Provision in Loughries in 2024.”

A subsequent report was brought to the Council in May 2024 and the following was agreed:

“That Council task officers to engage with local landowners with a view to providing an open green space/informal play area for the community of Loughries in line with the Council Play Strategy. Furthermore Council agree that officers review the potential for play provision for Loughries in the future when the thresholds as outlined above have been met.”

Key Issues

The Council did not own or manage any land within Loughries that could be utilised for the provision of formal or informal play facilities. As outlined in the report presented to the Council in May 2024, land ownership within the settlement was limited, and investigations confirmed that Northern Ireland Housing Executive land holdings did not provide a suitable opportunity for the development of an open green space or informal play area.

The Council's Play Strategy established a number of criteria to guide investment in play provision and ensure resources were allocated consistently across the Borough. One of those criteria was that a settlement should contain a minimum of 100 residential properties before a formal play park was considered for delivery. Current records indicated that Loughries contained 97 residential properties. As such, the settlement did not currently meet the threshold required for consideration of a formal play park under the Play Strategy. While the position may be reviewed in the future should housing numbers increase, the threshold has not yet been achieved.

Following the Council's decision in May 2024, officers sought to identify potential opportunities for the provision of an open green space or informal play area through engagement with local landowners. Two parcels of privately owned land were identified in the area as having potential for further consideration. Those sites were referred to as Site A and Site B.

Officers engaged the owner of Site A regarding the potential use for community recreation purposes. Following consideration, the owner advised that the land would not be suitable for informal play and recreation and did not wish to pursue the matter further. As a result, the option was no longer available for consideration.

A meeting was subsequently held with the owner of Site B. The landowners indicated that they were supportive in principle of the concept of local play provision and acknowledged the community benefit that such a facility could provide, particularly given the presence of children within the area and the site's proximity to the local primary school. The land was currently leased to a local farmer for grazing purposes under an informal agreement and was therefore available for consideration should alternative arrangements be agreed.

While the landowners expressed a positive attitude towards the proposal, they advised that they were currently seeking independent advice and had not reached a final decision on whether they would be prepared to lease the land to the Council. A key issue raised during discussions was the potential duration of any lease agreement. The owner of Site B indicated that they would not be willing to enter into a lease exceeding five years in duration. Whilst they suggested that a future renewal may be possible, no commitment could be provided and any extension would be entirely at the discretion of the landowner.

The limited lease term presented a significant consideration for the Council. Any investment in creating a public recreation space would require expenditure on design, site preparation, access improvements and potential future maintenance. A

lease term of only five years may not provide sufficient certainty to justify a substantial capital investment, particularly where there was no guarantee that the lease could be renewed beyond the initial period. Should a lease not be extended, the Council could be left with limited opportunity to realise the longer-term community benefits typically associated with such investment.

During the site visit, officers assessed the physical characteristics of the site and identified a number of challenges which would require further investigation. Access to the land was currently provided through an agricultural field gate and there was no dedicated pedestrian access suitable for regular public use. To facilitate safe community access, infrastructure works would likely be required, including the provision of an appropriate access point and potential pathways within the site.

In addition, the land was uneven and contained significant undulations across much of the site. Those ground conditions may limit the range of informal recreational activities that could take place without intervention and could necessitate site preparation works to create a safe and usable public space. The extent and cost of any such works would need to be established through further technical assessment and design development should the Council wish to progress the proposal.

Financial considerations would also require careful evaluation. The Council previously held a lease for the parcel of land at a cost of £3,000 per annum; however, any future lease arrangement would require an updated valuation and rental assessment through the Council's independent valuer. In addition to annual lease costs, the Council would need to consider the capital investment required to make the site accessible and fit for purpose, together with ongoing operational costs associated with grass cutting, inspections, maintenance and general management of the site.

Given the uncertainty surrounding lease renewal, together with the potential capital and revenue implications of developing the site, it was prudent that the Council carefully considered whether the level of investment required would represent value for money over the maximum lease period currently proposed by the landowner. Any decision to progress the proposal would need to balance the potential community benefits of providing informal recreational space against the financial commitment required and the limited security of tenure available.

It should also be noted that a number of existing play facilities served the wider area surrounding Loughries. Londonderry Park (Tier 1) was located approximately 2.4 miles away by road. Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC), a Tier 0 facility with a wider catchment area, was also accessible to residents, together with the Tier 2 play facility at Abbot Gardens.

Next Steps

No further action was proposed at this time. Officers would continue to monitor residential growth within Loughries and should the settlement meet the thresholds contained within the Council's Play Strategy, a further assessment of play provision would be undertaken and reported to the Council for consideration.

Summary

The report provided an update on the Council's consideration of play provision in Loughries following previous Council decisions in October 2022 and May 2024. Officers had reviewed opportunities for both formal and informal play provision in accordance with the Council's Play Strategy and has engaged with local landowners to explore the potential for an open green space or informal play area.

Officers reviewed the most recent available address data and identified 97 residential properties within the settlement boundary. Therefore, Loughries did not meet the Play Strategy threshold of 100 residential properties required before a formal play park could be considered. In addition, the Council did not own any suitable land within the settlement and no appropriate Northern Ireland Housing Executive land had been identified.

Engagement with two local landowners identified one potential site for consideration; however, significant challenges existed including uncertainty over lease availability, a maximum lease term of five years, the requirement for access and site improvement works, and associated capital and ongoing maintenance costs.

Given those considerations, together with the availability of existing play facilities in nearby locations, no further action was proposed at this time. Officers would continue to monitor residential growth within Loughries and would review the potential for play provision should the thresholds contained within the Council's Play Strategy be met in the future.

In the absence of an offer of a longer-term lease and given the likely capital and revenue costs associated with developing the site, officers did not consider the proposal to represent a sufficiently robust investment opportunity at this time or one which would provide adequate certainty to justify the level of investment required.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the outcome of engagement with local landowners regarding the potential provision of an open green space/informal play area in Loughries.

It was further recommended that Council agrees that officers continue to monitor residential growth within the settlement and that the potential for play provision in Loughries will be reviewed in the future should the thresholds contained within the Council's Play Strategy be met.

Alderman Adair made an alternative proposal which was seconded by Councillor Edmund.

That Council, in light of information from the Woodland Trust, bring forward a report on all options including land purchase with a view of implementing the Tree Strategy and enhancing play and recreation in Loughries.

Alderman Adair explained that Loughries was a small but vibrant community on the outskirts of Newtownards. He noted that, despite recent residential development in the area, including a number of turnkey housing developments that had attracted

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young families, there remained a lack of green open space for residents. He recalled that the Council had previously leased land in the area but had relinquished that lease, a decision which he considered to have been short-sighted. He advised that this had prompted him to bring forward a Notice of Motion to seek a remedy to the situation.

Alderman Adair further advised that the area currently fell just two houses short of meeting the criteria required for the provision of a play park. He also referred to a recent meeting with the Woodland Trust, at which he had been informed that Loughries ranked poorly in terms of tree coverage. He expressed concern at this position and noted that opportunities to address it were limited due to the absence of publicly-owned land in the area.

He therefore called upon the Council to exhaust all possible avenues to secure land that could be developed as green space to meet the current and future wellbeing needs of the community. He emphasised the importance of exploring every available option, stating that failure to do so could leave the Council on the back foot as the area continued to grow. He looked forward to receiving a report examining all potential options and sought Members' support for his alternative proposal.

Councillor Wray stated that he had intended to express his disappointment and indicated that he wished to make a similar proposal. He thanked Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund for bringing the matter forward stating that the area falling short of the play park threshold by only a small margin did not deter him and he recognised that there was a significant need for such provision within the community.

In summing up, Alderman Adair thanked Members for their positive comments and support. He stated that their response sent a strong message to residents that the Council was listening to the needs of the community.

The Chair agreed that the lack of green space within the area was a significant issue and stated that it was a matter that warranted further consideration.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the Council, in light of information from the Woodland Trust, bring forward a report on all options including land purchase with a view of implementing the Tree Strategy and enhancing play and recreation in Loughries.

5. PROMOTIONAL PARKING TARIFFS – CHRISTMAS 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in February 2026, the Council agreed the Ards and North Down Off-Street Parking Order 2025, with the following recommendation:

“That an officer report is brought back to the Committee on options around introducing free or reduced-price parking during the Christmas period when the new Order is implemented, similar to other local Councils.”

It was envisaged that the new Order would be implemented in Autumn 2026. However, no further communication had been received from the Department for Infrastructure confirming the timeline and therefore the new Order and associated tariff structure would not be implemented before Christmas 2026.

Although the new tariff structure would not be implemented before Christmas 2026, officers had engaged with the Local Action Groups to discuss potential promotional Christmas tariffs for 2026.

Key Issues

Each Local Action Group (LAG) was provided with a summary of the promotional parking tariffs introduced by other Council areas within the NI Consortium in 2025, including the successes achieved and challenges encountered.

Newtownards

Newtownards Local Action Group met on 17 June 2026. During the meeting, members discussed the option of offering free parking. The LAG recognised the difficulties that free parking could create in Newtownards town centre, particularly in relation to space blocking and turnover in busy town centre car parks during the festive season, and the potential negative impact that could have on trade. As in previous discussions, members also considered the option of two hours' free parking, including the associated enforcement requirements and potential difficulties for car park users.

Members also noted that introducing a new promotional tariff for December, particularly if followed by the implementation of a new tariff structure in the new year, could cause confusion for car park users.

It was agreed that the existing £1 for five hours tariff should be promoted more effectively this year, and there was no support for free parking for Christmas 2026. As with previous discussions with the LAG, it was also agreed that an all-day parking rate in one of the peripheral car parks would be considered as part of the six-month review following implementation of the new Order.

Holywood

Holywood Local Action Group met on 30 June 2026. During the meeting, members raised similar concerns regarding the difficulties that free all-day parking could create, given the existing pressures on parking availability in the town. The LAG also discussed the desirability of achieving consistency across Bangor, Newtownards and Holywood.

It was agreed that the LAG was content with improved promotion of the existing £1 for five hours tariff this year and did not support free parking for Christmas 2026.

Bangor

Bangor Local Action Group met on 9 July 2026. During the meeting, members discussed how free parking on Saturdays from the Christmas light switch-on (21 November 2026) could support businesses within Bangor city centre over the Christmas period. The LAG considered that consistency with the other two towns

was not required, as the needs of each area differed and it was the role of the LAGs to highlight those local needs.

Members also discussed how the impact of the promotional tariff could be measured, including the possibility of carrying out surveys on the ground each Saturday to establish uptake. However, it was agreed that it would be sufficient for Bangor Chamber to issue a survey to its businesses in January to assess the impact on December income.

An email was sent to members of the Newtownards and Holywood LAGs to advise them of the outcome of the Bangor meeting and invite comments. Newtownards Chamber urged Bangor to reconsider and adopt a consistent approach. Bangor Chamber maintained the position agreed at the LAG meeting.

Anticipated costs based on 2025 Income

There were 22 charged car parks: 9 in Bangor, 3 in Holywood and 10 in Newtownards. Introducing free Saturday parking from 21 November to 31 December as proposed by the LAG, would cost Council free Saturday parking in Bangor only as proposed by the LAG, at a cost to Council of £5,175.20.

The table below provided further information for Members on the total 2025 income for all 22 car parks, and the income broken down by city or town, for the relevant Saturday periods, and, therefore, the anticipated cost to the Council of introducing free parking on Saturdays from the first Christmas light switch on (Bangor - 21 November) and for December only.

6 x Saturday income 21 November - 31 December	
All car parks (22 car parks)	£15,618.37
Bangor only (9 car parks)	£5,175.20
Holywood only (3 car parks)	£2,844.38
Newtownards only (10 car parks)	£7,598.79
4 x Saturday income December only	
All car parks (22 car parks)	£8,906.39
Bangor only (9 car parks)	£3,118.59
Holywood only (3 car parks)	£1,796.75
Newtownards only (10 car parks)	£3,991.05

Next Steps

Should Members choose to introduce free Saturday parking in Bangor only, officers would need to implement a clear communications plan to ensure that users understood the promotion applied to Bangor only. That would include liaising with the Council's enforcement partner to update messaging on the RingGo app and payment machines. Enforcement patrols could not be amended; however, they would remain necessary to address poor parking.

Summary

The report set out the views of the Local Action Groups and the associated anticipated cost to the Council. Proceeding on the basis of the feedback from the

LAG meetings would result in free Saturday parking in Bangor from 21 November until 31 December 2026, at an anticipated loss of income of £5,175.20. Normal charging and promotion of the £1 for five hours parking rate in Newtownards and Holywood would continue.

RECOMMENDED that the Council considers the information provided in this report and decides whether to approve promotional Christmas parking tariffs for 2026 in the manner suggested as a result of consultation undertaken with the main trade organisations.

Proposed by Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor Wray,

That Council progresses with Free Parking for Bangor from 21st of November 2026 to 31st of December 2026. Normal charging and the promotion of the £1 for five hours parking rate for Newtownards and Holywood would continue.

Councillor Blaney stated that engagement with the Borough's Chambers of Commerce was a positive approach, as it provided flexibility to respond to the differing needs of individual towns. He considered it to be an appropriate use of the Council's powers, allowing those businesses most directly affected to have an input into decisions relating to their local areas. He welcomed the proposed Christmas parking initiative.

Councillor Wray acknowledged the differing views expressed and commented that, while consistency across the Borough was desirable, there was little value in consulting Chambers of Commerce if their views were subsequently disregarded. He stated that he respected both perspectives and believed it would be helpful to assess the impact of the initiative. If free parking was introduced, he felt there should be a means of measuring its benefit to local businesses in Bangor.

The Director confirmed that officers would liaise with the Economic Development service to gather feedback and relevant information on the effectiveness of the initiative.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter expressed disappointment that a consistent approach was not being applied across all towns within the Borough. While £5,000 might not appear a significant sum, she considered it to be a substantial amount of money, particularly where residents and visitors to Newtownards would continue to pay for parking while users in other areas may not. She emphasised that the Council was responsible for making decisions and stated that she was uncomfortable with the divergence from a uniform approach. In her view, it was inequitable for consumers in one part of the Borough to subsidise arrangements elsewhere. While she understood that the Local Advisory Group (LAG) had requested the initiative, she remained concerned about the inconsistency.

The Chair responded that Local Advisory Groups played an important role in highlighting the particular circumstances and priorities of individual towns. Referring to discussions on parking tariffs and Department for Infrastructure on-street parking, he noted that Christmas promotional parking measures had consistently been requested in Bangor. He considered that towns and villages should be permitted to

develop their own identities and priorities and that it was often difficult to apply a uniform policy across all areas. The Chair stated that it would be important to assess the effectiveness of the initiative through feedback from local businesses and Chambers of Commerce. While acknowledging that £5,000 was a significant sum and that some Members considered the funding could be used for alternative town centre initiatives, he nonetheless felt it was appropriate to test the proposal and evaluate the outcomes.

Councillor Newman described the proposal as a gesture of goodwill towards Bangor traders, many of whom had experienced considerable challenges in recent years. She stated that, if the business community believed the initiative would be beneficial, it was worthwhile giving it an opportunity and reviewing the resulting feedback.

Councillor Kendall advised that she sympathised with the concerns raised by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter and understood why Bangor businesses might favour the proposal. However, she expressed concerns regarding consistency and enforcement. She noted that motorists could be charged for parking in one town while parking was provided free of charge elsewhere in the Borough, creating a perception of inequity. While she did not wish to oppose the recommendation of the Local Advisory Group, she stated that the lack of a single Borough-wide approach made her uncomfortable and could be viewed as unfair by residents and visitors.

Councillor Brady stated that he understood the concerns raised by Members but considered the proposal to be a worthwhile gesture of goodwill. He remained supportive of the recommendation, commenting that the initiative represented the Local Advisory Group process operating as intended. He agreed that evidence of its impact would be required and said it would be interesting to assess the extent of any benefit achieved for local businesses.

Members were not in agreement and when put to a vote with a show of hands 5 were in favour, 4 were against and there was 1 abstention. The recommendation was CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Blaney, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the Council progresses with Free Parking for Bangor from 21st of November 2026 to 31st of December 2026. Normal charging and the promotion of the £1 for five hour parking rate for Newtownards and Holywood would continue.

6. UPDATE ON ROADMAP TO GREEN FLEET (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Council previously agreed a phased Roadmap to Green Fleet. That roadmap identified battery electric vehicles as the most viable option for smaller vehicles, including light goods vehicles (LGVs), in the near term, while hydrogen was identified as the more likely long-term pathway for heavier fleet vehicles. However, the roadmap also recognised that hydrogen refuelling infrastructure, security of supply, depot readiness, costs, technology maturity and staff skills remained uncertain and would take time to resolve before the large-scale deployment of

hydrogen-powered HGVs became practical. The approach therefore prioritised working towards the 2030 carbon reduction milestone through the rollout of battery electric vehicles where suitable, while continuing to monitor hydrogen for heavier fleet applications.

Following publication by the Department for the Economy of the results of its recent consultation on “A sustainable, regional approach for the production, storage, transport and use of hydrogen as a fuel” (attached at Appendix 1), officers considered it timely to update Members on progress to date and on the key issues identified.

Key Issues

The difficulties associated with implementing a hydrogen-powered HGV fleet remained significant. First, there was no established local refuelling network for hydrogen, and current demand was too low to justify immediate large-scale investment in dedicated transport, pipeline, or storage infrastructure.

In the short term, hydrogen transport would largely depend on road-based solutions such as tube trailers, which may be suitable for pilot activity but did not yet provide a comprehensive long-term refuelling solution for a large municipal heavy fleet.

Second, the supply of “green” hydrogen remained at an early stage of development and was materially more expensive than conventional fuels, with stakeholders consistently highlighting the challenges of production costs, grid-related charges, and the need for public funding support to make projects viable.

Third, the market for hydrogen HGVs remained immature, with limited vehicle availability, high capital costs, and continuing uncertainty over the pace of development relative to battery technology.

Fourth, the Department’s consultation confirmed that hydrogen should be targeted at hard-to-electrify sectors but also noted that transport decarbonisation policy spanned multiple bodies and required coordinated action on infrastructure, regulation, and funding.

Finally, the Council would need to address depot safety, maintenance arrangements, staff retraining, specialist workshop equipment, and wider regulatory compliance before any operational rollout could proceed at scale. Officers anticipated that some of those issues may be addressed through the previously reported depot rationalisation project; however, that would not be completed for a number of years and, given the current challenges associated with hydrogen as a fuel source, it was not yet possible to plan on the basis of hydrogen being a viable operational solution.

Risk to 2030 Target

Current fleet consumption data further illustrated the scale of the challenge. The latest quarterly sustainable energy update showed that combined diesel usage remained above the 2019/20 baseline, with overall diesel use in Quarter 4 increasing by 21.3% against the baseline and resulting in an increase of 94.35 tCO₂. For 2025/26, fleet-related emissions were reported at 2,224.22 tCO₂e, compared with a 2030 fleet target of 940.67 tCO₂e.

While some emissions savings were expected from transitioning smaller 4x4 vehicles and car-derived vans to battery electric vehicles, the number of LGV fleet vehicles suitable for BEV transition was relatively low and there were currently no fully implemented solutions for decarbonising the heavy goods fleet. Taken together, that meant that, at present, the Council was unlikely to achieve the 2030 target of a 48% reduction in carbon emissions from fleet operations unless there was significant technological, infrastructure, and funding progress in the coming years.

Proposed Electric Refuse Collection Vehicle Trial

Given the current risk to achieving the 2030 fleet emissions target, officers considered that the Council should take a practical interim step by procuring one electric refuse collection vehicle (e-RCV) for use across the refuse collection service on a structured 18-month trial. The vehicle would be rotated around all bin routes during the trial period in order to test its operational suitability across the full range of local collection conditions, including route length, topography, payload, charging requirements, depot arrangements, crew feedback, service resilience, and seasonal variation. That approach would allow the Council to gather robust local evidence on the potential role of e-RCVs within the fleet, while limiting the initial capital commitment to a single vehicle rather than a wider fleet replacement programme.

The proposal was consistent with the experience of other councils, particularly more urban authorities, where electric refuse collection vehicles had already been deployed successfully at scale or through operational pilots. Those examples demonstrated that e-RCVs could make a meaningful contribution to reducing fleet emissions, air pollution, and noise where route characteristics and charging infrastructure were suitable. Officers were confident that, although not every local route may prove suitable, at least one Council bin route was likely to be viable for permanent e-RCV operation. Therefore, irrespective of the outcome across the wider trial network, the vehicle could be retained in service at the end of the 18-month period and assigned permanently to the most viable route identified through the trial.

The trial would also provide an important evidence base for any future infrastructure decisions. Rather than investing prematurely in extensive charging or depot upgrades, the Council would be able to identify the minimum practical infrastructure required to operate an e-RCV effectively, understand any constraints within existing depot arrangements, and assess whether future investment should be targeted at specific routes, depots, or charging arrangements. That would support a proportionate and data-led approach to decarbonising the heavier fleet while avoiding unnecessary outlay at this stage.

That was particularly important given the likelihood that the Council may not meet the 2030 fleet emissions target under the current trajectory. By progressing a limited but meaningful e-RCV trial, the Council would be able to demonstrate that it had taken all reasonable and practicable steps to test available low-carbon alternatives, reduce reliance on diesel where possible, and build a clearer pathway for future fleet decarbonisation. The trial would therefore complement the continued review of hydrogen and other heavy fleet technologies, while providing an immediate opportunity to test an available solution in local operating conditions.

Although e-RCVs were currently approximately twice the cost of conventional diesel refuse collection vehicles, with an estimated purchase cost of around £500,000, the purchase of one vehicle was considered affordable within the agreed vehicle replacement budget. That would be achieved by rescheduling the replacement of other vehicles and retaining them in service for longer than originally planned. That approach would allow the Council to undertake a meaningful trial without committing to a wider fleet replacement programme at this stage. How the pilot exercise would inform the longer-term fleet replacement strategy was of immense value.

Next Steps

In light of the constraints noted in previous sections of the report, the immediate priority should be to continue delivery of Phase 1 of the Green Fleet roadmap while taking forward a structured trial of one electric refuse collection vehicle. Officers recommended that the Council should progress the procurement of a single e-RCV and prepare an 18-month route-rotation programme covering all bin routes, with clear monitoring arrangements for route performance, range, charging requirements, payload, service resilience, crew feedback, maintenance implications, seasonal variation, and any associated depot or infrastructure constraints. The findings from the trial should be used to identify the most viable permanent route for the vehicle and to inform any future business case for additional e-RCVs or targeted charging infrastructure.

Alongside that, officers should continue engagement with public sector and regional partners on shared hydrogen opportunities, monitor the Department's developing hydrogen policy and action plan, review options for future refuelling partnerships and depot suitability, and assess market developments, funding opportunities, safety and regulatory requirements, and the comparative position of battery, hydrogen, and other low-carbon technologies for heavy fleet applications.

Summary

In summary, hydrogen remained a potentially important long-term option for decarbonising HGVs and other hard-to-electrify heavy vehicles; however, the current barriers to implementation were substantial. The evidence reviewed indicated that the principal constraints related to infrastructure, fuel supply, cost, technology maturity, regulatory development, and organisational readiness.

Current diesel consumption and fleet emissions data also demonstrated that, given the limited number of vehicles suitable for transition to battery electric technology and the absence of an implemented decarbonisation solution for the heavy fleet, the Council was unlikely at present to meet the 2030 target of a 48% reduction in carbon emissions from fleet operations. In that context, the proposed 18-month trial of a single electric refuse collection vehicle provided a proportionate and practical interim measure, enabling the Council to test suitability across local bin routes, identify any infrastructure requirements, and retain the vehicle for permanent use on the most viable route thereafter. A cautious and phased approach therefore remained justified, with hydrogen kept under active review while officers continued to explore feasible interim and longer-term decarbonisation measures.

RECOMMENDED that the Council

1. notes the update, including current diesel consumption trends and the associated risk to achieving the 2030 fleet emissions target and agrees that officers should continue to progress Phase 1 of the Roadmap to Green Fleet, while keeping the feasibility of hydrogen-powered HGVs and other heavy fleet decarbonisation options under review and reporting back as the policy, infrastructure, technology, and funding landscape develops; and
2. approves the development of a plan to purchase one electric refuse collection vehicle for an 18-month trial across all bin routes, with the vehicle to be retained for permanent use on the most viable route identified through the trial, subject to suitable incorporation into the Council's fleet replacement strategy or business case if required. A future report will be brought in relation to the procurement of this vehicle, as per Council Procurement Policy.

The Director provided a brief overview of the report, advising that there were two key issues to note. Firstly, the Council was currently not on track to achieve its green fleet targets, and a more detailed report on that matter was included in the agenda of the meeting later. Secondly, he referred to the potential use of hydrogen-powered vehicles, noting that while officers continued to monitor developments in this area and would report on outcomes, there remained significant gaps in the provision of hydrogen infrastructure and technology. As a result, hydrogen was not currently considered a realistic option in the short to medium term.

The Director explained that the proposal before Members formed part of the wider Vehicle Replacement Strategy and was not a request to approve the purchase of an electric vehicle at this stage. Rather, the purpose of the report was to seek Members' agreement for officers to undertake further investigation and develop the evidence base required to inform future decision-making.

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

Councillor Brady queried the increase in diesel consumption during Quarter 4, noting that it appeared significant and more than a simple outlier. In response the Director explained that the Council had recently been transporting residual waste to Warrenpoint on a regular basis for export and that was likely to be a major contributing factor to the increased diesel usage.

Councillor Brady also asked whether the proposed electric vehicle trial needed to last for 18 months or if it could be completed more quickly. The Director advised that the 18-month period had been recommended by the Estates team in order to assess vehicle performance across all seasons, including winter, spring and summer, and under different operational scenarios and load capacities.

Finally Councillor Brady asked how far the Council was from achieving its target and the Committee was informed that the variance was significant and would be discussed later in the meeting.

Councillor Kendall welcomed the report, not because the Council was off target, but because it demonstrated a considered and evidence-based approach. She noted that the proposed vehicle purchase could provide wider benefits by informing future infrastructure requirements and helping to target future investment through a data-led approach. Given current global circumstances, she considered it unlikely that fuel costs would fall significantly and stated that the Council should continue to explore more environmentally friendly alternatives. She also expressed an interest in receiving ongoing updates throughout the winter and spring on the outcomes of the trial.

Councillor Blaney raised concerns regarding cost, noting that the electric vehicle was approximately twice as much as a standard vehicle. He asked whether, if the trial proved to be unsuccessful, the vehicle could be resold commenting that electric vehicle technology was evolving rapidly, with new and improved models regularly entering the market. Councillor Blaney further queried how many vehicles would ultimately need to be purchased should the Council decide to roll out the technology across the fleet.

The Director confirmed that a business case had not yet been developed and the Head of Estates had advised that further work was required and that, at this stage, the proposal remained exploratory.

Councillor Blaney stressed the need for robust facts and figures to support any future investment, emphasising the importance of protecting ratepayers' money while recognising the Council's aspiration to become as environmentally sustainable as possible.

The Chair expressed similar concerns regarding the overall strategy. While acknowledging the Council's statutory duties, he noted that vehicle technology was evolving rapidly and raised concerns about investing heavily in a particular technology, such as hydrogen, only for developments to move in a different direction. He welcomed the focus on building a strong business case and referenced solar panels as an example where value for money must be demonstrated.

The Chair also noted that smaller electric vehicles may be particularly useful in urban areas and narrow streets, potentially offering opportunities to improve service delivery. However, he considered that the technology and supporting infrastructure were not yet fully developed and suggested that message should be communicated to central government.

Councillor Newman referred to the report's mention of another council having already implemented similar vehicles and sought confirmation that experience would form part of the Council's research. In response the Committee was informed that engagement with other councils formed part of the research process and would help inform future decision-making. Councillor Newman also highlighted the importance of understanding operational performance, including vehicle range and battery life during winter conditions, when charge retention may be reduced.

The Director agreed, noting that any business case would need to consider the actual running costs and operational performance of the vehicles in real-world conditions.

In conclusion, the Chair observed that the Council's current fleet operated on diesel and that fuel costs had become "eye-watering". He noted that could potentially strengthen the financial case for alternative vehicle technologies if fuel savings could offset the initial investment costs over time.

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

7. REQUEST TO NAME COUNCIL FACILITIES – BALLYGOWAN MULTI-USE GAMES AREA

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that a request has been submitted in writing to the Chief Executive seeking approval to name the new Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) at Moss Road, Ballygowan, in memory of the late Iris Oliver. A new MUGA was constructed at the Moss Road Playing Field facility in 2026 as part of a wider development of the site, including a carpark upgrade and the installation of walking trails.

Iris Oliver joined Ballygowan and District Community Association (BDCA) in June 2014 and was elected Chairperson in October 2015. She served as Chairperson until her passing in September 2021. During her tenure, she provided leadership throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and remained in post despite a period of serious illness during 2020 and 2021. For approximately seven years, Iris was an active member of BDCA, serving as Chairperson for six years. The request stated that she made a significant contribution to the Ballygowan community and that naming the facility in her honour would provide a fitting tribute to her commitment and service. In 2020, Iris received the Ards and North Down In Bloom Volunteer of the Year Award in recognition of her contribution to transforming and enhancing the Ballygowan area. She played a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining attractive floral displays around the village hall and surrounding areas. Through successful applications for grant funding, Iris also helped secure seating, raised beds and picnic benches for community use. The name proposed is "Iris Oliver Memorial Games Area."

Key Issues

The Council had an agreed policy which ensured a consistent approach to the naming of Council facilities. The Council was mindful that such decisions should promote equality of opportunity and good relations. Names should normally comprise two parts. The first part of the name must:

- Not be considered offensive* to any group or individual within the Borough. A name will be considered offensive if it can be interpreted to be abusive, antagonistic, discourteous, disrespectful, lurid or rude.
- Not be the surname of any living person or a name which could be clearly attributed to any living person. The Council would however consider an

application to name a facility after an individual who was deceased and had made an extraordinary contribution* in some way to the Borough and its residents or public life in general.

- An extraordinary contribution must have benefitted a significant number of people and/or been made over a significant period of time, must be fundamentally philanthropic and must comply with the seven principles of conduct underpinning public life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership).

The second part of the name should be appropriate to the physical resource, for example, "Hall", "Centre", "Playing Fields" or other similar descriptors.

Parks and Cemeteries Officers met with the committee of Ballygowan and District Community Association on 24 June 2026 to discuss the proposal. The group were supportive of the proposal and recognised the significant contribution Iris had made to the area. Members also placed on record their recognition of the contributions made by former Chairs and members of the Association who had since passed away.

On 25 June 2026, Parks and Cemeteries officers met with the family of Iris Oliver to discuss the proposal. The family expressed its support for the proposed naming.

Next Steps

In line with the 'Requests to Name Council Facilities' policy, the Council would consider the proposal against the agreed principles contained within the policy. Should the request be approved, officers would take the appropriate steps to rename the facility and install appropriate signage. Should Council reject the application, the applicant would be notified in writing, together with the reasons for the decision.

Summary

A request had been received to name the new Multi-Use Game Area (MUGA) at Moss Road, Ballygowan, the "Iris Oliver Memorial Games Area" in recognition of the significant contribution made by the late Iris Oliver to the Ballygowan community over many years. Iris was a long-serving member of Ballygowan and District Community Association, including many years as Chairperson, and was recognised through the Council's In Bloom Volunteer of the Year Award in 2020 for her efforts in enhancing the village through environmental improvements and community initiatives. The Council's agreed policy for naming facilities permitted consideration of naming a facility after a deceased individual where they had made an extraordinary contribution to the Borough and its residents. Officers had engaged with both Ballygowan and District Community Association and the family of Iris Oliver, all of whom have expressed support for the proposal. The Council was therefore asked to consider the request against the principles contained within its approved naming policy before determining whether the facility should be formally renamed.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers this report and determines whether the proposed naming of the facility as the "Iris Oliver Memorial Games Area" should be approved in accordance with the Council's approved Policy for 'Requests to Name Council Facilities'.

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

Proposing the recommendation Councillor Douglas shared with her Council colleagues a little bit about Iris Oliver, who had served as Chair of Ballygowan and District Community Association. She noted that Iris was a dedicated member of the community, always active, forward-thinking, and looking for ways to improve the area. She highlighted her work in supporting families, including through annual remembrance initiatives, and her significant contribution to transforming Ballygowan through projects such as securing grants, installing seating areas, developing picnic facilities, and creating raised beds. The Member went on to report that the group was very supportive of the proposal being brought and added that she had met with Iris's family, who had shared that view. She strongly believed that Iris's contribution to the Ballygowan community deserved to be recognised.

As seconder to the recommendation Councillor Edmund thanked his colleague for bringing the proposal forward, along with Council officers for their work and thought this was a fitting act to a lovely lady who had given so much to the Ballygowan community.

Alderman Adair thanked Councillor Douglas for presenting the proposal informing the Committee that he had met Iris when he had been Mayor and had been saddened to hear of her passing. He expressed his support for the proposal, stating that it would provide a fitting and lasting tribute to her contribution to Ballygowan.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Douglas, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted and that the name Iris Oliver Memorial Games Area be used.

8. NOTICE OF MOTION 713 MEMORIAL BENCH FOR JAIDYN RICE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in March 2026 the following decision was agreed by the Council as a result of a Notice of Motion:

“That this Council notes the profound impact on the Clandeboye 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.”

Following the Council decision, officers met with members of the Rice family to discuss the Notice of Motion, the Council's existing Memorial Bench Policy and the family's wider work to promote road safety awareness following Jaidyn's death.

Key Issues

The Council currently operated an approved Memorial Bench Policy, which set out the process for the provision of memorial benches on Council-owned land.

Under this policy, applications were accepted annually from 1st April and, where applications exceed availability, applicants were selected through the established process. A maximum of twenty memorial benches were approved each year to ensure consistency, fairness and the sustainable management of Council assets and open spaces. The existing policy was currently under review and an updated policy would be submitted to a future meeting.

The existing Memorial Bench Policy did not provide for individual benches to be allocated outside the established application process. Officers were required to administer all applications in accordance with the approved policy to ensure equitable treatment of all applicants and to avoid creating precedents that could undermine the integrity of the scheme. Officers therefore did not have delegated authority to make an individual allocation outside the approved policy.

To depart from the approved policy in this instance would create a precedent for future applications and could expose the Council to challenge on the grounds of inconsistency or unfairness in the application of an approved Council policy.

Officers met with members of the Rice family to discuss the Council decision and the requirements of the Memorial Bench Policy.

The family expressed its understanding of the current policy arrangements and indicated willingness to submit an application through the established process. Subject to a successful application, officers would work with the family to identify an appropriate location and to incorporate a QR code linking directly to the Here2Help app.

During discussions with the family, it was recognised that Jaidyn's death formed part of a wider issue relating to road traffic fatalities and the significant impact those incidents had on families, friends and local communities. Officers therefore explored the potential for a broader and more permanent memorial that would recognise all victims of road traffic collisions within the Borough while also promoting road safety awareness and access to support services.

Initial engagement had been undertaken with Road Safe NI, who had indicated a willingness to participate in the development of such a project in collaboration with their affiliated charity, The Road Ahead NI. Early discussions had identified opportunities to create a meaningful memorial and educational feature that could both commemorate lives lost and contribute to wider community awareness regarding road safety.

The development of a permanent road traffic victims memorial would require the allocation of capital funding and the preparation of an appropriate business case. Any funding requirement would need to be considered through the Council's annual rate-setting and budget process.

Should funding be approved, officers would adopt a collaborative co-design approach involving victims' families, relevant support organisations, Road Safe NI, The Road Ahead NI and the Policing and Community Safety Partnership. That approach would seek to ensure that any memorial was sensitive, meaningful and reflective of the experiences of those affected by road traffic fatalities.

It was noted that a similar collaborative design model was successfully employed in the delivery of the Dementia Friendly Sensory Garden in Ward Park.

The proposed road traffic victims memorial would be additional to, and not a replacement for, the memorial bench associated with Jaidyn Rice.

Next Steps

The Rice family would be invited to submit an application for a memorial bench through the Council's Memorial Bench Policy process. Subject to a successful application, officers would work with the family to identify an appropriate location and incorporating a QR code linking directly to the Here2Help app.

Officers would develop an outline proposal and business case for consideration of a memorial for all victims of road traffic collisions as part of the Council's rate-setting and budget process.

Subject to Council approval of funding, officers would establish a stakeholder working group consisting of families, charities and relevant Council officers, to commence a co-design process to develop the feasibility, scope and objectives of a permanent memorial recognising victims of road traffic fatalities.

Summary

The Council had previously agreed to support the creation of a memorial bench recognising the contribution of Jaidyn Rice and incorporating access to support services through the Here2Help app. While the Council's approved Memorial Bench Policy did not allow for the allocation of benches outside the established application process. The Rice family had indicated their willingness to proceed through the existing arrangements.

In parallel, officers had started exploring the potential for a wider permanent memorial to commemorate victims of road traffic fatalities within the Borough. Early engagement with relevant road safety organisations had been positive, and subject to future funding approval, officers would develop proposals for consideration by Council.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees to the approach below:

1. Note the engagement undertaken by officers with the Rice family following the Notice of Motion and the family's willingness to proceed through the Council's existing Memorial Bench Policy process.
2. Agree that any memorial bench application will be processed in accordance with the Council's approved Memorial Bench Policy.
3. Note officers' initial engagement with Road Safe NI and The Road Ahead NI regarding a wider road traffic victims memorial.

4. Agree that officers develop an outline proposal and business case for consideration of a memorial for all victims of road traffic collisions as part of the annual budget and rate-setting process.

The Chair indicated that Councillor McCollum was present at the meeting having requested speaking rights for this item.

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

Councillor Wray advised that he had spoken with the Rice family, who were content with the process and appreciative of the progress made. He highlighted the two elements of the proposal: the provision of a memorial bench for Jaidyn and the development of a wider legacy through a permanent memorial for road traffic victims. He acknowledged the challenges presented by the existing policy but stressed the importance of creating something meaningful for the family and thanked them for their patience and ongoing support for other families affected by road traffic tragedies.

Seconding the recommendation Councillor Harbinson recognised the work undertaken by Councillor Wray and Councillor McCollum and welcomed the potential for a lasting legacy.

Councillor McCollum conveyed the Rice family's gratitude to officers for their sensitive engagement and spoke of the family's determination to honour Jaidyn while also creating a permanent memorial that would recognise all road traffic victims. She proposed that the memorial be co-designed with bereaved families along with the Policing and Community Safety Partnership ensuring that those who were directly affected be involved in the development. Reflecting on the family's strength in the face of unimaginable grief she stated that while the pain of loss could never be removed, the Rice family and others could be supported through a meaningful process of remembrance and recognition.

Councillor Blaney and several Members expressed support for the proposal while recognising the limitations of the Council's current memorial bench policy. Members acknowledged the need to avoid creating a hierarchy of memorials and welcomed the ongoing review of the policy, particularly proposals to increase the number of memorial benches available across the Borough.

The Director confirmed that a review of the memorial bench policy was already underway to address issues such as increasing opportunities, while bearing in mind maintenance costs and fairness for all applicants. Members noted that a number of families were already waiting for memorial benches and agreed that any revised arrangements would need to provide a fair and sustainable approach. During the discussion, Members reflected on the importance of remembering loved ones and providing appropriate opportunities for families to commemorate those they had lost.

The Chair acknowledged the strength shown by the Rice family and welcomed their commitment to campaigning on road safety issues. It was noted that proposed policy changes would be brought forward as soon as possible, with a report on the wider memorial proposal to be brought back before the end of the financial year.

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

9. OFFENSIVE WEAPON SURRENDER SCHEME (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Council had received correspondence, dated 30 June 2026, from officials in the Department of Justice requesting its participation in an Offensive Weapon Surrender Scheme in the Autumn. A copy of the correspondence was included (attached) for Members' information.

Key Issues

As part of The Offensive Weapons Act 2019, the Department of Justice (NI) planned to make the private possession of a range of offensive weapons illegal. The possession of those items in a public place was already an offence. Those offensive weapons included zombie knife, machete, flick knife and ninja sword and images were shown in the DoJ letter.

If the law changed to ban items that were previously legal to own, owners should be provided with a safe and legal way of disposing of said items before they became illegal. As a result, the DoJ intended to operate a "Surrender & Compensation Scheme" in 17 designated police stations and had requested that councils provide locations for "Community Surrender Bins" at Household Recycling Centres across Northern Ireland.

It was proposed that specially designed, secure wheelie bins were located in both Bangor (Balloo) and Newtownards Household Recycling Centres. Recycling Centre staff would have a very limited role except for signposting the location of the bins to the public and there would be no additional cost to the Council. Subject to approval and confirmation of the scheme dates, it was envisaged that the Community Surrender Bins would be in location from October 2026 for three months.

The two legacy councils previously participated in initiatives to remove dangerous objects and on that basis, it was recommended that the Council participated in the Department of Justice's Offensive Weapon Surrender Scheme.

Summary

The Department of Justice has requested that local authorities assisted in the introduction of new legislation to remove offensive weapons from the community by installing Community Surrender Bins at Bangor (Balloo) and Newtownards Household Recycling Centres. There would be no cost to the Council and very

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limited involvement of Council staff with the bins envisaged to be in location for three months from October 2026.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves participation in the Department of Justice's Offensive Weapon Surrender Scheme in Autumn 2026.

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

Councillor Wray welcomed the proposal particularly since it would not involve a cost to the Council and also noted that offensive weapons could also be deposited at local police stations as part of the scheme.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter sought clarification on the protection of Council staff and the practical operation of the scheme within the Council's existing facilities. She suggested that consideration be given to incorporating the service into the booking system but raised concerns regarding security and safety, particularly given that Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) were publicly accessible locations. While recognising that some individuals might be reluctant to use police stations, she queried how access to the service would be managed and whether additional controls would be required.

The Head of Waste and Cleansing advised that any collection units would be secure and fixed to the ground, meaning that staff would not be required to handle their contents. He indicated that operational arrangements would need to be considered as the scheme developed and advised that implementation was likely to be considered from October. He noted that there may not be sufficient time to bring a further report to the Committee before then. Officers also highlighted that the scheme's anonymous nature would make it difficult to operate through a booking system and that further information was required regarding costs, security measures and the design of the collection units.

Councillor Blaney acknowledged the benefits of anonymity but emphasised the need to minimise risks to both staff and the public. He sought clarification on the location of collection points within HRCs and whether staff would be aware when members of the public were using those disposal facilities.

The Chair raised concerns regarding the suitability of HRCs as collection locations and questioned whether all practical considerations, including CCTV coverage and operational arrangements, had been fully examined.

Councillor Harbinson acknowledged the concerns raised but stated that he believed the proposal was positive overall and that the operational details could be resolved through further discussions.

In concluding the discussion, the Chair noted broad support for the principle of the scheme and suggested that feedback be obtained from Council HRCs before any final decision was made.

A vote was taken with a show of hands and 7 voted in FAVOUR, 4 voted AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED so the recommendation was CARRIED.

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

10. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 632 HRC PEDESTRIAN ACCESS – HOLYWOOD AND MILLISLE
(APPENDIX III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that from July 2025 to September 2025 the Council led a pedestrian access trial at two of the Council's smaller Household Recycling Centres - Hollywood HRC and Donaghadee HRC. The pilot involved setting aside and publicising specific periods for pedestrian-only access. Evaluation of the trial found that those periods were not well used.

Following the presentation of a report summarising the results of the pedestrian access trial at Environment Committee in December 2025, Members requested a further report setting out industry good practice and other means by which safe pedestrian access might be introduced at HRCs.

A report was provided to Committee in April 2026. The report included, published good practice relating to pedestrian access in HRC operations, Health and Safety regulations and guidance relating to HRC operations, good operational practice at HRCs in NI Councils and a site-by site review of potential pedestrian access at AND's HRCs.

Key issues

The report offered three recommendations, with the below recommendation agreed.

To implement further measures to allow pedestrian access at the two sites Hollywood HRC and Millisle HRC.

That would require additional works and a phased introduction as followed.

Hollywood HRC had a separate pedestrian access gate; however, the current layout did not adequately segregate vehicles and pedestrians. It was recommended that pedestrian access was considered following improvements to the site layout, refreshed site markings, and introduction of bollards. That was subject to availability of budget.

Millisle HRC - A separate new pedestrian access gate was required. That would be in addition to refreshed site markings, changes to the site layout, and introduction of bollards. That was subject to availability of budget.

Therefore, work up a business case for 2027/2028 for the investment that would be required to introduce pedestrian access at the two HRCs referred to, including an analysis of demand.

Next steps

Hollywood HRC

Hollywood Household Recycling Centre currently had a dedicated pedestrian access gate. To enhance site safety and improve traffic and pedestrian management, additional line marking works were required throughout the site, as illustrated in the proposed site layout (Appendix A). Additional, removable bollards would also be required.

The proposed works were estimated to cost £10,500 and would require the temporary closure of the site for approximately 1-2 days to allow the works to be completed safely and efficiently.

Those improvements would help to clearly define vehicle and pedestrian routes, contributing to a safer and more effective site operation.

Millisle HRC

Millisle Household Recycling Centre currently did not have an existing dedicated pedestrian access gate. To improve pedestrian safety and site accessibility, a section of the existing boundary wall would need to be removed to facilitate the construction of a new pedestrian entrance and exit. Dropped kerbs at the entrance would need to be introduced and several removable bollards installed throughout the site.

The estimated costs of those works was £45,000.

In addition, new line markings would be required throughout the site, as illustrated in the proposed layout (Appendix B), at an estimated cost of £3,000. Those markings would provide clear segregation between vehicle and pedestrian movements and improve overall site safety.

The site would also require a revised operational layout, including the relocation and reorganisation of waste streams, to accommodate the proposed pedestrian access and to optimise site flow.

It was anticipated that the site would need to be temporarily closed for a short period to allow the required works to be completed safely and efficiently.

The proposed improvements would enhance site accessibility, improve traffic and pedestrian management and support a safer operation of the site.

Signage

New signage would be required for both HRC sites. That was estimated to cost £2,000 for both sites.

Booking system

The booking system would require 'new work' to be carried out to introduce the pedestrian function for Millisle and Hollywood bookings. Pedestrian bookings would follow the same terms and conditions as vehicle users and must provide booking

reference and proof of address on entry. The ‘new work’ had been estimated to require two days, costing £1,400.

Estimated cost breakdown

Millisle	£48,000
Holywood	£10,500
Signage	£2,000
Booking system	£1,400
Total Estimated costs	£61,900

Summary

Subject to Member approval to proceed further, officers would develop a funding business case (in accordance with the established rates setting process) and detailed project plan for the implementation of the above site changes.

RECOMMENDED that the Council considers the outlined tasks and if this proposal should be included for consideration within the 2027/2028 rates setting process.

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

Proposed by Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Edmund to Defer a decision on Item 10 until the proposed review of HRCs had been completed

Alderman Adair referred to the fact that when the trial had been carried out previously there had not been a great uptake and he questioned whether that justified the cost of the financial commitment being suggested. He felt that it would be more appropriate for the Council to make a more informed decision following a review of the service. He stressed that he was not against but rather he wanted to defer the decision for now.

Councillor Edmund concurred with his colleague and thought the sum was significant and if a review was being undertaken anyway it would be wise to wait until that was completed before making a decision.

Councillor McCollum said that she was strongly against the proposal on the table and while she appreciated the results from the pilot they had not been compelling but nonetheless she was assured that there was significant need for pedestrian access at Holywood. She reported that the HRC in Holywood was only steps away from a residential area and she had no doubt that Councillor Kendall would endorse what she had said since both of them had received significant complaints from residents who did not have cars but still believed that they should have access to HRCs. She felt it was unbelievable to expect people who lived minutes away to drive to the sites and thought the suggestion of that was indefensible. She acknowledged that she could not speak for Millisle but stated that in terms of Holywood it was a significant issue and would only require a simple reorganisation of the layout there. She questioned why residents in Holywood should have to await the outcome of a full review of all the HRCS across the Borough and added was it not the Council's mission to reduce carbon emissions.

Councillor Kendall agreed with Councillor McCollum and explained that she too had received numerous correspondence about the matter from the residents of Holywood and could not agree with the proposal on the table. She thought it was ludicrous that visitors to the HRC there were able to walk across the forecourt while people entering the site on foot were refused. She did not know why the permission that had been in place a number of years ago was revoked and also could not see why a person on foot would need to use the booking system to be permitted entry. She also pointed to the fact that the trial had been extremely short. She stressed that the people of Holywood were paying the same rates as everyone else and they were incensed. She believed that the Council should give the go ahead to pedestrian access in the town.

Councillor Wray expressed that he was slightly conflicted over this decision since he was aware that the two areas which had been trialled wanted different things. While Millisle did not feel strongly about pedestrian access Holywood clearly did and so the obvious decision would be to proceed there.

Councillor Harbinson said that he was also against the proposal and he had an alternative if the decision fell. He felt that if a playpark was desired and needed, for example, on the Ards Peninsula the funds would be found so he felt that should be applied to Holywood where the costs were relatively modest at £15k.

Alderman Adair remembered that the uptake figures at the trial had been very low and requested this from officers. The officer reported that these had been provided to the committee previously but did not have them to hand currently.

Alderman Adair withdrew his proposal and made an alternative one which was seconded by Councillor Wray.

That the decision be deferred and brought to the following month's Committee with the numbers of pedestrians who had visited during the trial.

Members were not in agreement and Councillor Harbinson felt that this would only be dither and delay and he would not support. Councillor Kendall agreed with him and made it clear that she was aware that the figures were not high but Holywood residents had informed her that the trial time was short and they had not been made aware of it.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter felt it was grossly unfair that some people got special dispensation and she said that she would not apologise for scrutinising the decision for the service. The delay was for one month and her role as an elected member was to scrutinise decision making in the interests of the ratepayer.

A vote was taken with a show of hands and 7 voted in FAVOUR, 4 voted AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED so the proposal was CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Wray, that the recommendation be adopted and that a decision be deferred for one month to the October Environment Committee.

11. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 700 – LINEAR PARK PATH NETWORK

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in February 2026 the following decision was agreed by Council as a result of a Notice of Motion:

“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 e.g. 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.”

Key Issues

Linear Park was a popular and well-used urban park serving a large residential area, nearby schools and the wider Bangor East community. The park provided an important pedestrian link between residential areas and local shops, while also supporting informal recreation, dog walking, community use and active travel. The site included valuable natural features, including tree canopy, a community orchard, informal hedgerows and areas which supported biodiversity and community wellbeing.

In recent months, the formation of a community-led “Friends of” group had strengthened local engagement with the park. The group had provided a valuable route for community feedback and had identified a number of suggestions for future improvements.

Members of the group had expressed interest in walking and running route information, including a clear site map on the community noticeboard and distance markers along the route. That would support informal walking and running activity, rather than a formal Parkrun. For safety reasons, it was appropriate to limit route markings to the Ashbury shops side of Linear Park, thereby avoiding the need for users to cross Silverbirch Road unnecessarily.

Accessibility had been improved on the path in ‘lower’ Linear Park through the installation of a new path surface. The area in question was particularly low lying and in periods of high rainfall, the river tended to rise to levels above the normal flow. The area in question formed a natural floodplain and, for that reason, it would be difficult to provide a drainage solution that would fully alleviate future flooding.

As part of the investigation undertaken in response to this Notice of Motion, officers were requested to assess the feasibility of introducing lighting within Linear Park. Members would be aware that Linear Park was secured and closed to the public during hours of darkness, with the park being locked each evening at a significant ongoing cost to the Council. Given those existing operational arrangements, the

installation of lighting was unlikely to represent a cost-effective investment or provide sufficient value for money.

Next Steps

At the time of writing a Walkability Audit was planned for the end of August to provide a clear picture of pathway condition, accessibility, infrastructure and the level of works required to improve pathways around the park. That would ensure that any future works carried out met the needs of all users. Following the Walkability Audit, route maps and distance markers would be progressed for a walking and running route in 'upper' Linear Park (Ashbury shops end), in collaboration with the Friends of Linear Park group. Officers would engage with the Rivers Agency to discuss the flooding issue and investigate appropriate potential solutions.

Summary

Following a Notice of Motion in February 2026, Council officers had explored options for walking and running distance markers in Linear Park and reviewed ongoing flooding issues in 'lower' Linear Park. Community feedback supported the introduction of route maps and distance markers in 'upper' Linear Park (Ashbury Shops side), while a recent Walkability Audit would help guide future improvements.

Although accessibility had been enhanced through path upgrades, flooding remained a challenge due to the area's location within a natural floodplain. Officers would continue to work with the Rivers Agency to investigate potential solutions.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

The Chair advised that Councillor Cochrane had asked for speaking rights on this item and that had been granted.

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

Councillor Cochrane thanked officers for the response to his Notice of Motion that he had brought with Councillor Thompson in respect of Linear Park, Bangor. He, the Friends of the Park and local residents appreciated the walkability audit on the upper park and asked if that could also be carried out on the lower park. He also referred to the flood risk in that area particularly at Silverbirch and hoped that a quick response would come from the Department for Infrastructure.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries reported that a flooding risk assessment was being carried out with the Rivers Agency for the whole length of Linear Park and that also included other areas of the Borough where there were risks of flash flooding during periods of extensive rain. In respect of the walkability audit the officer agreed that that could be considered again and would be a good opportunity to engage with local people. The officer agreed to provide regular updates on progress to the Committee over the coming months.

Concluding, the Chair noted that the Linear Park was very well used and enjoyed and he praised the improved surface noting that the addition of benches in the park would enhance it further.

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

12. QUARTERLY SUSTAINABLE ENERGY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE 2026-27
(Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in June 2024 the 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.”

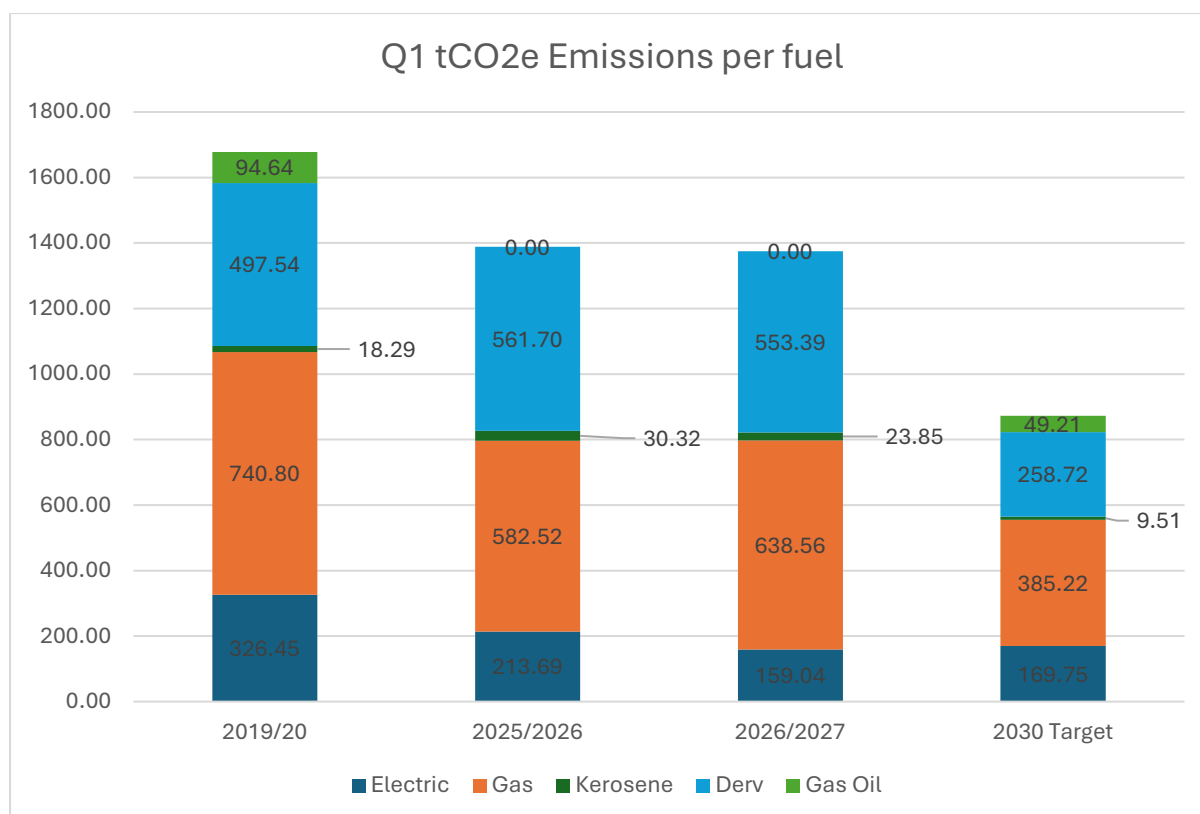
Improving oversight and accountability within the Council for energy management would ensure that consumption performance and the implementation of the Strategy and the action plan would be continuously monitored. Improved monitoring and governance would improve energy performance by ensuring actions were effectively implemented and consumption trends routinely monitored, which should result in reduced consumption, costs, and emissions.

Key Issues

This report was part of the Council’s ongoing quarterly series, tracking energy consumption against the 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



Electricity

As shown in the graphs above, carbon emissions resulting from electricity consumption decreased in Q1 by 25.6% compared with the same period in the 2025/26 financial year.

When measured against the baseline year, Q1 also demonstrated a notable improvement, a reduction of 51.3% reduction in carbon emissions, equivalent to 167.41 tCO₂. That reflected continued progress towards emissions reduction objectives. The Council remained committed to building on that 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.

Top 4 sites with the most significant decrease in electricity consumption in Q1 2026-27

- Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre
- North Road Depot Waste Transfer Station
- Environmental Resource Centre/Waste Transfer Station
- Bangor City Hall

Top 4 sites with the most significant increase in electricity consumption in Q1 2026-27

- Aurora Leisure Centre
- Londonderry Park
- Town Hall (Arts Centre/Market House) Newtownards
- Balloo Household Recycling Centre

The increase in electricity consumption across the leisure facilities appeared primarily driven by higher occupancy and demand. The Aurora Leisure Centre had a defective CHP Gas Engine which resulted in importing more electricity from the Grid.

April 2025 was notably warmer overall in Newtownards than April 2026. April 2025 was the third-warmest April on record, with an average monthly mean temperature of 9.8°C and an average daily maximum of 14.6°C, compared with a cooler monthly mean of 8.6°C and average daily maximum of 13.1°C in April 2026.

The Newtownards Town Hall (Arts Centre) was heated using electricity. The cooler conditions experienced during April 2026 were therefore likely to have resulted in increased heating demand and may have contributed to the higher electricity consumption recorded during the period.

The function room facilities at Balloo Household Recycling Centre had experienced increased demand during the reporting period, with a higher number of bookings and meeting events. In addition, Service Unit Managers had reported that the exceptionally warm conditions experienced in June, which was the warmest June recorded in 50 years, resulted in increased use of air-conditioning equipment. Those factors were considered likely contributors to the increase in electricity consumption recorded at the site.

Gas

Natural gas carbon emissions increased by 9.6% in Q1, compared to the same period in the 2025/26 financial year, resulting in an estimated 56 tCO₂ increase in emissions.

Relative to the baseline year, Q1 showed continued progress, with a 13.8% decrease in gas carbon emissions equivalent to a 102.2 tCO₂ reduction.

As noted above, April was notably colder than the corresponding period in the previous year, which was likely to have increased heating demand and associated gas consumption.

Top 4 sites with the most significant decrease in gas consumption in Q1 2026-27

- Redburn Community Centre
- Manor Court Community Centre
- Kilcooley Community Centre
- Westwinds Community Centre

Top 4 sites with the most significant increase in gas consumption in Q1 2026-27

- Queens Leisure Centre
- Environmental Resource Centre/Waste Transfer Station
- Londonderry Park
- Queens Hall / Newtownards Library

The Environmental Resource Centre/Waste Transfer Station experienced a significant boiler failure during the winter period. To maintain continuity of service, a

temporary replacement boiler was installed. However, the replacement unit had a slightly lower capacity than the original fixed installation, having been selected as the most suitable unit available at short notice.

As a result, the temporary boiler was required to operate under greater demand to maintain the required internal ambient temperatures, which may have contributed to increased energy consumption. Planned future works at the site would include the installation of a suitably sized and appropriately rated permanent boiler system, which was expected to improve heating efficiency and performance.

The Estates Team had also identified essential refurbishment works at Queens Leisure Centre and Londonderry Park. As part of those works, consideration was being given to replacing existing boilers with more modern, energy-efficient systems, alongside the potential integration of electric heating systems at sites where Solar PV installations were planned. That approach would provide an opportunity to maximise the use of on-site renewable electricity generation and further reduce reliance on fossil-fuel-based heating.

It should also be noted that not all gas meters were read on a monthly basis, and consumption data for some sites was therefore based on estimated meter readings. Caution should consequently be exercised when interpreting the reported figures and assessing overall consumption trends. Meter readings at some sites were obtained only every six or twelve months, while larger-consuming sites were generally subject to automated daily meter readings.

As actual meter readings became available and replaced estimated consumption data, some fluctuation or rebalancing of the reported consumption profile was expected. That may result in previously reported consumption figures increasing or decreasing accordingly. The position would continue to be monitored, with the expectation that any imbalance in the data would progressively reconcile during Q2 and subsequent reporting periods.

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 the Council's 2030 emissions reduction targets. Planned measures included:

- Deploying Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) and Monitoring & Targeting (M&T) systems, alongside Building Management Systems (BMS), to integrate heating controls and building metering infrastructure into a remotely accessible platform. That would enable more accurate and granular consumption profiles across multiple energy and utility sources, supporting improved monitoring, analysis and identification of consumption trends, anomalies, inefficiencies and opportunities for energy reduction.
- 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 2026/27 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.

Kerosene carbon emissions has seen a reduction of 21.3% in Q1 compared to the same period in 2025/26 financial year, resulting in a 6.47 tCO₂ emissions reduction.

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.

When considering the combined reporting of diesel consumption, overall usage in Q1 was 6.5% lower than the corresponding period in the 2019/20 baseline year, resulting in an associated reduction of approximately 38.79 tCO₂e.

Diesel-related fleet emissions in Q1 were 1.5% lower than the corresponding period in 2025/26, representing a reduction of approximately 8.3 tCO₂e.

Total fleet mileage during the reporting period was 406,702 miles, representing an 8.5% reduction compared with the corresponding period in the previous financial year. Fleet diesel consumption also reduced, totalling 195,817 litres, a 2.8% reduction compared with the same period in 2025/26. That reduction had occurred despite there being no increase in the overall number of fleet vehicles compared with the previous financial year.

Consumption Costs

The table below presented 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 1 Utility/Fuel Type	2019/20 Costs £(NET)	2019/ 20 Unit Rate	2026/27 Costs £(NET)	2026/27 Unit Rate £/unit (NET)
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		£/unit (NET)		
Electric	£191,586.31	£0.15	£333,676.88	£0.27
Gas	£214,992.11	£0.05	£256,328.59	£0.07
Kerosene	£3,180.35	£0.44	£9,815.36	£1.05
Derv	£190,163.76	£1.03	£348,335.48	£1.38
Gasoil	£19,559.76	£0.57		
TOTAL	£619,482.30	-	£948,156.31	-

Highlights of Energy Saving Initiatives Delivered this Reporting Period

List below of recent energy saving initiatives in Q1:

Description	Annual energy saving estimate	Annual tCO ₂ e reduction estimate	Annual cost saving estimate £(NET)
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
Donaghadee Parade – Public Toilets Refurb	2539 kWh	0.44	£660
Banks Lane – Public Toilet Refurb	1532 kWh	0.27	£398
TOTAL	29,291 kWh	5.21	£7,615

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 and KPI's for service unit managers to be agreed for 2026/2027.
- 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.
- 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 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	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080

Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage			
Glen Community Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080
Kilcooley Community Centre Solar PV with Battery Storage	~8,000 kWh (<i>design estimate only</i>)	1.4	£2,080
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
Ballyholme – Public Toilet Refurb	1442 kWh	0.26	£375
South Pier – Public Toilet Refurb	2539 kWh	0.44	£660
TOTAL	327,693 kWh	57.77	£85,200

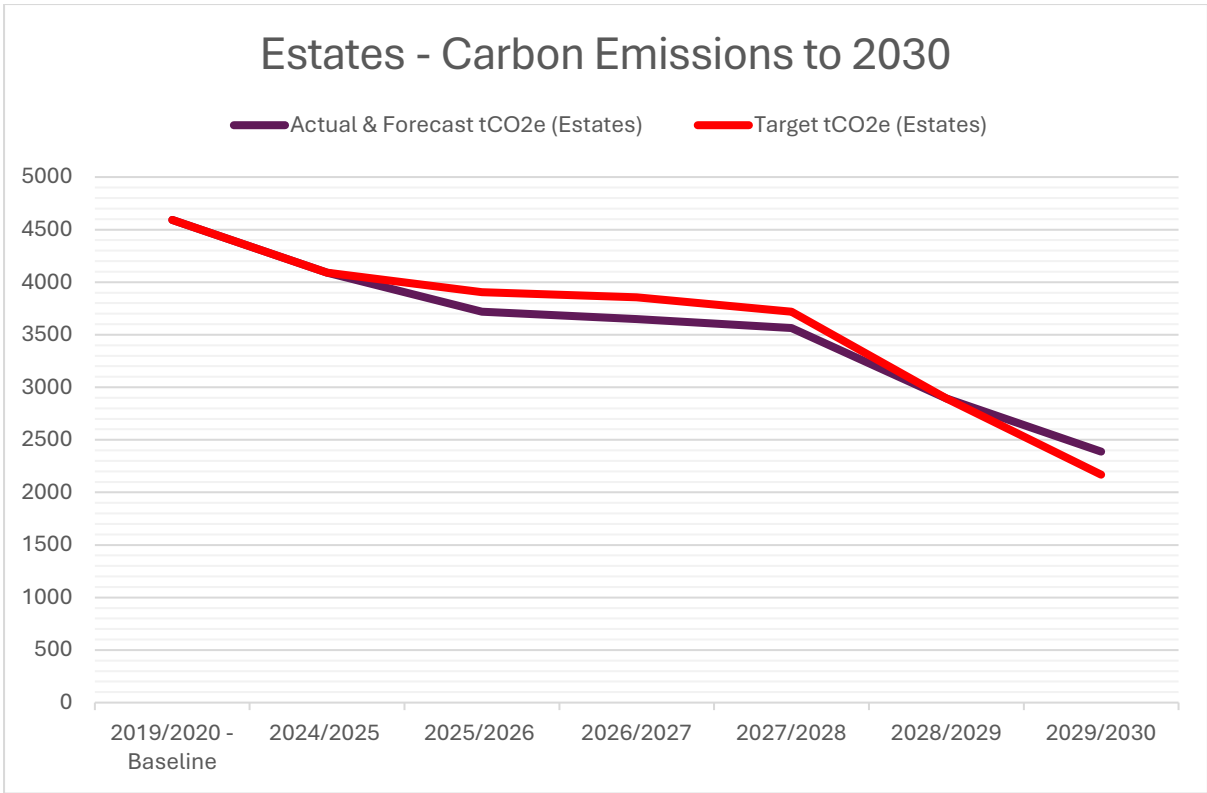
Summary

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 remain aligned with the target.



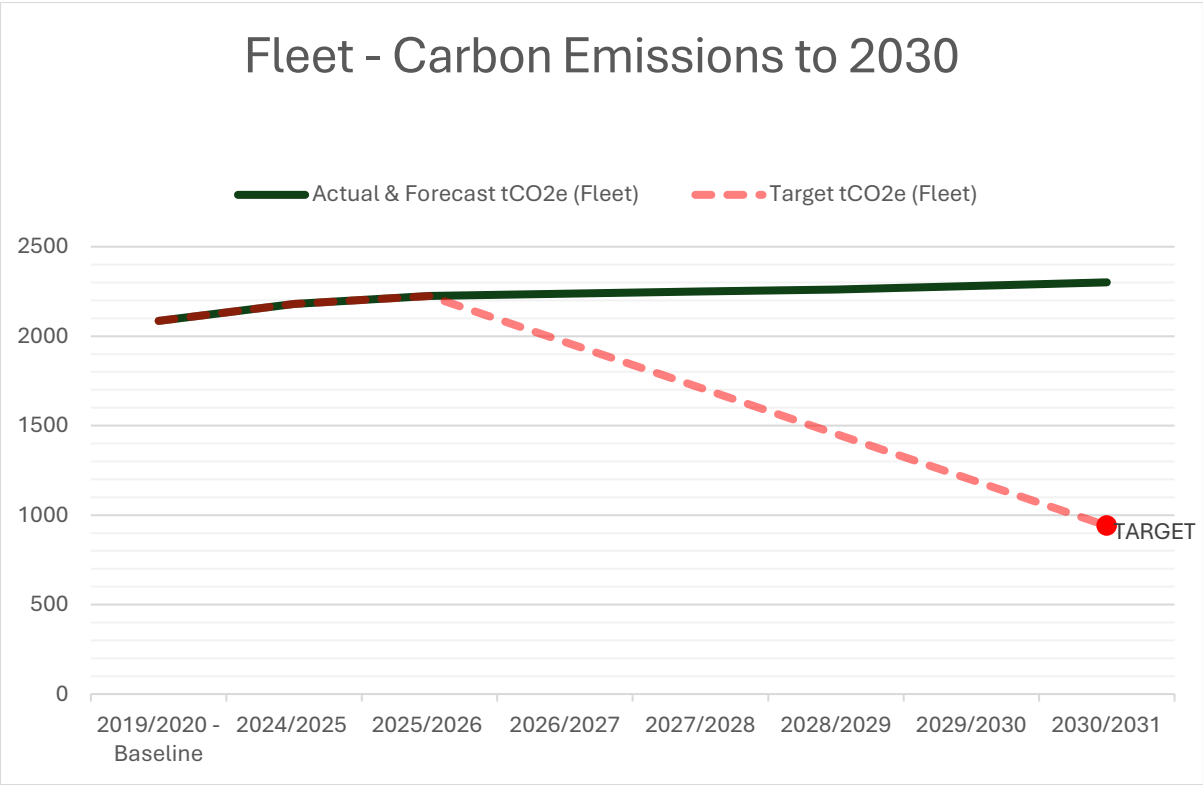
The graph below showed the overall change in fuel-related emissions across the Council’s fleet since the 2019/20 baseline year.

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 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 Councillor Brady, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Kendall was happy to propose and referred to the use of LED lighting which was lower energy and therefore budget friendly but she stated that she would like to see wildlife friendly lighting too for its energy saving benefits. There was further discussion on the Council’s options to run other services, such as leisure services, in a more energy efficient way and examine where further savings could be made.

Councillor Brady noticed that in Quarter 1 gas use had increased compared to electricity and he asked why that had been.

The Chair stated that it was notable that new technologies had been successful in bringing energy use down and that using sustainable energy well could save a significant amount of money for the ratepayer.

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

13. NORTH DOWN COASTAL PATH WORKING GROUP MINUTES

(Appendix V)

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 relating to connectivity, access and maintenance along the North Down Coastal Path, following the decision to withdraw the planning application for the proposed Kinnegar to Donaghadee Greenway Scheme. The Working Group was comprised of Elected Members and representatives from community and business organisations.

Key Issues

A meeting of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group was held on 27 April 2026 and the minutes of the meeting were agreed by the Working Group at the 29 June 2026 meeting.

Next Steps

Request for the Council to note the minutes and note the progress of the North Down Coastal Path Task and Finish Working Group.

Summary

The North Down Coastal Path Task and Finish Working Group, formed in September 2023 to address maintenance and connectivity, had finalised minutes from its 27 April 2026 meeting. The Council was asked to acknowledge the progress made by the group, which held quarterly meetings to oversee improvements along the coastline.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the attached minutes of the North Down Coastal Path Working Group held on 27 April 2026.

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

14. COMMUNITY TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of this report was to update Elected Members on the progress of the Community Trails and Greenways Unit within the Council's Parks and Cemeteries Service. Members would be aware that in 2024 the Council appointed a Development Officer (Community Trails and Greenways) with a clear role to:

- manage and support the development of active travel and recreation opportunities within the Borough;
- ensure a customer focused approach by engaging with key stakeholders to identify and implement environmental and commercial measures and sustainable project solutions;

- develop, identify, and promote the appreciation and enjoyment of Council owned Parks and other greenspace assets and resources across the Borough.

A suite of events listed in the attached appendix aligned closely with the overarching goals outlined in the Ards and North Down Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2028.

Key Issues

The Community Trails and Greenways programme continued to make a significant contribution towards the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2028 and the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan, through a diverse range of walking, cycling, biodiversity, heritage and wellbeing initiatives delivered across the Borough. The programme was designed to encourage greater use of parks, greenways, community trails and open spaces whilst supporting health improvement, environmental awareness, community engagement and active travel objectives.

The activities delivered throughout 2025-2026 demonstrated strong alignment with a number of Corporate Plan objectives, particularly those relating to lifelong learning, cultural and heritage development, community partnership working, physical and mental wellbeing, sustainable travel and equitable access to services. Through a varied programme of events, residents and visitors had been provided with opportunities to learn new skills, engage with the natural environment, explore local heritage and participate in healthy outdoor recreation activities. Those events had encouraged people of all ages and abilities to become more active and connected within their communities.

A key area of delivery had been the promotion of physical and mental wellbeing. Walking festivals, Bike Week activities, seasonal guided walks, biodiversity events and inclusive cycling programmes had encouraged participation in outdoor recreation and supported the Council's objective of improving health and wellbeing for residents. The availability of free and accessible activities had helped reduce barriers to participation and had ensured a broad range of opportunities were available to different sectors of the community.

The programme had also contributed significantly to environmental education and sustainability. Biodiversity walks, tree identification sessions, seabird walks and conservation-focused events had increased understanding of local wildlife, habitats and environmental stewardship. Those activities supported the Council's commitment to developing a sustainable borough and helped foster a greater appreciation of the Borough's natural assets.

Community engagement and partnership working remained central to the programme's success. Activities had been delivered in collaboration with Council departments, community organisations, specialist facilitators, local experts and external agencies. The collaborative approach had enabled the delivery of a varied and high-quality programme while strengthening community ownership, civic pride and social connectedness. Heritage walks delivered in partnership with the North Down Museum and inclusive cycling programmes delivered with community

organisations demonstrated the value of cross-sector collaboration in achieving shared outcomes.

The programme had further supported the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan by encouraging greater use of Council parks, trails and natural spaces as safe, accessible and vibrant community assets. Activities such as Walking Week, Bike Week, inclusive cycling initiatives, biodiversity workshops and the development of the Cairnwood Tale Trail had enhanced visitor experiences, increased participation and promoted inclusive access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

An important aspect of programme delivery had been the embedding of the "Five Steps to Wellbeing" throughout activities and events. Participants had been encouraged to connect with others, keep active, continue learning, take notice of the natural environment and give back through volunteering, knowledge sharing and community participation. That approach had ensured that wellbeing outcomes remained central to all programme activity.

The strong attendance levels achieved at major events and festivals demonstrated a growing demand for outdoor recreation, active travel and environmental learning opportunities across the borough. The programme continued to provide an effective mechanism for engaging residents, supporting visitor experiences and promoting the borough's parks, trails, coastline and green infrastructure assets.

In 2026, the Council's infrastructure had taken a significant step towards supporting the delivery of those activities, with the completion of the new Greenway from Green Road, Bangor to Newtownards. While Officers continued to work through some minor issues, the significant usage was already clear to see.

Next Steps

Officers would continue to deliver a year-round programme of walking, cycling, biodiversity, heritage and wellbeing events across the borough. The programme would build upon the success of Walking Week, Bike Week and other established festivals through the introduction of new activities and partnership opportunities. Opportunities for inclusive participation would develop further, ensuring activities remained accessible to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

Promotion of active travel and sustainable recreation through increased use of community trails, greenways and shared-use pathways would continue with a sustained focus on new facilities and attractions that encouraged greater use of parks, open spaces and greenway infrastructure.

Officers would continue to strengthen partnerships with community organisations, statutory agencies and specialist providers to enhance programme delivery and maximise external funding opportunities where available.

Summary

The Community Trails and Greenways programme had made a significant contribution to the delivery of both the Council's Corporate Plan and the Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan during 2025-26. Through a comprehensive programme of walking, cycling, biodiversity, heritage and wellbeing activities, the service had

successfully promoted active lifestyles, environmental awareness, community participation and sustainable travel across the borough.

The breadth and diversity of activities delivered had enabled residents and visitors to engage with the borough's parks, trails, coastline and green spaces in meaningful ways while supporting physical health, mental wellbeing and lifelong learning. Strong attendance at festivals and events demonstrated continued public demand for those opportunities and highlighted the value of investing in accessible outdoor recreation programmes.

The programme continued to demonstrate the Council's commitment to developing a sustainable, vibrant and inclusive borough. By building upon existing successes, strengthening partnerships and expanding opportunities for participation, Community Trails and Greenways would continue to play an important role in enhancing quality of life, supporting community resilience and encouraging greater use of the borough's natural and recreational assets.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter welcomed the opportunity to see the Greenway develop and knew that it was having a positive impact for residents. She referred to the Beverley area, where increased numbers of families and cyclists were using the routes. However, she raised concerns regarding the branding and signage of the Comber Greenway network, stating that many of the residents that she represented were dissatisfied with the fact the greenway was called the Comber Greenway and did not fully understand the extent of the wider network. She suggested that clearer online mapping would help improve public understanding and community buy-in.

Officers explained that the branding of the wider network as the Comber Greenway had been a Council decision following a workshop that all Members were invited to and a subsequent recommendation from the Community and Wellbeing Committee. It facilitated a single branding opportunity which then formed part of a broader marketing approach to promote the entire Greenway network. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries acknowledged that the branding may not currently make complete sense as the network was not yet fully connected. However, he advised that once the routes were all formed, the branding would become clearer. He also noted that future consultations on the location of bus stop style signage would provide an opportunity to communicate the benefits of the completed network and promote greater public awareness of how their locality was part of it.

Councillor Wray highlighted the significant benefits of the Borough's walking and cycling infrastructure, referring particularly to the Park Peddle Group. He noted that he had met with a cycling group which highly valued the walkways and trails and described them as transformative. He commended Council officers for their work and expressed a desire to see Park Pebble developed further, including the potential establishment of a Parkrun. The officer informed the Committee that discussions were ongoing with Parkrun organisers and advised that there were substantial

opportunities to expand events and initiatives that promoted walking and cycling across the Borough.

The Chair raised concerns about members of the public accessing a private bridge, which had resulted in anti-social behaviour in a part of the Greenway and he asked if appropriate planting could be placed there to discourage loitering. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that the Tree and Woodland Officer was progressing plans to plant vegetation in the area which would restrict access and that the work was expected to take place within the coming months.

The Chair also highlighted parking issues near the bridge in Beverley, particularly vehicles parking within a bus turning circle. It was suggested that additional signage may be required, and officers confirmed that they would work with colleagues in DfI and Translink to address the matter noting that the popularity and success of the Greenway had inevitably created some associated challenges.

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

15. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 714 REQUEST FOR PUBLIC CONVENIENCES AT HELEN'S BAY STATION

(Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the Council agreed to the following as a result of a Motion of Motion in May 2026.

'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.'

A Letter was sent to Translink on 5 June 2026 and receipt was acknowledged on 8 June 2026. A response to the letter was received on 24 June 2026 from Ian Campbell, Director of Service Operations (attached).

The response had indicated that Helen's Bay Station did not have a building nor was it staffed and as such there was no existing infrastructure to accommodate a toilet facility nor staff to control access. It was pointed out that all trains had on board toilet facilities.

The Council was being asked to note the reply from Translink that stated it was unable to provide toilet facilities at Helen's Bay Station for the reasons stated in the attached letter.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

EC.02.09.26

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Councillor Edmund stated that his colleague, Alderman Graham, had brought the Motion originally and thought that the response from Translink had been disappointing. Toilets may be available on trains but the problem took place mainly in the area around the train station. The response in his view was easy and lazy and he thought it unfortunate for the residents who were suffering.

The Chair agreed adding that the railway network had a lot to improve upon and he referred also to disabled access at these stations too which was inadequate.

Councillor Kendall agreed with the previous comments in respect of Translink and while she was content to note the response it was highly disappointing and also unsurprising.

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

RECESS 9.00 pm.

RECOMMENCED 9.13 pm.

(Councillor Harbinson left the meeting)

16. NOTICE OF MOTION 706 FALLEN TREES OVER ENLER RIVER

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in March 2026, the following decision was agreed by the Council as a result of a Notice of Motion:

“To task officers to investigate and engage with other statutory agencies to work together to safely remove the fallen trees over the Enler River, Comber, which has been there since Storm Eowyn”

In response to the Notice of Motion, Officers had engaged with relevant stakeholders, including statutory agencies, and undertaken investigations to establish ownership of the land on which the fallen tree was located. This work had also formed part of wider land ownership investigations associated with the proposed Greenway project.

Despite extensive enquiries and a review of available mapping and property records, officers had been unable to identify the landowner of the affected area. As the tree was not located on Council-owned land, the Council had no direct responsibility for its removal or ongoing management.

Whilst the wider Greenway investigations may assist in clarifying ownership in due course, those processes had not yet reached a conclusion and no authority had been identified which would permit or require the Council to undertake the works at this time.

Council's approach to asset management required that its limited operational resources were prioritised towards the maintenance, improvement and management of land and assets for which it had ownership or statutory responsibility.

Undertaking works on third-party land where ownership had not been established would be inconsistent with that approach. Intervening in these circumstances may also establish a precedent for Council undertaking works on land that it neither owned nor controlled. That could create expectations that similar requests elsewhere across the Borough would be accommodated, potentially resulting in ongoing financial and operational commitments beyond the Council's established responsibilities and available resources.

The estimated cost of removing the tree was £2,880 plus VAT. Whilst the cost was relatively modest, although no budget was currently available, the principal issue was not the cost of the works but the Council's legal ability to undertake works on land where ownership had not been established. In the absence of a confirmed landowner, there was also no mechanism available to recover those costs should the Council proceed. Undertaking works on land where ownership has not been formally established presented a number of risks for the Council.

Should a landowner subsequently come forward, the Council could face allegations of trespass, be required to cease works, restore the land to its previous condition, or potentially compensate the landowner for any losses incurred. Furthermore, the expenditure of public funds on land outside the Council's ownership or control may be subject to challenge and could be viewed as poor value for money. By carrying out works on land outside its ownership or control, the Council may also assume responsibility for the ongoing safety and condition of the site and any associated infrastructure.

Uncertainty regarding land ownership could create difficulties in relation to future maintenance obligations, liabilities and regulatory compliance. It was therefore considered prudent that ownership and any associated legal interests were fully established before the Council resources were committed to undertaking works. Officers had engaged with relevant stakeholders and would continue to monitor any opportunities that may arise through future Greenway investigations or other statutory processes that could help clarify ownership and inform any future course of action.

Officers had considered the current condition and position of the fallen trees. Based on visual assessment, the trees appeared stable and were considered unlikely to move from the current position. Consequently, the risk to members of the public was considered to be low.

Next Steps

Officers would continue efforts to establish ownership of the land through ongoing investigations associated with the proposed Greenway project and any available statutory records. Should land ownership be established, officers would engage directly with the landowner to discuss the condition of the trees and any potential remedial actions.

Officers would keep the situation under review and report back to Members should new information emerge regarding ownership, statutory responsibilities or potential delivery mechanisms.

Summary

In response to the Notice of Motion, officers had consulted with relevant stakeholders, including statutory bodies, and carried out investigations to determine ownership of the land where the fallen trees over the Enler River were located.

As the trees were not situated on Council-owned land, the Council had no legal ability to enter the land and no statutory obligation had been identified that would enable intervention at this time.

Whilst the estimated removal cost was relatively modest, undertaking works on land of unknown ownership would expose the Council to risks and could establish an operational expectation for intervention on land outside the Council's ownership or control in other places.

Accordingly, it was recommended that the Council continued to pursue clarification of ownership before considering any intervention on the site.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

Councillor Douglas began by pointing out an inaccuracy on the agenda which should have said 'Response' to Notice of Motion. She also clarified that it referred to trees and not a single tree.

She thought the response to her and her colleague's Motion had been frustrating and disappointing. It seemed that the Rivers Agency did not want to get involved if they felt it did not affect the flow of the river. She knew that officers would continue their efforts to establish ownership and she understood that Council officers had looked at the trees and considered them to be stable. Meanwhile she continued to be concerned that the trees could hurt people and hoped that in time the matter would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

Councillor Edmund knew the area and agreed with the disappointment expressed saying it appeared that no agency wished to do anything if it cost money. He knew that officers would work to try to see them removed.

Councillor Ashe echoed those comments and appreciated it was not the Council's remit to move the trees and while the cost to do that was modest the Council had a responsibility in how it spent ratepayers money.

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

17. PORTAVOGIE AND PORTAFERRY 3G PITCH PROJECTS – BI-MONTHLY UPDATE (Appendices VIII & IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that in February 2024, the Council agreed to the following:

“That Council notes the closure of the training area at Portavogie Football Pitch due to health and safety concerns, recognises the negative impact this has on local provision and sports development and tasks Officers to bring forward a report on options to provide temporary training facilities in the village in the short term and repairs to the pitch in the long term. As a matter of urgency Council tasks Officers to bring forward a bimonthly progress report on the development of the Portavogie 3G Pitch, Portaferry Sports Centre and Portaferry 3G Pitch to this committee.”

The previous report was submitted to the Community and Wellbeing Committee in September 2025. Since then, Members and key stakeholders had been updated on the two 3G pitch projects through alternative communication methods, including email and telephone correspondence. Following re-organisation, those bi-monthly 3G pitch reports would be reported to the Environment Committee, and the update on the Portaferry Sports Centre was now a matter for the Active and Healthy Communities Directorate. Formal reporting was temporarily paused to allow time to deal with some sensitive issues pertaining to land, access, property and confidential matters, which had now largely been resolved. The pattern of reporting using the RAG status would now recommence.

Key Issues

This report provided the bi-monthly updates requested by the Council in relation to the two capital projects. The updates were presented in the RAG reporting format, as requested by Members in May 2024.

Next Steps

Officers would recommence bi-monthly reporting to the Environment Committee using the agreed RAG status format and would continue to update Members on project progress, risks and key milestones.

Summary

1. An update on the Portavogie 3G Pitch project is attached at Appendix 1.
2. An update on the Peninsula 3G Pitch project is attached at Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this update report.

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

Alderman Adair welcomed the report, noting that it was encouraging to receive some positive news following a period in which many major projects had faced difficulties.

However, he cautioned that the project was not yet fully secured and remarked that, despite having been under discussion for approximately 16 years there had been little visible progress on the ground.

While he welcomed the approval of planning permission and acknowledged the work undertaken with NI Water, he highlighted that two key matters remained outstanding: issues involving the Education Authority and the need for an updated business case. He asked when the revised business case would be brought before the Committee and the Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that, subject to no significant issues arising, the business case was expected to be provided to officers by December and certainly further decisions would be anticipated before the end of the current Council mandate.

Alderman Adair welcomed that update but stressed that the local community ultimately wished to see physical progress being made. He acknowledged the challenges that had arisen throughout the lifespan of the project and stated that the need for the facility was now greater than ever. While remaining cautious, he said the latest developments gave him cause for optimism and he looked forward to considering the updated business case.

Councillor Edmund also welcomed the progress made on the project, observing that after 16 years it would be pleasing to finally see it delivered. He noted that around 270 children alone would benefit from the facility and believed it would be well used by the wider community. He commented that issues involving NI Water had not assisted progress and thanked officers for their continued work in advancing the project.

Councillor Wray highlighted the significant cross-party and cross-chamber support that existed for the Portavogie facility. He stated that the Council had already invested substantial time, effort and resources into the project and emphasised his unwavering support for seeing it progress.

Referring to the proposed pitch project in Portaferry, he expressed concern that it might encounter similar difficulties. He noted the reported £4.3 million increase in projected costs and questioned why a number of factors had not been identified or accounted for at the Outline Business Case stage. He expressed concern that communities were often encouraged by initial cost estimates, only for significantly higher figures to emerge at a later stage, and suggested that created difficulties in managing local expectations.

Officers advised that the increase in costs was primarily linked to inflation, NI Water requirements and the need to engage with private landowners. It was noted that cost estimates were currently being updated and could increase further when assessed against current market rates. Officers explained that a number of additional requirements, including earthworks, drainage works, fencing and the provision of new organic infill, had not been fully identified at the earlier stage and had subsequently added to overall project costs.

The Director explained that all capital projects followed a gateway process and that the original Outline Business Case had been prepared in 2016. Since that time, the

format and requirements for business cases had changed considerably. The Outline Business Case had enabled the project to proceed to planning, but as further information and requirements had emerged, it had become necessary to revisit and update the business case. The Director noted that this was a normal part of the process and that costs would continue to be refined as the project progressed through subsequent stages.

In closing, Councillor Wray noted that some Members had attended discussions on these issues and queried how expectations could best be managed with local communities. The Chair responded that this was a matter for wider discussion across the Council.

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

18. NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL AUTHORITY MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STATISTICS, JANUARY – MARCH 2026
(Appendix X & XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the official waste management statistics for the fourth quarter of 2025/2026 (January to March 2026) 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 have been implemented during the quarter with the aim of improving performance.

In summary, key indicators remained positive for the reporting period. They showed that the Council had been successful in maintaining high levels of reuse and recycling. More detailed analysis revealed a continued reliance on higher performing HRC diversion, with lower relative tonnages 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]

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%	52.9%	

CHANGE	+3.3%	+2.9%	+2.4%	+1.4%	
Waste From Household Recycling Rates (Official UK recycling measure)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	59.7%	58.0%	53.5%	51.4%	55.9%
2025 - 2026	62.7%	60.9%	55.4%	52.7%	
CHANGE	+3.0%	+2.9%	+1.9%	+1.3%	
NI Household Recycling Rate Ranking (KPI(a2))					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	3rd	3rd	3rd	2nd	3rd
2025 - 2026	1st	2nd	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%	25.0%	
CHANGE	-1.5%	-0.8%	-0.6%	-0.7%	
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%	27.5%	
CHANGE	+4.8%	+3.8%	+2.9%	+2.1%	

The headlines for household waste recycling were:

- **Household waste recycling rate (KPI(a2))** rose by 1.4% compared to the same quarter last year, from 51.5% to 52.9%. That was 5.7 percentage points higher than the NI average of 47.2%. The Council was ranked second out of the eleven NI councils for its household waste recycling rate, consistent with the ranking for same quarter last year.
- **Waste from Households recycling rate** rose 1.3% to 52.7% compared to the same quarter last year.
- **Household waste composting rate** fell by 0.7% compared to the same quarter last year - from 25.7% to 25.0%. The Council's household waste composting rate was 4.6 percentage points higher than the NI average of 20.4%. Ards and North Down was ranked second in the council performance table for that stream, along with Mid Ulster District Council.
- **Household waste dry recycling rate** rose by 2.1% compared to the same quarter last year - from 25.4% to 27.5%. The Council's household waste dry recycling rate (i.e. recycling of items other than organic food and garden waste) was one percentage point higher than the NI average of 26.5%. Ards and North Down was ranked fourth in the council performance table for that stream.
- **Kerbside compostables capture rate** was 68.4% compared to a NI council average of 60.8%.

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
2025 - 2026	5,824	6,275	5,572	5,451	
CHANGE	+1%	+5.1%	+22.3%	+16.9%	
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	1,555	
CHANGE	down 7.5%	down 11%	up 20.6%	102.2%	
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	3,896	
CHANGE	up 3.8%	up 10.3%	up 22.9%	+0.05%	
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%	71.4%	
CHANGE	up 2.6%	up 3.8%	up 0.3%	down 11.6%	

The headlines for HRC performance were:

- **Total HRC waste per capita** averaged 32.9kg, compared to an average 38.6kg per capita for all other NI councils.
- **HRC residual waste per capita** was 9.4kg, compared to an average of 17.8kg per capita for all other NI councils.
- **HRC recycling per capita** was 23.6kg, similar to the average 23.8kg per capita for the other 10 councils.
- **HRC recycling percentage** was 71.4% in this quarter, compared to an average rate of 56% for other councils. During the same quarter the previous year, our HRC recycling rate was 83%. The significant change was due to an anomalously low residual waste tonnage received in Q4 2024-25.

Table 3: Kerbside performance 2025/26 vs 2024/25

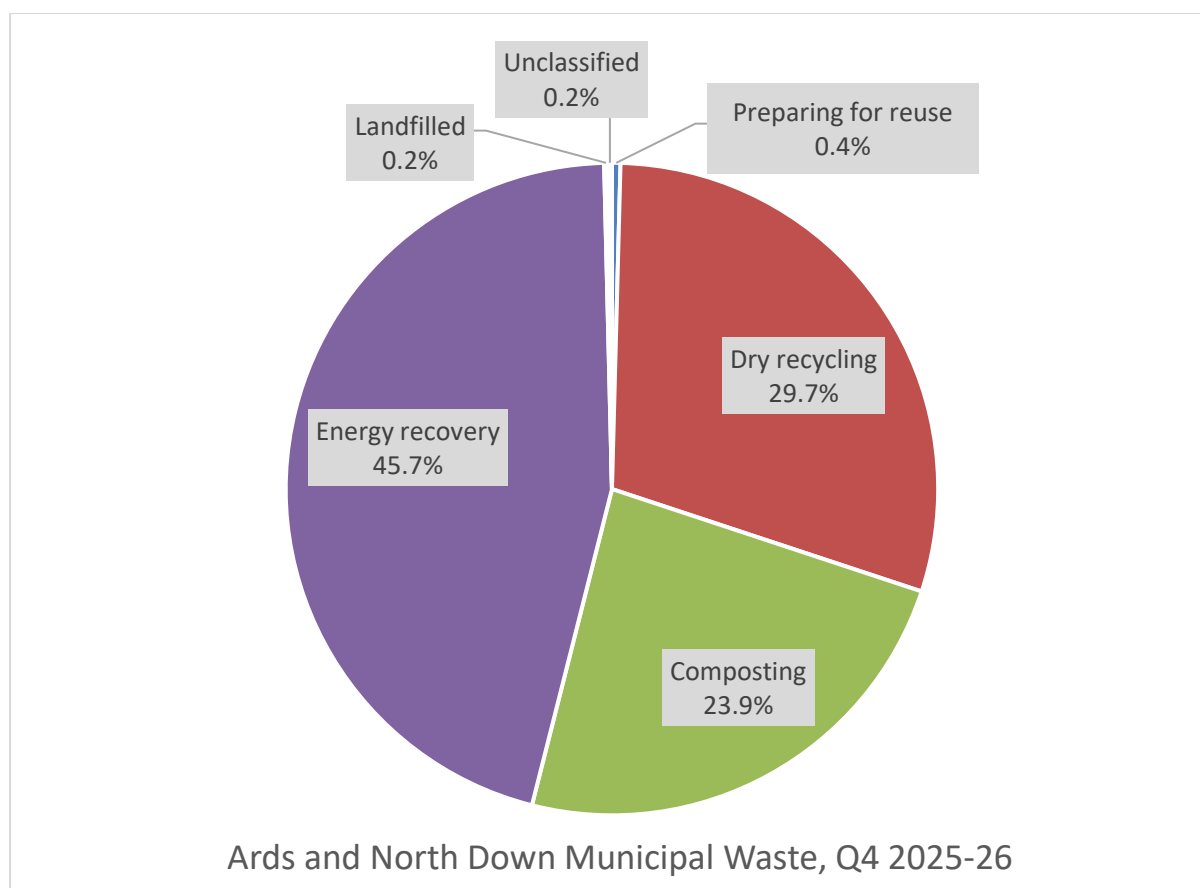
Total kerbside waste collected (tonnes)					
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual
2024 - 2025	16,109	16,038	13,919	14,446	60,512

2025 - 2026	15,610	15,874	13,850	13,763	
CHANGE	down 3.1%	down 3.0%	down 0.5%	down 4.7%	
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	6,655	
CHANGE	down 0.6%	up 3.0%	up 4.6%	down 7.6%	
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	7,108	
CHANGE	down 4.6%	down 3.0%	down 4.6%	down 1.4%	
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%	51.6%	
CHANGE	down 1%	down 2.0%	down 2.2%	up 1.5%	

The headlines for kerbside collection performance were:

- **Kerbside collected waste per capita** averaged 83.2kg during this quarter. The average for all other Northern Ireland councils was 80.4kg per capita.
- **Kerbside collected residual waste per capita** averaged 40.2kg per capita, compared to an average of 47.6kg per capita for the other Northern Ireland councils.
- **Kerbside collected recycling per capita** averaged 43kg per capita, compared to an average of 32.8kg per capita for the other Northern Ireland councils.
- **Kerbside recycling percentage** (the proportion of waste collected for recycling through our kerbside service) was 51.6%. That was slightly higher than for the same quarter in the previous year and was higher than the 40.8% average for other Northern Ireland councils.

Municipal waste overview



In Quarter 4 of 2025/26, 53.6% (10,605 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% (83 tonnes) was sent for re-use or repair. For residual waste, 45.7% (9,048 tonnes) was sent for energy recovery during the quarter, and 0.2% (36 tonnes) was rejected as non-target material by our reprocessors and sent to landfill.

Operational Performance Improvement Measures

MC1 - Marketing and Communications Indicators

38 social media posts were issued across Facebook and Instagram. Those represented a mix of educational and operational messages including:

- Winter Coat Project – promotion of donation points and 2 x pop-up shop events
- Seasonal - Valentines – Glass/Perfume bottle recycling (WRAP Assets)
- Food Waste Action Week – “Make the most of your food” (WRAP assets)
- Bin collections in winter weather including significant collection disruption and storm response (Storm Chandra in January)
- Temporary facility closures (maintenance, vandalism of WC facilities)
- Bank Holiday Bin Collections (St Patrick's Day and Easter)

One press release was issued, 11 March 2026. That highlighted the HRC’s paint reuse scheme via launch of new mural. Read on ANDBC website at [New Mural Unveiled at Balloo Recycling Centre - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)
More detail on social media posts during the quarter is included in Appendix 1.

MC2 Bin-Ovation

- 5 Bin-Ovation ‘News and Info’ articles were published including collection/HRC arrangements for Easter and March Bank holiday, Food Waste Action Week 2026, Storm update and Winter Coat Project: Pop-up Shop Dates
- 6 Bin-Ovation push notifications issued.
- 1513 Bin-Ovation downloads recorded.

MC3 – Officers delivered 14 community and engagement events, reaching 900 people.

- 2 x Information events
- 6 x schools
- 5 x adult groups
- 1 x Youth groups

Household Recycling Centre Indicators

HRC2 Number of visitors turned away from site: 364

HRC2a Number of HRC bookings: 71,487

HRC2b – Average number of HRC visits per household: 0.99 (averaged across the 71,976 households in the Borough)

Kerbside Household Waste Collections Indicators



- KS1 – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (yellow): 2339
- KS2 – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (amber): 145
- KS3 – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (red): 28

Summary and Trend Analysis of Indicators

Indicator Reference	Monitoring Period 11 (Jul to Sept 2025)	Monitoring Period 12 (Oct to Dec 2025)	Monitoring Period 13 (Jan to Mar 2026)
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MC1 Social media posts	50	64	
MC2 Print press and online articles	1	1	5
MC3 Engagement events/sessions	16	18	14
HRC2 Visitors denied entry	697	436	
HRC2a No. of bookings	85,160	77,429	71,487
HRC2b Average no. of HRC visits per household	1.18	1.08	0.99
KS1 Yellow warning stickers on grey bins	1913	1612	2339
KS2 Amber warning stickers on grey bins	133	133	145
KS3 Red warning stickers on grey bins	53	63	28

Summary Analysis

The Council's overall recycling performance demonstrated an increase of 1.4 percentage points over the same quarter in 2024/25 with the Council maintaining its second place ranking in the NI Council recycling performance table. This quarter's performance was due to good diversion for reuse and recycling through kerbside, HRC, and bring services.

During the quarter January to March 2026, AND BC:

- Recorded household waste recycling rate of 52.9%; the second highest household recycling rate of the 11 NI councils. That was an increase of 1.4 percentage points from the same quarter in 2024/25.
- Collected 683 fewer tonnes of waste at the kerbside compared with the same quarter last year. Despite the reduction, the kerbside recycling rate increased slightly to 56.1%, as the decrease in residual waste was greater than the decrease in recyclable material collected.

Year on year data for HRC residual waste indicated a significant increase in tonnage received from 769 tonnes in Q4 2024/25 to 1,555 tonnes in Q4 2025/26. Analysis of

waste data for the most recent seven years indicated that HRC residual waste tonnage for Q4 2024/25 was atypical for that period in the year.

Table 4 Comparison of HRC residual and recycling tonnages for Q4 since 2021/22

Q4 HRC waste and recycling (tonnes, %)							
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Residual	2,095	3,631	2,569	1,942	1,416	769	1,555
Recycling	3,375	4,972	3,750	3,463	3,337	3,894	3,896
% recycled	61.7%	57.8%	59.3%	64.1%	70.2%	83.5%	71.4%

Additionally, changes to tonnage trends were observed following the introduction of HRC access and use rules in 2021/22, and the HRC booking system in 2022/23.

Kerbside recycling performance had held steady for the last three quarters, but the kerbside recycling rate had generally remained below the rate recorded in the corresponding quarters of the previous year. Council officers were developing a multi-channel, borough-wide communications campaign which would aim to increase awareness of what happened to kerbside collected recycling, and in turn increase residents' confidence in their recycling efforts and increase capture of materials at the kerbside.

The Q4 composting performance remained broadly stable at 25.0%, compared with 25.7% in the previous year. The slight reduction reflected normal fluctuations in organic waste generation, particularly garden waste volumes which were highly dependent on seasonal and weather-related factors. Continued waste prevention activity and changing household behaviours may also have contributed to lower organic waste arisings.

The Council was awaiting the publication of DAERA's response to the 2024 Rethinking Our Resources consultation. That was expected to provide direction on collection consistency and workplace recycling initiatives, helping to guide future service planning.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter raised the fall in one of the sections of residual waste which had been put as an anomaly and wondered if officers had any idea why that had been so great. The Head of Waste and Cleansing replied that it had been flagged and was being investigated and similarly there had been a rise in recycling.

Table 4 was an outlier and that was why the Council was looking at an increase. However, the rest of the report was very pleasing and showed that residents were doing well sorting waste correctly.

The Chair asked a question in relation to dry recycling and wondered why there had been an improvement and uptake recently. The officer replied that it was probably due to a big drop in residual waste collection rather than more recycling. He added that the section would work with the Council’s Communications team to provide information to residents and give them the confidence to recycle correctly at the kerbside. The Chair thought that would be welcomed.

Councillor Kendall queried the amount of Binovation downloads and it was noted that 90,000 residents in the Borough had signed up to that. There had also been an increase in yellow warnings on bins and that was explained by having staff available to inspect bins more thoroughly and issue those warnings.

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

19. H2 PERFORMANCE REPORTS 2025/26

19.1 ESTATES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Members would be aware that the Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil that requirement the Council had in place a Performance Management Policy and Handbook. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to 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 outline how each respective Service will contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Reporting Approach

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

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

The report for H2 was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to 15 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:

- Harbours berth holder survey completed
- Harbours stakeholder engagement meeting held

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Numerous energy saving projects completed - as reported in the Sustainable energy management strategy update report.
- Update on roadmap to green fleet reported to Council

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Alderman George Green Community Centre - refurbishment
- Kilcooley Community Centre - refurbishment
- Portaferry Market House - refurbishment
- Carrowdore Community Centre - refurbishment
- Queens Leisure Centre – refurbishment of shower area
- Balloo ERC - roofing / cladding and additional ramp
- Hibernia Street and Holborn Street car parks – redesign and resurfacing
- Exploris seawater storage tanks - refurbishment
- North Road Depot, Skipperstone CC, Green Road CC, Manor Court CC, Ballygowan CC - solar panels
- North Road Depot - double glazing
- Ward Park Depot – works associated with development of Community HUB

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Play Area inspections
- Legionella awareness training
- Tracked excavator training
- Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group approved training

Key issues

As part of the commitment to continuous improvement the annual Service Plan is reviewed on a monthly basis. The Service Risk register has also been reviewed and no new issues have been identified.

Next Steps

2 KPIs have failed to meet the target set. Reasons and action to be taken is outlined below.

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	It has proven difficult to encourage staff to engage in this process. The system in place was “clunky” and time consuming.	New system has been implemented	Peter Caldwell	H1 2026/27
Implement the schedule for planned maintenance of public areas. Public areas will be safer and more attractive. Planned maintenance of public areas carried out according to schedule	Implementation of planned maintenance strategy under review by Senior Maintenance Officer	Develop and review planned maintenance schedule	Geoff Allen	H1 2026/27

Summary

Overall, the Estates Service delivered strong performance during H2 2025/26, meeting or exceeding most of its targets. Key achievements included completing scheduled refurbishment and energy-management actions, reporting the Roadmap to a Green Fleet, maintaining full completion of monthly car park inspections, delivering service transformation measures and securing a satisfactory annual audit of harbour safety systems. Two indicators remained below target: employee appraisals were 72% complete against a 100% target, and planned maintenance of public areas achieved 90% against a 100% target. These areas will remain under review, with corrective actions progressed to support improved performance.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

Alderman Adair welcomed the report but expressed concern regarding the missed target on the implementation of the maintenance schedule for public areas. He noted that the planned maintenance actions had not been carried out as intended and emphasised the need for the Council to develop, implement and regularly review a proactive maintenance programme. Referring to major summer events, including the

Twelfth celebrations and the Kite Festival, he stated that he had visited a number of Council-maintained areas and had been disappointed by their condition, observing that many locations were in need of attention and general upkeep.

He commented that the Council often appeared to be reactive rather than proactive in its approach to maintenance and advised that he intended to undertake an audit of Council property. He highlighted a range of minor issues, including bins and signage, and reported that every picnic bench in Cloughey required repainting, while numerous boards on the boardwalk were broken. He stressed the importance of proactive maintenance across the nine villages of the Ards Peninsula and called on the Council to focus on core maintenance responsibilities. In his view, issues were often only addressed when reported by Councillors. While welcoming investment in local communities, he emphasised that such investment must be supported by long-term maintenance arrangements. He also raised concerns regarding play parks, noting that many were overgrown with weeds, and called for routine inspections and maintenance to be undertaken.

The Chair referred to a Notice of Motion that he had brought previously in relation to maintenance matters and advised that he had recently met with senior officers to discuss the issue. He agreed that weed growth had been particularly problematic during the year and supported the need for a more proactive maintenance approach. In particular, he noted that the condition of areas around Ballyholme Promenade had been unacceptable and should have been included within the regular maintenance schedule.

The Chair further highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Borough was presented in the best possible condition, particularly during major events such as the Sea Bangor Festival, which attracted significant numbers of visitors. He agreed that a comprehensive audit of maintenance requirements would be beneficial and indicated that improving maintenance standards across the Borough would be a key theme of his chairmanship going forward.

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

19.2 PARKS AND CEMETERIES

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Members will be aware that Council is required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil 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 will be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted:

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

The H2 (Quarters 3 and 4) report for Parks & Cemeteries was below.

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to all seven outcomes:

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

Key Achievements:

- Ards & North Down in Bloom Community Competitions Community Awards event delivered in November.
- Construction of the Greenway between Newtownards and Bangor is substantially complete, with snagging works underway ahead of planned completion in Summer 2026.
- Play Strategy review underway with children engaged and consulted.
- New Play Parks installed at Island View in Greyabbey, Shorefront in Groomsport and Northfield in Donaghadee completed.
- New Multi Use Games Area at Moss Road Ballygowan completed.
- Multiple ‘Friends of’ events and activities were undertaken, assisting in the recruitment of new volunteers and strengthening local engagement and support.
- Bike safety checks completed during March.
- A Halloween-themed Park Pedal in October at Ward Park and a Christmas-themed Park Pedal in December at Castle Park.
- 31 community groups received In Bloom grants totalling £36,052, supporting local environmental enhancement projects and increased community participation.
- The annual ‘Awake the Garden’ was celebrated in March 2026 at the Walled Garden in Bangor.
- Delivery of a local sand dune conference in Portavogie. A range of Coastal experts delivered presentations on designations, modelling, current condition of our sand dunes and good case study examples. The event was well attended and received positive feedback. The conference was followed by some practical Marram Grass planting on Portavogie Beach.

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

Key Achievements:

- Vigorous removal of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed.
- Successful tender completion for new, more efficient machinery that emphasises modern technology with environmental efficiencies achieved.
- Tree planting event at Kerrs Wood in Bangor. This saw forty standard trees being planted with the help of the local community.
- Tree and hedgerow planting event at Smelt Mill Bay, Bangor. This saw standard trees and hedges being planted with the help of the local community.
- 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.
- Tree planting event at Hunts Park, Donaghadee. In association with the local community of Donaghadee, parks team helped organise a tree-planting event which saw 500 tree whips being planted.
- Events held as part of international environmental awareness days including World Hedgehog Day, International Bat Night, RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch & Dawn Chorus.
- Rewilding: continue to develop existing rewilding sites. Seapark has been further enhanced in partnership with Buglife, initial site works to scarify the site followed by seeding of yellow rattle. The Bowtown rewilding site continues to thrive. The local community group continues to use and monitor the site whilst the local school has regular activities on the site.
- Continued work with North Down Swift group. Hosting an event and agreed the location of four new boxes and callers in Community Halls across Bangor.
- New bat and bird boxes installed at Kiltonga Nature Reserve and Crawfordsburn Glen.
- Education programmes – continue to deliver education programme with local schools.

Outcome 3: A thriving and sustainable economy.

Key Achievements:

- Jingle Bell Trail (6th to 21st December 2025) in Bangor Walled Garden attracting approximately 5,000 people through the festive trail.
- Trail Tales launch Cairn Wood in November 2025
- The Chilli Festival took place in September in the Walled Garden. This event is part of the 'Taste AND' at Bangor Castle, a Speciality Food and Drink Showcase happening over the same weekend.
- Halloween Trail (24th Oct to 2nd Nov) in Bangor Walled Garden attracting approximately 5,000 people through the spooky trail.
- Trail of the Easter Bunny was delivered during April across locations throughout the Borough, attracting thousands of participants who followed clues to receive an Easter-themed reward.

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

Key Achievements:

- Floodgates Park progressing towards planning application.
- Whitespots County Park project continues to be progressed.
- Construction of the Greenway between Newtownards and Bangor is substantially complete, with snagging works underway ahead of planned completion in Summer 2026.
- Tree planting event at Killare Wood in Bangor. In association with Choice Housing, council supplied and helped plant 300 tree whips in their new housing development.
- Ministerial pre-launch of the Greenway project took place in March ahead of final snagging works and completion.
- Contractor appointed to the Ward Park Environmental Improvement Scheme.

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

Key Achievements:

- World Book Day in March was celebrated with a local nursery school in Ward Park.
- 'Friends of' groups – Linear has continued to thrive with five community events undertaken this year. A new purpose made community noticeboard was placed on site in March 2026.
- Meeting was held for potential Friends of Ballymenoch Park, Holywood. This is to be followed by a site walk and family summer events.
- Schools Growing Club – another five schools due to be completed for the 2025/26 cohort including, for the first time, a secondary school.
- PeacePLUS Your Place Re-imaging our Space is underway with recruitment completed in April and launch event planned for June.
- Awake the Garden was celebrated in March 2026 with a series of activities throughout the week including a Safety for Women and Girls event, Grow Your Own film showing, Bangor Horticulture Daffodil Competition and finishing with the traditional Awake the Garden flagship Day with plant sales, music, performers and stall holders.

Outcome 6: Opportunities for people to be active and healthy.

Key Achievements:

- Various cycling (Park Pedal), BMX, skateboard and scooter (Teens on Wheels) sessions to target families, increase cycling skills and awareness and engage with more teenagers and young people.
- The 'SparkHer' series was started with a series of free outdoor activities, workshops, and fitness sessions for women and girls across Ards and North Down. This was funded by the Northern Ireland Executive Office as part of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls initiative.
- Island View, Northfield and Shorefront play parks all complete Launch events held at each location May/June 2026.
- Ballygowan MUGA and youth shelter were completed with a launch event planned for the summer.
- Park Pedal events were held as well as 'Teens on Wheels' events.

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

Key Achievements:

- Staff Business Planning Day was held in November, with all Parks & Cemeteries staff attending to help shape the Service Plan for 2026/7 and ensure we continue to meet and exceed our KPIs.
- Green Flag Awards are retained for Castle Park, Londonderry Park, Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Linear Park and Ballymenoch Park, Clandeboyce Cemetery and Cairn Wood. The retention of seven Green Flag Awards demonstrates continued excellence in the management and presentation of the Borough's parks, nature reserves and cemeteries.
- Plotbox cemetery software continues to expand its services with portals for memorial sculptors online applications and other streamlining processes.
- Success at the NI Amenity Council 'Best Kept Awards' with the Borough receiving awards for: Groomsport (Best Kept Large Village) and Donaghadee (Best Kept Small Town); plus Runner-Up awards for Bangor (City Category), Holywood (Medium Town) & Finalist for Newtownards in Large Town Category.
- At the Ulster in Bloom Awards Donaghadee was awarded 1st place in the Town Category and Crawfordsburn achieved a 2nd place in the Village Category.
- At the (RHS) Britain in Bloom Awards Donaghadee was awarded a 'Gold Award' in the Town Category.
- Donaghadee won the Town Category in the IPB Pride of Place Awards in partnership with Council.

Key issues

Recruitment and retention: The Service continues to experience recruitment and retention challenges within a competitive labour market. Apprenticeship opportunities, succession planning and ongoing workforce planning measures are being progressed to support future staffing requirements and service resilience.

• **Cemetery capacity and future provision:** Future cemetery capacity remains under review. Work continues to identify and assess suitable land opportunities for future burial provision, with engagement ongoing with relevant stakeholders to ensure long-term burial provision across the Borough.

• **Budget pressures and financial sustainability:** Ongoing budget pressures continue to require careful financial management. The Service is actively identifying efficiencies, reviewing expenditure and seeking innovative approaches to maintain service standards while delivering value for money.

• **Climate change and extreme weather:** Increased incidents of flooding, drainage issues and storm damage continue to impact operational activity and maintenance costs. The Service is implementing mitigation measures, prioritising resilience improvements and adapting maintenance programmes to respond to the effects of changing weather patterns.

Next Steps

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Review Date
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EC.02.09.26

84

% of completed Employee Appraisals in the period April 2025 to March 2026	Practical difficulties with the CoRE system impacted the completion of reviews.	Appraisal process now on new and improved platform, will make process easier to navigate.	Head of Parks & Cemeteries	October 2026
Amount of herbicide used (litres)	Increased usage of herbicides on pitches and control of invasive species.	Improved training, alternative products continue to be identified including use of stem injection for invasive species. Progressing the centralisation of chemical management.	Head of Parks & Cemeteries	October 2026
% staff attendance	Although staff absence rates have improved, it remains challenging.	The Service Management Team continues to meet regularly with HR and rigorously implement attendance management procedures. Changes to sickness reporting arrangements and proactive case management have contributed to improved attendance levels.	Head of Parks & Cemeteries	October 2026
% spend against budget	Income levels exceeded projections during the period,	Team to continue to monitor monthly the budget.	Head of Parks and Cemeteries	October 2026

resulting in a
variance
against the
approved
budget profile.

Summary

The effective performance of a large, varied, and multi-site workforce achieved positive frontline, operational, and strategic outcomes for the Parks and Cemeteries Service in H2 (October 2025 – March 2026).

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the contents of the Parks and Cemeteries Performance H2 Report for 2025/26.

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

Alderman Adair commended the Parks and Cemeteries team for the significant improvements that had been delivered across the Borough, particularly within the Ards Peninsula. He noted that these enhancements had been greatly appreciated by local residents and families and felt it was equally important to acknowledge when the Council had performed well. He highlighted the provision of memorial benches and public seating as positive additions which had been well received, particularly in cemeteries where they provided places for reflection and remembrance. He expressed his appreciation to the Parks and Cemeteries team for its work in maintaining the resting places of loved ones.

The Chair agreed that the Parks service continued to deliver excellent work and noted that he had previously highlighted that. However, he reiterated his concerns regarding weed removal and the need for improvements in that area.

Councillor Edmund seconded the comments of Alderman Adair and raised a query regarding Ballywalter Cemetery. He recalled that groundworks had previously been discussed and referred specifically to the older section of the cemetery near Whitechurch, Ballywalter, where a number of headstones were positioned at uneven angles. He asked whether further work could be undertaken to address those issues, noting that their condition was a source of frustration for some residents.

In response, the Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that issues with headstones were a common challenge in older cemeteries. He explained that modern burial practices typically involved strip foundations that provided greater stability for memorials, whereas older cemeteries contained individually installed memorials that could move over time and impact the appearance of the site. He advised that the Council was undertaking testing and identifying memorials that presented concerns and was contacting owners where possible to encourage remedial action. He added that the sinking of graves was also a common occurrence and encouraged grave owners to contact the Council if they noticed significant changes requiring attention. Councillor Kendall raised a query regarding employee appraisals and also commented on the Council's Herbicide Reduction Policy. She noted concerns expressed by residents who had observed weed spraying being undertaken in

situations where weeds could have been removed manually within a matter of minutes. She questioned whether there remained a culture of relying on weed spraying and sought information on the measures being taken to reduce that practice.

Councillor Kendall also referred to the Key Performance Indicator appraisal process and the introduction of a new appraisal platform. She sought assurance that issues experienced with the previous system had been addressed and emphasised that the process should provide meaningful value for staff rather than being a purely bureaucratic exercise.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that appraisal completion rates were high and acknowledged that the previous system had been cumbersome to use. He explained that the revised platform had initially been trialled within the Parks service, where it had worked successfully, before being rolled out across the wider Council. He added that the system had been tailored to make discussions more relevant to staff members, supporting training and development needs, and providing a meaningful opportunity for managers and employees to engage in constructive conversations.

Addressing the concerns regarding herbicide use, the Head of Parks and Cemeteries stated that there had been a significant cultural change within local government in recent years. He advised that chemical use was now very limited and that the Council undertook extensive hand weeding as part of its operations. Since the adoption of the Herbicide Reduction Policy, only small amounts of chemicals were being used in carefully selected circumstances. He explained that a task and finish group, comprising managers, gardeners and gravediggers, had been established to explore alternative approaches. Those included the use of hot foam treatments, mechanical sweepers and collaborative working with Waste Management colleagues to improve cleanliness and reduce opportunities for weed growth. He considered these initiatives to have been successful in changing the culture within the service, whilst acknowledging ongoing public concerns regarding weed control.

Councillor Douglas thanked officers for the report and raised a question regarding the Ballygowan Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), which the report stated had been completed and launched during the summer. She asked for the date of the launch event. The officer advised that he did not have the information to hand but would provide the date to Councillor Douglas following the meeting.

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

19.3 WASTE AND CLEANSING

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

Management Handbook outlined the approach to 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	January
Half Year (H2)	October – March	September

The report for October to March 2026 was attached.

Corporate Plan 2024-2028

In line with the Corporate Plan 2024-2028, our service has contributed to 3 key corporate outcomes as follows:

Outcome 2

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

Key achievements:

- Increased household recycling rate to 58.03%
- Increased HRC reuse and recycling to 75.3%
- No waste sent directly to landfill during the first half of this financial year.
- From the beginning of 2025, Ards and North Down sends its residual waste for further processing and treatment. During the year 2025/26, we produced 31,661 tonnes of household residual waste. A two-stage process first recovered 3,055 tonnes (9.6%) of recyclable material before sending 28,606 tonnes (90.4%) for energy recovery in the form the Refuse-Derived Fuel
- A small quantity of non-target material collected for recycling is rejected by our contractors. During the year 2025/26, 16 tonnes of rejected material were sent to landfill by our contractors.

Nb. These waste data are drawn from NIEA’s quarterly waste data reports and information from the Council’s contractors. These data are considered provisional and subject to change until final and validated waste data is published by NIEA in November 2026.

Outcome 4

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

Key achievements:

- Achieved success in the Loo of the Year Awards (2025), receiving four platinum awards and one diamond award.
- Success in the Best Kept Awards 2025:
 - Best Kept Small Town – Donaghadee
 - Best Kept Large Village – Groomsport
 - Runner up, City – Bangor
 - Runner up, Medium Town – Hollywood
 - Finalist, Large Town – Newtownards.

Outcome 7

Ards and North Down Borough Council is a high performing organisation

Key achievements:

- Services delivered within agreed budgets.

Key issues:

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

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

Action to be taken:

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

Identified KPI at Risk	Reasons as to why KPI has not been met	Action to be taken	Designated Officer	Date for Review
Cleanliness Index	Independent survey not able to be completed by service provider	Engage with potential providers of independent cleanliness surveys to reintroduce measurement against the KPI for the 2026/27 Service Plan	Head of Service	A service provider has been engaged and has completed the first of four quarterly independent Borough Cleanliness Surveys for 2026/27

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Alderman Adair stated that it was important to place on record his appreciation for the Council's waste collection service. He noted that every ratepayer relied upon the service and remarked that, throughout his experience, he had never received a complaint about it. He praised the reliability of the service, observing that any problems which did arise were resolved quickly and efficiently. He further commended staff for delivering an excellent service regardless of weather conditions.

The Chair referred to a previous action regarding the recycling of plastic toothpaste tubes through ARC21. Officers advised that toothpaste tubes had historically been manufactured using a variety of materials, which had made recycling difficult, but work had been undertaken within the industry to standardise the polymer composition of the tubes. That development would enable toothpaste tubes to be added to recycling streams in the future.

In response to a query regarding timescales, officers advised that Council recycling officers were continuing to work with ARC21 and partner councils on the matter. However, no implementation date had yet been agreed as consultation with the other councils remained ongoing. The Chair requested that the Communications team be informed once arrangements had been finalised so that residents could be appropriately advised.

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

20. DEPOT RATIONALISATION PROJECT UPDATE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of this report was to provide Members with a concise overview of the depot rationalisation project background, progress to date, current position, key risks and next steps.

Key Issues

Project Purpose

The Depot Rationalisation Project was reviewing the Council's operational depot arrangements to identify the most appropriate long-term solution for service delivery, future depot infrastructure, staff facilities, operational requirements and fleet decarbonisation. The project was also considering opportunities to rationalize existing arrangements and ensure any future depot provision was aligned with wider Council priorities and future service needs.

Project Timeline at a Glance

Period	Key Activity	Position
Apr 2025 to Jan 2026	Initial information gathering, procurement and consultant appointment.	Arcadis appointed and Project Initiation Document agreed.
Mar to Jun 2026	Feasibility work completed covering green and renewable infrastructure, depot layout and site requirements.	Final feasibility reports issued for review and approval.
May to Aug 2026	Strategic Outline Case development, stakeholder workshops and Council-wide information gathering.	Draft SOC submitted on 10 August 2026 for stakeholder review.
Aug to Nov 2026	Additional Site Selection Assessment approved.	GIS-based assessment to identify and score potential depot locations.
Sep 2026 to Apr 2027	Governance review and progression towards Outline Business Case stage.	CPPB and Committee consideration planned before OBC development.

Progress to Date

Feasibility stage completed: Arcadis completed Feasibility Study 1 on Green and Renewable Energy Infrastructure and Feasibility Study 2 on Depot Layout and Site Requirements. These reports were circulated to relevant stakeholders for review, comments and follow-up discussions.

Fleet and energy considerations assessed: The feasibility work supports planning towards a predominantly electric fleet future, while retaining flexibility to accommodate hydrogen or other emerging technologies if market conditions, supply chains or policy direction changed.

Stakeholder engagement undertaken: Council services had contributed operational, financial and commercial information to inform the business case. Discussions had also taken place with Translink to share learning and consider potential future opportunities, although co-location decisions were not being progressed until potential sites were better understood.

Strategic Outline Case developed: Workshops had been completed to establish the case for change, spending objectives, service requirements, options appraisal and key risks. Arcadis submitted the draft Strategic Outline Case on 10 August 2026, with stakeholder review underway.

Site Selection Assessment approved: The Project Board considered and approved an additional site selection workstream. That would use GIS-based analysis and relevant datasets, including environmental, transport, planning and land ownership information, to identify and score potential depot locations across the Borough.

Current Position

The project had moved from feasibility into formal business case development. The draft Strategic Outline Case was now being reviewed by stakeholders and was expected to proceed through the Council's governance arrangements, including Corporate Project Programme Board consideration and Environment Committee consideration. The programme had been revised to allow the Site Selection Assessment to be completed before the Outline Business Case was developed. Arcadis had forecast overall completion in April 2027.

Key Risks and Considerations

- Affordability remained a key consideration, particularly given the potential level of expenditure associated with depot rationalisation options.
- The project required robust operational and financial data to ensure future options were based on reliable evidence and service requirements.
- There was a risk of programme slippage if additional investigative work, stakeholder availability or internal priorities delayed key deliverables.
- Other Council projects and service plans, including Parks and Cemeteries, Civic Office accommodation and Household Recycling Centre considerations, may create dependencies that needed to be managed collectively.
- Further decisions would be required on the preferred direction, site selection requirements, option shortlisting and progression to the Outline Business Case stage.

Finance and Governance

The approved project budget to date for the feasibility and business case stage was £110,000 and was proceeding within budget. Governance remained in place through the Project Board, regular Arcadis meetings, CPPB and Committee reporting.

Next Steps

1. Complete stakeholder review and approval of the Strategic Outline Case.
2. Consider the SOC through CPPB and Environment Committee/Council governance routes.
3. Complete the Site Selection Assessment and agree search zones, assessment requirements and weightings.
4. Use the SOC and site assessment outputs to inform the Outline Business Case, including more detailed consideration of options, affordability, delivery arrangements and implementation requirements.

Summary

The Depot Rationalisation Project had made steady progress from initial feasibility through to Strategic Outline Case development. The project had established a stronger evidence base for future depot, service and fleet infrastructure requirements and was now moving towards key governance decisions on whether to progress to the next stage. The immediate focus was on completing the SOC review, progressing Committee consideration and undertaking a structured site selection assessment to support future decision-making.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Following a question from Alderman Armstrong-Cotter on site options, the Director explained that there were a few sites identified in the northern, more populous, area of the Borough. At this stage, the plan was for an Outline Business Case to come forward with the options in the Spring.

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

21. NOTICES OF MOTION

21.1 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.

Proposed by Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Cochrane rose to propose the Motion and began by acknowledging the excellent work already carried out by the Donaghadee Community Development Association on this important issue in terms of lobbying the Northern Ireland Executive. He explained that he wished to focus on what he believed to be the fundamental issue and that was that Stormont needed to get to grips with coastal erosion in Northern Ireland since this was a problem that was not going away.

He explained that our coastline was under increasing pressure, yet responsibility for dealing with coastal erosion remained fragmented and inadequate for the scale of the challenge and that was particularly concerning for Ards and North Down. Members were aware that the Borough had the largest stretch of coastline of any council area in Northern Ireland, making it particularly vulnerable to erosion and the damage it could cause to communities and infrastructure.

The Borough's coastline was also one of its greatest assets. Coastal walks, beaches, harbours and promenades were central to the tourism economy and a huge part of what made the Borough such a fantastic place to live. He stressed that that asset needed to be properly managed and protected.

He explained that at present, responsibility was effectively split between the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) and the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The simple question he thought was the lack of responsibility for any one Department which complicated the issue. He believed that Northern Ireland needed a single lead statutory body with clear responsibility for coastal erosion and coastal management.

It was his view that Councils should remain central to that process because they were closest to the communities affected. However, councils could not reasonably be expected to tackle major coastal erosion when they lacked the statutory powers, specialist expertise and financial resources to deliver major protection works.

The experience of his own DEA demonstrated why that mattered. In Donaghadee, residents had seen the partial collapse of the sea wall and he found it extremely difficult to accept that critical coastal infrastructure should have been allowed to deteriorate to that extent. Proper coastal management should mean identifying those risks before infrastructure failed.

The issue was not confined to Donaghadee since other significant problems had, and were occurring, in other parts of the Ards Peninsula, affecting communities and public infrastructure. Those were not isolated incidents and demonstrated the need for a coordinated, long-term approach. He said a lead statutory body should monitor

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coastal erosion across Northern Ireland, work with councils, develop long-term plans and oversee coastal protection and have the powers and funding to act.

There were also benefits financially in terms of having one single body to tackle coastal erosion as it may unlock additional funding streams from the UK Government. He paid tribute to his colleague Jim Shannon MP who had consistently lobbied the Government at Westminster to allow Northern Ireland to have access to those funds.

He clarified that he was not suggesting every inch of coastline could or should be protected but rather that strategic decisions be made with the communities affected. He urged Members to support the Motion since the Borough's coastline was far too important to leave to fragmented responsibility and reactive measures.

Seconding the Motion Councillor Thompson thanked the other councillors from the DEA who supported the need for those practical measures to address the need and recognise the longest coastline in Northern Ireland. He asked too for a timeframe for delivery.

Councillor Edmund informed the Committee that the first meeting about coastal erosion had taken place in 2013 on the Ards peninsula. It had been successful and at the time had identified 85 hotspot areas and that number had likely grown. His colleague Michelle McIlveen MLA had established a coastal erosion forum at Stormont to provide a strategic role in how Northern Ireland faced the issues. He explained that this Borough had a long history of pushing the issue of coastal erosion and defence and he thanked Members for bringing the Motion which covered the entire Borough so he was happy to support.

Alderman Adair thought that there had been very little real progress since 2013 and that meeting had brought the attention of coastal erosion to Northern Ireland and he thought that funding from the UK government was needed. He felt that representatives from the Ards Peninsula could also have joined to highlight the issue and bring it to the fore. He agreed that this was a very pressing issue for the Borough.

Councillor Wray and Councillor Cathcart also supported and believed that it was right to highlight the issues at every possible level.

Councillor Cochrane thanked Members for their support and agreed that it needed to be given all party support and be appropriately funded and tackled without delay.

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

22. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the public and press be excluded from the following items of confidential business.

23. TENDERS

23.1 Framework Extension for Arboriculture Services

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the framework for the Provision of Arboricultural Services was awarded on 6 November 2024 for an initial period of one year, with the option to extend annually for up to a further three years. The framework was established to provide specialist arboricultural services across the Borough, including tree surgery, tree felling, stump removal, pruning, emergency tree works and associated arboricultural operations.

A number of contractors as a result were appointed.

The first one-year extension was approved for the period 6 November 2025 to 5 November 2026. A number of those contractors had agreed to entering into an extension to the contract.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the extension of the Arboricultural Services Framework for a further twelve-month period from 6 November 2026 to 5 November 2027.

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

23.2 Tender for the Provision of 1 Mobile Roll Packer

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the current Roll Packer at Bangor (Balloo) Household Recycling Centre was at end-of-life and there was a need for a new machine. A capital budget of £110,000 was allowed for the purchase of 1(no.) mobile roll packer.

RECOMMENDED that the Council awards the contract for the Provision of 1 Roll Packer to the highest-ranking company.

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

23.3 Extension of Mobile Sauna Services 2026-27

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the purpose of this report was to update Members on the appointment of Mobile Sauna Service providers at various locations in the Borough and seek approval to extend the contract period for financial year 2026-27, following the successful delivery of service.

A discussion ensued regarding the desire of extending the number of locations in the future.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the award of the Mobile Sauna Service contract for Harbour Road, Groomsport.

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

23.4 Extension of Tender for the Provision of External Cleaning and Tankerage

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that the tender for the Provision of External Cleaning and Tankerage Services had been operational since award of the contract, however, was due for extension from 22 September 2026. Due to the on-going requirement, Council officers had sought agreement from the contractor for extension.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the extension of the contract for the Provision of External Cleaning and Tankerage Services with the incumbent contractor A.M. Powerwashing for a further year.

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

24. CAR PARK CONTRACT DEBT

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that on 1 April 2024, the Northern Ireland consortium of eight of the eleven councils entered into a five-year contract with Marston Holdings Ltd for car park enforcement, including enforcement of Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) debt.

Some debt from unpaid fines had become irrecoverable and a recommendation was made with the support of the Head of Finance to proceed as recommended.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees to write off unenforceable outstanding car park enforcement debt as outlined in this report.

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

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

25. UPDATE ON STORM EOWYN DAMAGE AT AURORA – PROJECT COMPLETION (Appendix XII)

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

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environmental Services detailing that Members would be aware of the significant storm damage that occurred during Storm Éowyn on 24 January 2025 to the roof of Bangor Aurora Aquatic and Leisure Complex. Previous reports to the Environment Committee in February 2025 and June 2025 outlined the emergency response, the temporary and permanent repair strategy, the insurance position and the potential implications for the ongoing legal case relating to construction defects at Aurora.

The purpose of this report was to advise Members that the storm damage reinstatement project had now been completed. The permanent roof repairs reached practical completion on 28 January 2026 and the internal reinstatement works were completed during Quarter 4 of 2025/6. The consultant's final reinstatement report confirmed that the project was delivered earlier and at substantially lower cost than originally anticipated.

Confidentiality

Members were reminded that the contents of this report were of a highly sensitive legal nature.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Kendall, seconded by Councillor Newman, 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 10.39 pm.

ITEM 8.3.

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 3 September 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Smart

Aldermen: Adair (Zoom)
Armstrong-Cotter
McDowell

Councillors: Brady
Edmund
Gilmour
Hennessy
Hollywood (Zoom)

McCollum
Morgan
Newman
Thompson

Other Elected Members in attendance: Alderman Smith, Councillor Chambers, Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean.

Officers in Attendance: Director of Place and Prosperity (B Dorrian), Head of Communications and Marketing (C Jackson), Head of Economic Growth (S Ferguson), Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage (S Mahaffy), and Democratic Services Officer (R King).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Mayor (Councillor Blaney), who was attending a Mayoral engagement, and from Councillor McCracken.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

NOTED.

3. ITEM WITHDRAWN

The Chair advised that a deputation from Bangor Chamber of Commerce had been withdrawn from the agenda. At the Chamber’s request it would be listed as an agenda item on the October meeting of the Committee.

NOTED.

4. BANGOR BUSINESS AWARDS 2026 (FILE 160094)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that following the success of Bangor Business Awards held in 2025, Bangor Chamber of Commerce had planned to host the annual business awards ceremony 2026 to celebrate the achievements and successes of the local business community.

The Bangor Business Awards ceremony would take place on 5 November 2026 in the Clandeboye Lodge, Bangor.

The Bangor Business Awards would launch on 1 September, with entries closing on 29 September 2026. The finalists would be announced on 8 October 2026 following the judging.

For the 2026 awards, the Council would be a supporting sponsor of the Bangor Business Awards and sponsor of the Professional Business Services Company of the Year category at a cost of £3,000, which was covered within this year's Economic Growth revenue budget allocation. As part of the package, six complimentary tickets were being made available to the Council. Two of these tickets had been allocated to the Mayor and the Chief Executive as guests of the Chamber.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves support for the Bangor Business Awards and nominates a maximum of four Members to attend the Awards Ceremony on 5 November 2026 at Clandeboye Lodge, Bangor.

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

Councillor McCollum described the awards as a fantastic night which brought together the great and the good of the city with the aim of increasing connections and general prosperity.

Councillor Gilmour felt that the Bangor Business Awards were a great opportunity to highlight the variety of businesses in the Borough and to celebrate their successes and work that went on throughout the year.

The Chair sought nominations for the four available places.

Councillor McCracken was proposed by Councillor McCollum and seconded by Councillor Hennessy.

Councillor Cathcart was proposed by Councillor Gilmour and seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter.

Councillor Gilmour was proposed by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter and seconded by Councillor Edmund.

Councillor McCollum proposed herself and was seconded by Councillor Morgan.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McCollum, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the recommendation be adopted, and that Councillor McCracken, Councillor Cathcart, Councillor Gilmour and Councillor McCollum attend the Bangor Business Awards Ceremony.

5. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN ECONOMIC GROWTH CONFERENCE 2027 – ‘GROWTH AND CONFIDENCE’

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Members would be aware that the Economic Growth Service had recently been established following the organisational restructure.

The Service brought together Regeneration, Strategic Development, Economic Development and Development Projects, creating a stronger platform to align economic activity, regeneration priorities and investment opportunities across the Borough.

The Economic Development section had previously delivered a bi-annual Economic Development Conference. The most recent conference, held in 2024 under the theme of “Transformation”, focused on digital, social and climate transformation and was aimed at local business owners, senior managers, business support representatives and future business leaders.

Members would also be aware that new Local Action Groups had been established for the Borough’s urban areas. Their agreed Terms of Reference included provision for an annual conference focused on regeneration and placemaking, to support the ongoing positioning, vibrancy and development of Bangor City and the Borough’s town centres.

Officers considered that there was a timely opportunity to integrate these separate conference commitments into one distinctive Borough wide Economic Growth Business Conference. This would reduce duplication, make best use of officer, partner and business input, and create a higher profile platform to promote the Borough’s economic ambition, investment potential, regeneration priorities and business support offer.

A budget for this was agreed as part of the rate setting process last year.

The purpose of the report was to seek Members’ approval to progress the development and delivery of a new Borough wide Economic Growth Business Conference, themed Growth AND Confidence.

The proposed event would replace the former bi-annual Economic Development Conference and the proposed annual Local Action Group conference, creating one integrated, partnership-led conference programme for businesses, investors, stakeholders, communities and partners across both urban and rural areas of Ards and North Down.

Strategic Rationale

The proposed conference aligned with the Integrated Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy by connecting economic growth, visitor economy, regeneration, investment and place improvement within one strategic platform. It would provide a practical mechanism to communicate the Borough's proposition, showcase delivery, and strengthen confidence in future opportunities.

The proposal supported the Council's economic priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan, including the delivery of a thriving and sustainable economy; a vibrant, attractive and sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors; and an engaged Borough where citizens, businesses and stakeholders had opportunities to influence services, plans and investment.

The conference would be unique in bringing together the full remit of the new Economic Growth Service within one shared conversation. It would demonstrate the clear interrelationship between business growth, regeneration, investment, skills, infrastructure, innovation, town centre vitality, rural enterprise and placemaking.

Proposed Conference

It was proposed that the new conference be delivered as the Ards and North Down Economic Growth Business Conference, with the overarching theme of Growth AND Confidence.

The conference would be designed to build confidence in Ards and North Down as a place to start, grow, locate, invest and collaborate, while providing a clear and positive statement of intent about the Borough's economic future.

The event would bring together local businesses, start-ups, investors, potential investors, developers, funders, anchor organisations, community stakeholders, civic partners and elected members. It would provide a single platform to showcase the Borough's ambition and momentum, promote practical opportunities for growth, and encourage stronger connections between those who influence, invest in and deliver economic outcomes.

The conference would cover both urban and rural areas of the Borough. It would position Bangor City and the Borough's towns as important centres of urban economic growth, while also recognising the contribution of rural businesses, villages, the Ards Peninsula, coastal communities and the wider rural economy as essential parts of the Borough's distinctive growth story.

Indicative Format and Content

The duration and final format of the conference would be determined in consultation with partners. It was anticipated that the programme would include keynote speakers, panel discussions, local and regional case studies, breakout sessions, networking opportunities and sponsorship or exhibition space.

Indicative themes might include business growth, investment readiness, barriers to growth, access to finance, regeneration-led growth, town and city centre vitality, rural enterprise, innovation, skills, infrastructure, collaboration and future prosperity.

The programme would be developed to ensure practical value for attendees, with a strong focus on improved confidence in the Borough's economic direction. It would showcase credible examples from within and beyond the Borough, highlight where investment and business opportunities were emerging, and provide attendees with clearer next steps and a stronger understanding of Ards and North Down as a place where business could start, stay, scale and succeed.

Expected Outcomes

The conference was intended to deliver a range of practical outcomes which extended beyond the day itself. It would provide a visible and positive platform to demonstrate confidence in the Borough's economic future, while creating opportunities for businesses, investors, partners and communities to connect around shared priorities for growth.

- Improved business confidence through a stronger understanding of the Borough's growth ambitions, investment opportunities and support available to local businesses.
- Greater visibility for Ards and North Down as a place to start, stay, scale, invest and collaborate, with a clear proposition for both urban and rural growth.
- Stronger connections between businesses, investors, developers, funders, Chambers of Commerce, Local Action Groups, community representatives and public sector partners.
- Increased awareness of regeneration priorities, town and city centre opportunities, rural enterprise potential and wider economic development activity across the Borough.
- Identification of practical follow-up actions, including potential business leads, partnership opportunities, sponsorship relationships, investor engagement and future collaboration.
- A strengthened evidence base from delegate feedback, partner input and post-event evaluation to inform future Economic Growth Service planning, policy development and programme delivery.

These outcomes would support the Council's objective of creating a more confident, connected and ambitious business environment, while ensuring that future economic growth activity was informed by local need, visible opportunities and meaningful partnership engagement.

Partnership Approach

The conference would be developed and delivered through a partnership approach. Officers had commenced initial engagement and would continue to work with key partners, including the Ards and North Down Business Forum, Chambers of Commerce, relevant Council services and wider public, private and community partners. This would ensure the conference was shaped by business need, reflected local priorities and benefited from the credibility, reach and expertise of partners.

This partnership-led model was central to the proposed conference. It would help ensure that the event was not positioned solely as a Council initiative, but as a shared Borough wide platform for economic confidence, collaboration and delivery. It also provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships with business representative organisations, encourage sponsorship and partner contributions, and build a sustained network of support beyond the conference itself.

Detailed budget, venue, sponsorship, partnership and delivery requirements would be developed as part of the next stage of planning. Officers would explore opportunities to align existing service budgets with sponsorship income, partner support and in-kind contributions.

A detailed project plan would be prepared, including programme development, speaker engagement, venue and logistics, marketing and communications, sponsorship, stakeholder engagement and post-event evaluation.

The Council would consider the implications of the proposal under Section 75, Rural Needs, Data Protection, Climate and Sustainability requirements as planning progressed. The inclusive Borough wide focus of the conference would ensure that both urban and rural needs were considered, and that the programme was designed to be accessible, relevant and beneficial to a wide range of businesses, communities and stakeholders.

The proposed Ards and North Down Economic Growth Business Conference represented a timely opportunity to create one distinctive, Borough wide platform for economic confidence, collaboration and inclusive growth.

By bringing together the former Economic Development Conference and the proposed Local Action Group conference, the event would reduce duplication, strengthen partnership working and provide a more coherent way to showcase the Borough's investment proposition, regeneration priorities, business support offer and urban and rural growth opportunities.

Under the theme of Growth AND Confidence, the conference would provide practical value for businesses, investors, communities and partners by improving awareness, strengthening connections, encouraging follow-up actions and building confidence in Ards and North Down as a place to start, stay, scale, invest and collaborate. The partnership-led approach, involving the Business Forum, Chambers of Commerce, and wider stakeholders, would be central to ensuring the conference was relevant, credible and outcome-focused.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves officers to progress the development of a new borough wide Ards and North Down Economic Growth Conference, themed Growth AND Confidence. The conference will replace the former Economic Development Conference and the proposed Local Action Group conference, creating one distinctive, outcome-focused and partnership-led platform to showcase the Borough's economic ambition.

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

Alderman McDowell felt that the conference would be useful and welcomed the mix of different groups, but noted that the Local Economic Partnership, which he regarded as key, was missing and could have had valuable input.

The conference was also an opportunity to let businesses know what plans were afoot for the coming year. He asked when it would take place and the Head of Economic Growth advised it would be held in the first quarter of the following year, in February or March.

Councillor McCollum had been concerned on first reading that the proposal was overreaching in its ambition. The Economic Development Conference was one she had always enjoyed, with excellent speakers and networking opportunities, but she questioned whether incorporating the aims of the Local Action Group conference was overstretching the terms of reference.

She had been reassured on a number of points, particularly the breakout workshops and the connections business would bring to community groups, but was unsure what the conference offered to community groups which formed a large part of the input to the Local Action Groups.

She also asked how relevant it could be made to rural enterprise and the Head of Economic Growth advised that it was intended to be Borough-wide and of benefit to both rural and urban areas.

Officers were working through a partnership approach with the Ards and North Down Business Forum and the village partnerships, and remained in consultation with groups on the format and content to ensure it catered for all locations.

Councillor McCollum accepted that the proposal was at a working-up stage. While she did not think a conference was necessary for the Local Action Groups, she saw value in bringing them together to pool knowledge and experience and share ideas, perhaps through a seminar or workshop rather than on the scale of a conference.

Councillor Brady raised one minor gripe. He took issue with the name, concerned that the inclusion of 'Confidence' in the title might sound like the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and might signal the opposite of what was intended.

The Director of Place and Prosperity advised that officers would look at that, as everyone took their own interpretation from words.

Councillor Morgan shared Councillor McCollum's concerns and felt that including the Local Action Groups tended to make the event about place rather than economy and business. Both were important, but a more focused event this year, with a different angle in a future year, might work better. It was often the same people who sat on the Local Action Groups and the business groups, and she felt that too broad an event would lose half the audience.

The Director said he would take the comments on board. This was the first year the new Economic Growth section had been in place and the conference was about promoting everything within it. The Chambers and businesses were as important to

the growth of an area as the Local Action Groups, and officers felt this was the year to bring everybody in. A separate forum or workshop for the Groups might still be held.

In summing up, Alderman McDowell took on board the comments about the complexity of the groups involved, which was the point that had struck him. It would have to be delicately handled so that no group felt the event was not for them. He would welcome a draft coming to the Committee before it was finally issued, so that Members could consider whether it covered everything or tailor it accordingly, and he looked forward to seeing whether it could work.

The Chairman commented that it was a huge opportunity. The Council was going for growth and bringing the community and business with it.

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

6. SUPPORTING THRIVING HIGH STREETS PROGRAMME

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme was launched in 2025 as a coordinated package of support aimed at revitalising and regenerating the Borough's high streets.

The programme provided practical, visible and place-based interventions that were already supporting existing businesses, stimulating private sector investment, addressing vacancy and dereliction, improving the appearance of commercial premises, and strengthening the overall competitiveness and appeal of city and town centres.

The programme directly contributed to the Council's Corporate Plan outcomes by supporting a thriving and sustainable economy and helping to create a vibrant, attractive and sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors. It also aligned with city and town centre masterplan priorities by translating strategic regeneration ambitions into visible delivery on the ground, with investment focused on place, premises and public realm.

Programme Overview

The Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme had been designed as a multi-layered programme of support, with each strand responding to a specific high street challenge. The programme included support for active businesses seeking shopfront improvements, owners of vacant or derelict premises seeking to bring units back into use, smaller-scale shopfront refresh works, and wider public realm and environmental improvements. Collectively, these strands provided a coherent package of regeneration support that was delivering visible improvements, improving business confidence, enhancing streetscapes, increasing the attractiveness of town centre locations, and helping to create the conditions for increased footfall, dwell time and further private sector investment.

To date, three strands of support had been launched:

- Glow Up Grant Scheme
- Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme
- Freshen Up Grant Scheme

In addition, two funding applications had been submitted to further support the programme: the Clean City and Tidy Towns Scheme and a further Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme.

Glow Up Grant Scheme Update

The Glow Up Grant was the first strand of support launched under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme. The scheme provided capital grant assistance of up to a maximum of £2,500 to active businesses to support shopfront improvement works. It had enabled businesses to invest directly in their premises, deliver highly visible street-facing improvements, and contribute to a stronger, more attractive and more commercially appealing high street environment.

The scheme was now complete and all claims had been processed.

A total of 146 businesses were supported to improve their shop frontage: 69 in Bangor, 22 in Comber, 12 in Donaghadee, 10 in Holywood, and 33 in Newtownards.

In total, £404,427.93 had been invested in capital works to upgrade shopfronts, with £285,178.46 awarded through the scheme.

The scheme had demonstrated strong business engagement and had delivered a measurable regeneration impact by improving 146 shopfronts, leveraging wider capital investment, encouraging business pride in premises, and creating a more consistent and positive visual impression across key city and town centre locations.

It should also be highlighted that the scheme received runner up in the category 'Best Business Support Scheme' at the 2026 Association of Town and City Management Awards. The awards recognised the very best in urban place management across the UK.

Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme Update

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme was launched in early 2026 to support owners of vacant and/or derelict properties in Bangor and Newtownards to undertake transformation works that would assist in bringing premises back into active commercial use. The scheme responded directly to vacancy and dereliction challenges within high streets and sought to convert underused and visually negative properties into productive commercial assets that supported footfall, business activity and town centre vitality.

The scheme was being delivered as a targeted intervention and would provide a valuable evidence base for future regeneration activity. By supporting property owners to invest in vacant premises, the scheme was helping to reduce blight, improve the appearance of key streets, unlock premises for occupation, create

opportunities for new business activity, and strengthen the long-term resilience of city and town centres.

The pilot received 19 applications, with 12 Offers in Principle issued. This represented £271,456 in grant commitments and anticipated total investment of £500,283.67.

Bangor Current Position

Outcome	Number	Location Breakdown
Applications received	10	6 High Street; 2 Abbey Street; 1 Hamilton Road; 1 Bloomfield Road South
Passed assessment and received Offer in Principle	7	4 High Street; 2 Abbey Street; 1 Hamilton Road
Applications with permission to start to date	5	3 High Street, 1 Hamilton Road, 1 Abbey Street

Bangor received 10 applications, seven of which received Offers in Principle. Five projects had permission to start, with £48,427.20 grant released upfront. Two projects were at midpoint review and were expected to near completion by the end of summer.

Newtownards Current Position

Outcome	Number	Location Breakdown
Applications received	9	3 South Street; 2 North Street; 3 Frances Street; 1 Bangor Road
Passed assessment and received Offer in Principle	5	1 South Street; 1 North Street; 2 Frances Street; 1 Bangor Road
Applications with permission to start to date	2	1 Frances Street; 1 Bangor Road
Completed project	1	10b Frances Street

Newtownards received nine applications, five of which received Offers in Principle. Two projects had permission to start, with £12,285.60 grant released upfront. One project, at 10b Frances Street, was complete with a tenant in place.

Officers would continue to support delivery, monitor progress, and capture learning from the pilot to inform future programme development, including opportunities to scale interventions that demonstrated clear outcomes in reducing vacancy, attracting tenants and improving the commercial environment.

Freshen Up Grant Scheme Update

The Freshen Up Grant was the most recent strand of support launched under the programme. It was aimed at supporting smaller-scale improvements, specifically painting and power washing of shopfronts, to help businesses improve the presentation of their premises, protect previous investment, and contribute to

cleaner, brighter and more welcoming streetscapes. Eligible applicants could apply for grant up to £1,500 with a minimum 10% trader contribution.

The grant provided a practical, accessible form of support that enabled businesses to make quick, visible improvements. This helped maintain momentum following the Glow Up Grant Scheme, supported business confidence, improved the customer experience, and reinforced the overall quality and presentation of the high street environment.

To date, a total of 117 Letters of Offer had been issued: 48 in Bangor, 26 in Comber, 7 in Donaghadee, 7 in Holywood, and 29 in Newtownards. This represented a total capital works value of £174,378.80, of which £143,389.62 had been allocated as grant award.

Clean City and Tidy Towns Scheme – Funding Application

An application had been submitted to the Department for Communities for funding to deliver the Clean City and Tidy Towns scheme as a further strand of the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme. The proposed scheme was intended to improve and enhance the public realm across the five urban centres of Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards.

The proposed scheme sought to protect previous investment in the public realm, address areas of wear and tear, improve the appearance, safety and functionality of high streets, support business confidence, and create more welcoming, accessible and attractive places for residents, visitors and investors. In doing so, it would help ensure that investment in individual premises was matched by improvements to the wider setting in which businesses operated.

Delivering the Clean City and Tidy Towns scheme following the Glow Up Grant Scheme would create a stronger cumulative impact. While shopfront improvements enhanced individual premises and supported business pride, improvements to the wider public realm would strengthen the overall setting in which those businesses operated. The combined approach would improve the pedestrian experience, safety, accessibility and visual appeal, helping to encourage increased footfall, longer dwell time and greater confidence in the high street. This integrated package would maximise the value of public and private investment already made and reinforce the Borough's city and town centres as attractive places to visit, trade, invest and spend time.

An application had been prepared, seeking £900,000 from the Department for Communities. The application included a minimum Council contribution of 10% (£90,000).

The budget would be split over two financial years, as detailed below:

Year 1: 2026/27 – Department for Communities: £600,000; Council: £60,000

Year 2: 2027/28 – Department for Communities: £300,000; Council: £30,000

The proposed works would focus on targeted public realm enhancements, including cleaning, repair, replacement and enhancement of street furniture, planters, bins,

signage, lighting features, paving, minor infrastructure, CCTV infrastructure, placemaking initiatives to dress towns and enhance local identity, and other visible elements of the public realm, subject to local need, statutory approvals and procurement requirements. Priority would be given to interventions that were deliverable within the funding period, provided a strong visual impact, improved safety and accessibility, supported community reassurance, and complemented existing and planned regeneration activity.

Local Growth Fund – Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme – Funding Application

An opportunity had become available for the Council to apply to the Department for Communities for funding to deliver a new vacancy and dereliction scheme under the Local Growth Fund. An application was currently being prepared, requesting £300,000, which would be matched by a 10% Council contribution and a minimum 20% applicant contribution.

The Department had identified delivery timescales as a key risk. Funding was likely to be confirmed in September 2026, with all projects required to be completed by 31 March 2027. Given the short delivery timeframe, it was proposed that only projects with planning permission in place, or written evidence confirming that planning permission was not required, would be eligible to apply.

The proposed scheme would build on the objectives of the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme by providing a further targeted intervention to address vacancy, support property improvement and encourage the productive re-use of underused premises. This would help increase the supply of occupiable commercial space, support new and growing businesses to access suitable premises, and reduce the visual and economic impact of long-term vacancy within town centre locations.

The scheme would provide targeted capital grant assistance to owners of vacant and/or derelict properties to renovate premises and bring them back into active commercial use for rental purposes. The scheme would be made available across the five urban areas of Bangor, Comber, Donaghadee, Holywood and Newtownards (within the town centre boundary).

The proposed scheme was currently being developed alongside existing and emerging funding streams focused on vacancy and dereliction. These included Council funding for the Empty to Energised Scheme and Department for Finance funding linked to the Local Economic Partnership. Officers were working to coordinate these strands of support to create a more comprehensive vacancy and dereliction programme, capable of responding to a wider range of opportunities across the Borough.

Should the application be successful, approval was sought for officers to accept the funding, enter into any necessary funding agreement subject to normal governance requirements, and proceed to develop and deliver a Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme in coordination with existing and emerging funding streams focused on vacancy and dereliction.

The Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme had provided a coordinated, visible and outcome-focused package of support for high streets across Ards and North Down.

The Glow Up Grant, Empty to Energised Pilot Grant and Freshen Up Grant had each responded to specific regeneration challenges and had supported businesses and property owners to invest in their premises. Together, these schemes were improving the appearance of high streets, leveraging additional capital investment, reducing the negative impact of vacancy, supporting business confidence, and helping to create more attractive, active and commercially resilient city and town centres.

The Clean City and Tidy Towns application and the new Vacancy and Dereliction funding would provide further opportunities to build on this momentum, protect previous investment, address vacancy, and improve the overall quality, attractiveness and economic performance of the Borough's city and town centres.

The programme was originally intended to provide £1 million of support to the Borough's high streets; however, the combined value of the various programme strands and funding applications had now more than doubled this initial level of investment. This demonstrated the programme's success in building momentum, attracting additional resources, and positioning high street regeneration as a key delivery mechanism for economic growth, placemaking and town centre renewal.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the overview and progress update on the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme, including the Glow Up Grant, the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant, the Freshen Up Grant and the Clean City & Tidy Towns funding application; and approves officers to accept an offer of funding from the Department for Communities for a Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme should the application be successful.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter praised the scheme, from its inception, through to delivery, and now the results that were showing.

The proposer was pleased that it had received recognition as the runner up in the Best Business Support Scheme at the 2026 Association of Town and City Management Awards. As a Newtownards Councillor, she was proud that the town's high street had bucked the trend, and it was schemes such as this that would continue to enable the Council to grow the high street and to encourage people to understand that there was a marketplace for a business of any size to find its home in Newtownards and throughout the Borough.

The work undertaken on the buildings demonstrated the strengths of Ards and the wider Borough in its links to Belfast, its low rates for businesses and its coordinated sense of community.

She welcomed further funding to enable the work. The Department for Communities had effectively said that the Council had gone above and beyond what had been expected and had placed its confidence in the Council to do more. She welcomed that partnership and the benefits it provided to the Borough.

Even through a change of officers, she praised the Director for keeping his eye over the whole scheme. She asked whether it was known how much the Council's outlay would be at the next level, or whether that would depend on demand, noting that the Department had previously met the Council on a 90:10 basis, and she queried estimates in the rate setting process.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that the contribution remained the same as the previous scheme, at 10% from the Council to unlock the Departmental funding. The proposal was for a £300,000 funding application, which had been submitted, and the outcome was anticipated soon.

In a further query, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter recalled that previously the Council had more schemes which were almost shovel-ready and had therefore been given a bigger grant. She assumed the goal would again be to have more schemes ready, so that greater funding could be requested if available. She asked whether that was possible under this approach.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that there were two separate schemes. Tackling vacancy and dereliction would be dealt with through the likes of the Empty to Energised scheme, to which this funding application primarily related. The Clean City and Tidy Towns application would address a number of items within the current city and towns, and there was also funding for working up projects, which would continue in conjunction with the Local Action Groups. Masterplan review workshops had taken place that week and the previous week, focusing on the key priorities for the various locations.

The seconder, Councillor Gilmour, praised how far the scheme had come and how many businesses had been supported. A number of businesses in Bangor had contacted her about the Freshen Up Grant and she had helped them work through the forms, which were relatively simple - one of the key things discussed previously had been making the process as streamlined and as accessible as possible.

It was positive to see the pops of colour and the more intricate artwork now appearing around business premises, including a piece opposite the McKee Clock in Bangor and a number of the rows of terraces which were taking back a colourful seaside feel.

The bigger programmes and projects were also encouraging, and Members had previously discussed a possible Stage 2 if further funding could be secured, to bring forward living over the shops where premises were empty. While progress to this stage had been good, there was still room for growth.

She noted the application with the Department for Communities for Clean City and Tidy Towns, which would address wear and tear in the public realm, and asked that the Disability Forum be consulted as part of that process.

When she had undertaken a blind walk with visually impaired residents they had highlighted elements of the public realm which were an issue for them, and people with other disabilities would view the world differently and be able to point out further issues. If changes were being made, this was a key moment to include that and to ensure everything was inclusive.

Councillor Hollywood was pleased to see the progress of the schemes. The report demonstrated clearly how much money had been invested and how many premises had benefited, but he asked whether officers had any evidence yet that the schemes were increasing footfall or economic activity in the town centres. He also observed that Hollywood had been comparatively low in uptake across both the Glow Up and Freshen Up schemes, and asked whether any reason for that could be ascertained.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that outcomes associated with the investment were something officers would look to address as part of the post-project evaluation. The schemes had only relatively recently been completed and some were still at an early stage of delivery, so he did not believe clear information on outcomes was available at this stage. He would check with the relevant officers to understand what had been planned in terms of measuring outcomes and would come back with a further update.

The Director of Place and Prosperity advised, in relation to uptake in Hollywood, that the schemes were advertised throughout the towns and promoted through the Local Action Groups, and officers also did their best to promote them. It was then for applicants to come forward. Awareness could be raised, but it was for them to make the application.

Councillor McCollum was aware of businesses in Hollywood which had availed of the schemes. It was a much smaller high street and was, she would say herself, in pretty good order, so she had not been surprised that there had not been the same level of uptake as in other areas.

There had also been teething problems with the original Glow Up Grant, and it was good that many of those had been ironed out at the Freshen Up stage across the Borough. Particularly in Bangor, the visible and tangible difference made to the high street was to be commended, and over £2m delivered was a fantastic good news story.

She queried the underspend on the Freshen Up Grant, as that scheme had arisen from the Glow Up underspend. While the sum was not huge, she asked whether there was a plan for it, as there might be unsuccessful applicants on a waiting list who could benefit.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that the intention would be to maximise the benefits through the expenditure of the funding available, which was dependent on the applications received. Officers planned to continue further phases of the project and were hopeful of receiving the appropriate level of applications to maximise the opportunity.

Councillor McCollum asked what would happen if the Council did not reach the appropriate level of applications.

The Director of Place and Prosperity advised that the Council could only draw down from the Department for Communities what it spent, so if a budget could not be drawn down it went back to the Department.

Where funding remained in the Council's own budget, and some schemes were 100% funded, that could roll over into the next year, and officers would consider whether to run the scheme again, how it might be tweaked, or what scheme might go out the following year.

There was much more flexibility with the Council's own money, because a Departmental letter of offer required the funding to be spent by 31 March, and if it was not spent it was returned to the Department.

Councillor Edmund believed that 140 shop fronts refitted was a big tidy-up. He noted that work was going to take place in Millisle and Ballywalter and asked whether a similar scheme could be run for shop fronts once that work had been done, and rolled out through the villages at some stage.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that the funding currently applied for was through the Department for Communities and was limited to the urban centres. However, officers were looking at potential opportunities for the likes of the Empty to Energised scheme, which could potentially be delivered in rural areas under the Local Economic Partnership. That might not be at the lower level, but schemes of up to £50,000 would be the value aimed at for rural areas.

Councillor Morgan noted that a lot of work had been done on shop fronts in Comber, though it was a disappointment that the hoarding was still there. She welcomed Clean City and Tidy Towns, as that was another area which needed attention. Her only issue, recognising that officers could work only within the parameters available, was that £900,000 was not enough for the Borough.

A lot of thought would therefore be needed to ensure the best value was obtained from the money. She also understood why the grants were publicised and people came forward, but there were derelict buildings, some on the square in Comber and no doubt in other places, for which nobody would come forward for the sake of £50,000. Those buildings probably needed to be demolished and rebuilt. They were a problem and a terrible eyesore which detracted from the area, and she asked what could be done and what conversations could take place with the Department for Communities about them.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that this was something officers were looking at and trying to address, but they were limited by the funding currently available.

Through the likes of the Local Economic Partnership, where investors or developers had identified an opportunity to redevelop such a site, it was something that could be looked at if they came forward through that process.

The Chairman hoped that the evaluation process would highlight what worked and the areas which might need further focus.

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

7. NEWTOWNARDS CHRISTMAS SWITCH ON 2026 – UPDATE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that in November 2025, the Place and Prosperity Committee received an update on the 2025 Christmas Switch On programming for Bangor and Newtownards.

The report outlined plans for future Elected Member engagement in the Christmas Switch On planning cycle for 2026. It was agreed by the Council that once the Local Action Groups (LAGs) were reconstituted, Officers would attend meetings to allow the Events Team to present programming ideas at the early stages. The minutes of these meetings would be reported to the Place and Prosperity Committee, whereby all Elected Members would have the opportunity to be informed.

Elected Members had been nominated onto each of the LAGs along with other representatives from each of the areas.

To date, in 2026, the Events team had attended the below Newtownards LAG meetings:

Newtownards Local Action Group, 21 April 2026

Newtownards Local Action Group, 12 May 2026 (Special meeting to discuss Christmas).

The minutes and associated papers specific to Christmas Switch Ons were presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee in June 2026. The minutes of the Newtownards LAG on 12 May 2026 outlined an agreed approach by the LAG members for the Newtownards Switch On programme.

A request for a further update on Newtownards programming was made at the Place and Prosperity Committee on 11 June 2026. The LAG had received an update directly in recent weeks.

Christmas Switch On, Newtownards town centre and Conway Square – 28 November 2026

- Approximate times – 4.30pm - 6pm (tbc)
- Theme – ‘Light’
- Procession – 4.30pm leaves Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (tbc)
- Switch On – 5.30pm (tbc) includes the arrival of procession, followed by a short performance by the lead band from the procession and Mayoral Switch On.

- Budget £30,000

The Procession

The procurement of this element of the event was in progress with appointment to be complete by the start of September. Content remained indicative until the process was complete, however, the procurement document outlined potential provision of bands, performers, themed floats, liaison with schools and/or other community groups and organisations.

The route was still in planning but was intended to take in as much of the town centre as possible and would be finalised with the appointed supplier of the procession. It would culminate at Conway Square with static performances, followed by a short performance by the lead band, and a countdown ceremony with the Mayor and other Newtownards representatives.

Additional Activity

The usual Saturday market would continue as normal, with some reconfiguration of the layout to incorporate some of the parking bays nearest the road. This would allow space for the stage/performance area to be set up in advance. Officers would encourage the traders to adopt a Christmas theme to distinguish the market as part of a special day. Officers had and would continue to liaise with Market representatives on this aspect, who had greeted this favourably to date. The 'Passport' would be developed by officers with interested businesses. Businesses in Newtownards benefited from this initiative and their creativity and commitment had resulted in over 1000 passports being given out in previous years.

Officers were asked by the LAG members to explore different sites which might be suitable for some additional food trucks to accommodate the number of visitors to the town centre. Officers had concluded that the Mill Street car park was the most suitable given its size and location. It would be able to accommodate food trucks, the necessary queuing requirements and was within close proximity of Conway Square.

The Square would be set up during the event morning to accommodate a small stage and suitable walkway while the traditional market was taking place.

The engagement process via the LAG had assisted with programming for the Newtownards event. The minutes of all LAG meetings would be presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee to inform Elected Members of relevant Event programming decisions going forward.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the above report.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer thanked officers for taking on board the points made the previous year about having an actual event to look forward to. Those issues had been largely

outside officers' control and the team had taken some flak, so she thanked them for working closely with the Local Action Group to find a way forward.

She liked the theme of light, which would work well with the new Christmas lights coming to Newtownards, and was glad the market was involved, but as stallholders tended to leave at around 3pm she asked that the possibility of extending the market be explored. She also asked why consideration had not been given to South Street for the food trucks, given the precinct and the numbers already eating there, and whether the reason was that it was too big to close off.

The Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage advised that a site visit had considered the scale of the site, the location relative to the square and queuing capacity, and had concluded that Mill Street was the best place, but she would take the comments back for review.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter recalled an outdoor event some years previously which had used the South Street car park for jugglers and games and had been well used because it kept everybody central. Mill Street was nearby and a lot of planning had already been done, but she asked that South Street be considered, as people could access it through the shops in that area.

The Alderman hoped the event would be different from the previous year in a good way, so that people could enjoy Christmas in what she regarded as the Borough's premier shopping town.

Councillor Edmund was supportive and added his thanks to officers while Alderman McDowell was particularly pleased with the procession element. The involvement of the schools and community groups would bring parents and grandparents straight into the square. He asked whether the space in the square would be restricted with the market still taking place, noting that there should be a tree in the centre of Conway Square, and how that would be organised.

The Head of Tourism, Arts and Heritage advised that the team were conscious of the balance between the traditional Saturday market and the event set-up and would look again at the extension of the market. It had been agreed with the market that stalls would be slightly relocated into the bays, but there was an expectation that they would not run through until the switch-on, as a channel and safe capacity space would be needed for people to arrive and move on.

Councillor Thompson welcomed the report. He was aware that the procession in Donaghadee was well organised by the Rotary Club and brought a lot of people into the town, and this area of Newtownards would benefit. He had attended the lighting up the previous year with his grandchildren and although reasonable, it had not been what was normally expected. This proposal was nearer to a real Christmas afternoon out in Newtownards.

The Chairman thanked officers for the time taken in reviewing the event, which was a real opportunity to bring the community together and support colleagues in the town centre.

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

8. CONWAY SQUARE, NEWTOWNARDS – CHESS AND DRAUGHTS PILOT (FILE ART 07/09 26)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that in August 2026, the Arts and Heritage Manager was contacted by an Elected Member regarding the 'Chess' tables in Conway Square.

The request was to consider facilitating a 'deposit and return' system for the use of chess or draught sets for the tables previously installed by the Regeneration Service (now Economic Growth) in 2024. The Elected Member had noted that the tables were not being used to play chess as intended.

The Arts Service had considered the request and would run a pilot test during the period (remainder of) August-October 2026 and April-October 2027. The game pieces had been purchased using a minimal allocation of existing budget from the Arts Service.

Officers had purchased three chess sets and three draughts sets. These would be available for customer use by a 'deposit and return' basis. The deposit would be £10. The service would be available during Arts Centre Office opening hours and promoted via the Arts and Tourism service's normal digital channels and posters would be displayed in the Town Hall and Visitor Information Centre.

The pilot would allow officers to test the demand and monitor the use of the service.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Alderman McDowell, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter explained that the request had been brought forward by her colleague Alderman McIlveen. She praised the renovation of the Square which meant even on a wet day people sat under the tree coverage, and the tables had brought more people out at lunchtime for fifteen minutes for a mental health break.

She added that it was a worthwhile addition which highlighted the transformation of Conway Square into a central hub for visitors and residents.

The seconder, Alderman McDowell welcomed the variety that it brought to the Square and appeal it would have to children and young people.

Councillor Hennessy welcomed the idea and agreed that the tables should be used for the purpose intended. Recalling that chess tables were also planned for Bangor, he asked whether consideration had been given to how those would be used and whether something similar was planned.

The Director of Place and Prosperity advised that chess tables formed part of the Marine Gardens plans. Authority had been given to appoint an animation officer so that, once the space was fully utilised, it could be programmed from major events down to activities such as playing chess.

Alderman Adair welcomed the recommendation. He recalled that Alderman McIlveen had sought views on social media and received overwhelming interest, with over 150 likes and comments from people who would welcome this. He looked forward to seeing it put into practice.

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

9. QUEEN'S PARADE UPDATE REPORT (FILE RDP 63) (Appendices I & II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that at the meeting of the Council held on 29 April 2026 Bangor Marine gave a detailed report on the progress of phase 1 of the Queen's Parade Development Project.

This included the works at Marine Gardens and the McKee Clock Arena. Also detailed in the report were several new proposals including a much enlarged and fully accessible play park, the relocation of the westerly pavilion and the creation of an 80-space car park. The Council agreed to the proposals subject to planning permission being obtained. Consent from the Crown Estate was also required. The necessary planning application had now been submitted and discussions with the Crown Estate were ongoing.

As part of the update report, it was advised by Bangor Marine that they anticipated having the area shown as phase 1a on the map attached at appendix 1 completed by late October. This would mean that the area would be handed back to the Council and the large sculpture could be installed and launched and a substantial Christmas programme undertaken as well as other animation activities. However, at a recent Queen's Parade Project Board Meeting, Bangor Marine had now advised that the completion of this area would not be possible due to a number of reasons, but especially due to it being one of the wettest periods during 2026 which resulted in the concrete areas not being able to be laid and also some of the materials, specially from China, not being delivered on time.

Bangor Marine had confirmed that the area shown on the map at appendix 2 would be completed and handed over by the start of November.

The outworkings of this now meant that the Christmas programme as initially planned would have to be revised and a separate report on this was on the agenda. Also, a reduced animation programme would only be possible until the remainder of the site was completed.

It also meant that the large hands art piece could not be erected and launched in the Autumn. In discussions with the artist, it had been agreed that due to this it would

now be more appropriate to store the three art pieces when completed and erect and launch all three in the Spring when it was expected that the remaining sections of Marine Gardens, except for those parts subject to the planning application, would be finished and returned to the Council.

It was disappointing that due to a number of factors Bangor Marine would not have progressed the scheme as much as anticipated. However, the McKee Clock arena would be returned to the Council and the main Christmas “switch on” and other activities would take place there and some animation could be programmed. It was also now felt that the storing of the 3 art pieces, once completed and then all launched together in Spring 2027, might have more of an impact.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Councillor McCollum was prepared to propose the recommendation given it was only to note an update on the matter. She sought further clarification on the reasons for the delay, noting that weather was only one of those given. During her year as Mayor she had had an extraordinarily good run of weather for the Christmas festivities, whereas her colleague Councillor Cathcart had had an appalling switch-on period the year before, and she had heard that El Niño was coming and would be very bad. She asked officers to advise Members of the other reasons and about contingency planning.

The Director of Place and Prosperity explained that the rain had stopped the concrete from setting and the steel reinforcement bars had been too high with water washing off and leaving the steel exposed.

Some material, especially granite from China, had not arrived in time. Bangor Marine had advised him the previous day that the concrete had now been laid, with only a small patch to be finished once NIE completed the sub-station in Marine Gardens.

Councillor McCollum asked whether these were construction-related difficulties and nothing more, and the Director confirmed that was the case.

Councillor Gilmour again emphasised that she was only seconding the proposal as it was to note the update. She found the delay disappointing, but the revised timings were a matter for Bangor Marine and outside the Council's control. She asked whether completion was achievable against the Christmas date, and whether Bangor Marine had raised any concern or given assurances about remaining on schedule to complete within their funding.

The Director advised that at a meeting the previous day Bangor Marine had confirmed that, subject to planning and the Crown Estate, they would still meet the deadline as set out.

The funding depended on the work being done in order to make the claim, and if the work was completed by 31 March the claim could be made and the funding paid.

Councillor Gilmour said the proof would be in the pudding when the sculptures were seen and she had no issue with delaying them until all were ready. She asked whether they were still in production and whether adequate secure storage had been identified.

The Director advised that the three pieces were being completed and secure storage had been identified. Following discussion with the artist, officers now considered that launching all three as a mini trail in the springtime would have more effect, including economic benefits, by bringing people to see the trail, than installing them one at a time. In some ways the delay had led to a better idea.

The Director confirmed, in response to a further question, that the Department for Communities was content with that approach.

Councillor Brady wished to underline that the Minister for Communities was on record as saying he was not aware of any threat to the funding. He asked, if this delay was not bringing the project close to the deadline, whether a further delay might do so and how close to the wire the project would be.

The Director advised that the Minister's letter had also stated that the Department had no administration role in the matter, so he was factually correct that he was not aware of any threat. He reiterated Bangor Marine's position that if they reached 31 March the claims could be submitted and the funding paid.

Councillor Brady asked whether Bangor Marine were taking the boulevard proposal seriously, as opposition to the current approach was more widespread and deeper than its proponents seemed willing to accept, and it would be a solution that worked for everyone while providing increased parking revenue.

The Director responded that it should not be assumed the proposal worked, but Bangor Marine had taken it seriously and had told the Council the previous day that they were commissioning and paying for specialist traffic designers to reassess it, which would allow a real test of feasibility.

He had also received correspondence that week about vesting. The Department for Communities had vested most of the land, but the order excluded the Department for Infrastructure land, which included the road and footpaths.

Any such scheme would therefore require that Department's consent, along with major consultation and consideration of abandonment legislation, which was not a short-term process. Bangor Marine were making contact to test whether it was workable.

Councillor Brady was aware that the McKee Clock had stopped and asked if it would be working again when the site was returned.

The Director added that the clock stopping was not part of the works. He would speak to the Council's Asset and Property officers, to establish the cause and ensure it could be restarted when the site was handed back.

In a final query, Councillor Brady asked if the Integrated Consultant Team was auditing the work and whether there were reports Members could see.

The Director advised that the Team was appointed to monitor all the works and reported to the Council's internal board. Before the McKee Clock area was handed back it would assess everything against the specification agreed under the first Deed of Variation agreed two years previously, after which certificates would be supplied, the works signed off, warranties put in place and the normal twelve-month defects period would follow.

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

10. BANGOR ART PROJECT: PROPOSED LOCATION OF THE CRAB SCULPTURE

(Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that at the Place and Prosperity Committee meeting in September 2025, members considered an update on the Bangor Art Sculptures project.

During discussion, members were advised that concerns had been raised through the Council's Disability Forum regarding the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture on Eisenhower Pier. The main concern was in relation to accessibility and potential health and safety implications. Members were further advised that additional engagement would take place with the Disability Forum and other relevant stakeholders before the proposal progressed.

A comprehensive consultation process was undertaken to inform the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture. The primary stakeholder engagement was undertaken through the Council's Disability Forum, which requested further discussion and a site visit to review the proposed location at Eisenhower Pier. Forum representatives highlighted the importance of accessibility and suggested that additional stakeholders, including the RNLI, Harbour Authorities and Coastguard, should be involved in the assessment process.

Council officers worked closely with the Disability Forum between January and March 2026 to facilitate engagement and arrange site-based discussions. This culminated in a site meeting on 6 March 2026 involving Disability Forum representatives, project consultants and Council officers.

To support an informed discussion, the project team arranged for the proposed sculpture footprint to be physically marked out on site. Supporting drawings and plans were also made available to attendees, enabling stakeholders to consider the scale, positioning and operational implications of the proposal in its intended location. The proposed location and layout of the sculpture were shown in Appendix 1.

The consultation process had informed the final proposal, which had now been submitted as a formal planning application and was currently being considered through the statutory planning process. Officers would continue to liaise with relevant stakeholders as the planning process progressed and would ensure that accessibility, safety and inclusivity considerations continued to be reflected in the delivery of the project.

Following concerns raised through the Council's Disability Forum, further consultation and a site assessment were undertaken on the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture. The feedback received informed the final proposal, which had now been submitted for consideration through the statutory planning process.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the consultation undertaken in relation to the proposed location of *The Crab* sculpture and notes that the sculpture is now subject to the statutory planning process.

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

Councillor Gilmour welcomed that the Disability Forum had been consulted and that the plans took account of its feedback and that of the RNLI, the Coastguard and the harbour authorities. Where work was being carried out close to the coastline it was important that no obstruction was caused to the agencies which had to respond there, and that the area was as accessible as possible for day-to-day use.

Marking the site out to give an idea of the footprint was a positive step, and lessons could be learned from this for future projects.

Councillor McCollum, as a member of the Disability Forum, had attended the meetings and the site inspection and thanked the team for the inclusive way they had approached this.

She endorsed the points on emergency access, which had arisen at the site inspection where some ideas from the Forum had had to be countered. She asked whether the design fully took account of the reservations raised on the ground and, in some cases, the objections to the original proposal, recalling difficulties about the gradients of ramps which had in turn impinged on emergency access.

She asked officers to talk her through the design, as the statement that the consultation had informed the final proposal was slightly ambiguous.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that extensive consultation had been undertaken at the time. The Council's Integrated Consultant Team, the Paul Hogarth Company, had been involved throughout, culminating in a review on site at which the size of the plinth had been marked out. Given the pier structure officers were limited in what could be done, and his understanding was that the design had been developed to address the concerns raised.

Councillor McCollum expressed some concern, noting a ramp on both the left- and right-hand side and that the depth of the plinth had been an issue for some of the wheelchair users who had attended the site.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that he was not aware of the height of the plinth and would come back to clarify but believed it had been designed in accordance with the relevant standards.

Councillor McCollum did not want this to be a tick-box exercise in which the Disability Forum was brought to the site inspection and its observations were not then acted on, and asked whether the proposal had been put back to the Forum since being redesigned.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that he would need to take that away, but his understanding was that the design was based on the consultation and had taken on board the feedback received at that meeting earlier in the year.

The Director confirmed that the views had been taken into account. A specialist landscape architect had been on site, had listened and had designed the proposal to address as many of the Group's concerns as possible. It would never be perfect and some compromises had been necessary, but most had been taken on board, as officers did not want people brought to the site and then not listened to.

Alderman Adair advised that he would be voting against the report. He had continuously voted against the sculpture from the beginning and spoke for the silent majority, as the majority of ratepayers did not feel it was the best value for £1.5m when there were other priorities. The majority of his constituents were opposed and in all conscience he would vote against.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter took a similar view. She appreciated the Council had voted for the sculptures but wished to be recorded against the proposal while accepting the view of the majority of the Council.

Given the objections, the matter proceeded to a vote.

On being put to the meeting, with 8 Members voting FOR, 3 AGAINST, 1 ABSTENTION and 4 ABSENT. The proposal was declared CARRIED.

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

11. LOCAL ACTION GROUP MEETING MINUTES – QUARTER 2 (Appendices IV – IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the Local Action Groups provided an important mechanism for ongoing engagement with local stakeholders across the city and towns.

They brought together representatives from business, community and wider stakeholder interests to help identify local priorities, consider emerging issues, and

support the delivery of regeneration activity in line with agreed priorities and town/city centre objectives.

Through regular meetings, the Groups provided a forum for discussion on local opportunities, challenges and project ideas, while also supporting collaboration between Council and local partners. This engagement helped ensure that regeneration activity remained informed by local knowledge and responsive to the needs of each town.

Members would be aware that the Local Action Groups met on a quarterly basis. The minutes of the Quarter 2 meetings were attached for Members' consideration. In addition, a special meeting of the Bangor Local Action Group had been held, and the minutes of this meeting were also attached.

Members should note that a series of workshops had been arranged with the Local Action Groups to review Masterplan priorities and develop project ideas for delivery during 2026/27. The purpose of the workshops was to provide a focused opportunity for each Group to consider the relevant Masterplan priorities for their area.

The workshops would also help to establish a clearer understanding of stakeholder priorities, potential resource requirements, delivery considerations and opportunities for partnership working. This would assist officers in developing a more structured programme of potential projects for consideration as part of future work planning and budget discussions.

- Comber | 25 August 2026
- Bangor | 27 August 2026
- Donaghadee | 01 September 2026
- Newtownards | 02 September 2026
- Holywood | 03 September 2026

The outcomes from these workshops would be reported to the October Committee meeting.

Members should also note that a special meeting of the Holywood Local Action Group had taken place on 24 August 2026. The purpose of the meeting was to present information about the following:

- Innovation Hub
- Community Provision

Brian Dorrian, Director of Place and Prosperity, and Adele Faulkner, Director of Active and Healthy Communities, were in attendance.

The Quarter 3 LAG meetings were scheduled to take place on the following dates:

- Comber | 10 September 2026
- Newtownards | 15 September 2026
- Donaghadee | 17 September 2026

- Bangor | 24 September 2026
- Holywood | 29 September 2026

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the minutes of the Local Action Group Quarter 2 meetings and the dates of the upcoming workshops and Quarter 3 meetings.

Councillor McCollum proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

11.2 Newtownards LAG Minutes – 17 June 2026

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter noted that the consultation on the new library and Citizens' Hub at the new Queen's Hall had featured in the local press that day and thanked officers for progressing it so quickly.

She hoped people would engage so that the Masterplan was what the people of the town and Borough wanted, and encouraged Members to promote the consultation on social media to gain as many views as possible.

11.5 Holywood LAG Minutes – 30 June 2026

Councillor McCollum, Chair of that Group, had been on holiday when the meeting had taken place.

She advised that the sub-Local Action Group meetings in Holywood had been well organised and well attended, which was not always the case when consulting with the community, and that using the Group for this had been worthwhile.

Councillor McCollum had, however, attended the Masterplan workshop that afternoon at which only two Members were present, and hoped attendance had been better elsewhere.

The Masterplans were important given that working-up money could be coming down the line, and she had asked officers to bring the substance of the workshop back to the Group at the end of the month for a full discussion.

11.6 Bangor City LAG Special Meeting Minutes – 6 August 2026

Councillor Newman referred to page 3, where Mr Mitchell was noted as having reminded the Group that funding could only be claimed back when work had been completed, and that work would not continue if Bangor Marine did not consider the project capable of reaching that stage.

She sought clarity on the accuracy of the recorded comment and to put on record her concern, as she felt the developer was almost threatening the Council at every turn, with the fear always raised that they could pull out at any time.

The Director of Place and Prosperity advised that he was unable to comment on the accuracy of a minute one month after a meeting. He believed that the officer who

took the minutes would have recorded their understanding of the debate. Four weeks later he had no recollection of what had been said or of the tone of the conversation.

Councillor Newman advised that she wished to place on record her concern if that was the tone of the comment.

Councillor Brady raised the same concern, advising that he had been at the meeting and did not remember it being explicitly said, although it was possible he had misheard.

He said it had raised eyebrows. His understanding was that the Development Agreement was clear that Bangor Marine must finish a phase once it had commenced.

The Director said Members were working on the basis that this was the threat made, but as he could not remember it was not known whether it was accurate.

He confirmed that Councillor Brady was right that the position was set out in the Development Agreement, and he urged caution as the minutes had been checked some weeks after they were written and the team were not sure the tone was exact.

Councillor Brady asked whether a response had been received from Bangor Marine on his question about the 3,500 square metres of green space. Residents using CAD had measured the publicly available plans and believed that following the revision there had been a substantial reduction, possibly a net loss, and that the figure was out of date and possibly misleading and might not satisfy the conditions of the Levelling Up funding.

The Director advised that, having only returned from leave, he had not received a response and would look into it. The remainder had been dealt with through the planning application, and Members would recall that two large car parks had been taken away with most of that space put into open space, though he did not know the dimensions. He said he would forward the response to Councillor Brady.

Councillor Gilmour raised a point of process, noting that she did not sit on a Local Action Group as none covered Bangor West. She asked whether the Committee was the first place the minutes came to or whether they were circulated to Group members first, being mindful that the one Member in the room who had been at the meeting did not remember exactly what was said. There could be a situation in which no Member who attended a meeting was present at Committee, and while she was happy to agree what was recorded, accuracy could only be verified by a Member who had been there.

The Head of Economic Growth advised that the Local Action Group minutes were circulated to Group members after each meeting with an opportunity to correct any inaccuracies.

Councillor Gilmour welcomed that clarity, which meant the Members had the opportunity to scrutinise the record.

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

12. MARINE GARDENS, BANGOR: UPDATE, OPENING AND CHRISTMAS 2026

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive detailing that Marine Gardens was the first 'on-the-ground phase' of the Queen's Parade Development and a flagship project within the wider regeneration of Bangor.

Representing a capital investment of more than £11 million when fully operational, Marine Gardens would become a significant new civic asset for the city.

The Council's ambition was to ensure that Marine Gardens became known as a safe, welcoming and well-used destination – supporting sustained footfall and economic activity, community wellbeing, inclusive participation, cultural activity and Bangor's position as a vibrant coastal destination.

The Council's approach would combine regular community programming with larger events and destination activity. Initially it should be recognised that Council-led programming would be important to showcase the potential of the new space and build confidence in usage among local groups, partners and external event organisers.

The Council agreed to fund a dedicated Place Animation Officer for a two-year period. The role would support programming, bookings, stewardship, monitoring and continuous improvement of the space as further phases were delivered. An appointment was made to this post in July with the Officer starting the role on 1 September 2026. A budget of £80k was also made available for animation, engagement and a range of marketing activities associated with the site and the opening of Phase 1A in particular.

Phased opening

Early indications from Bangor Marine had anticipated all the Phase 1 area would be available at the first handover date in November 2026. Due to weather constraints, the construction timetable had been delayed and in this first stage only the McKee Clock Arena area was being handed over. This had necessitated a reshape of plans for the Christmas period from what had previously been planned.

The current anticipated sequence was:

- McKee Clock Arena (events space): to be handed over in the first week of November 2026, subject to site readiness, facilitating the Bangor Christmas programme.
- Remainder of Phase 1A: sunken gardens, grassed areas, promenade and central focal point, expected in March 2027.

- Phase 1B: playpark and car park, subject to planning permission, estimated for spring/summer 2027.

The phased approach created successive opportunities to launch and promote different parts of Marine Gardens. It also required careful management of access, presentation, servicing and communications while work continued elsewhere on the site.

Initial opening – McKee Clock Arena

The first opening milestone would establish the McKee Clock Arena as an operational outdoor events space and provide an early public demonstration of the potential of Marine Gardens.

It was proposed to hold a civic and media event to mark the transfer of the initial area. This would involve funders and partners, targeted stakeholders and media engagement, and would position the opening as a visible milestone in Bangor's regeneration. Discussions were ongoing with DfC and Bangor Marine around this.

Before public activity began, officers had to co-ordinate various operational arrangements required for safe and effective use of the available area. This would include event permissions, access, servicing, communications and management of the interface with continuing construction works. Much of this work was ongoing but some would only be able to take place once handover of the space happened in November – as such while handover was due to happen in the first week of the month, the site would not be publicly accessible until the Switch On weekend (21 November). This allowed for the infrastructure build associated with Christmas to take place.

Christmas 2026

Marine Gardens was proposed as the principal focal point for Christmas activity in Bangor in 2026. A four-week 'Light Up' programme was planned from Saturday 21 November, beginning with the traditional Christmas Lights Switch-On and continuing across the following weekends. The approach was intended to showcase the new space, encourage repeat visits and support city-centre footfall rather than relying on a single event. The principal proposed elements included:

- A large-scale, bespoke and visually distinctive Christmas tree at the centre of the McKee Clock, with high visibility from High Street and Main Street. At 19m+ it would help to put Bangor on the map as having the largest free standing Christmas tree in Northern Ireland (potentially the Island of Ireland). The tree was being part-funded by Bangor Marine via Levelling Up, as part of the Marine Gardens infrastructure improvements.
- A signature lighting installation using dynamic lighting, skyline projections and illuminated features to create an accessible, family-friendly experience. It would have broad appeal and help to build Bangor's reputation as a regional festive destination. In the opening year, this would

- not operate as a ground-level trail because of the security requirements and associated cost within an open site.
- A big (observation) wheel offering panoramic views across Bangor Marina and Belfast Lough. As a prominent landmark attraction, its strong visual appeal would also generate valuable promotional content, contributing to wider engagement during the festive period. An Expression of Interest process was ongoing for this opportunity.
- Discussions were in progress with providers for festive markets throughout the period. It was anticipated that these would include seasonal food/drinks and craft items.

The Christmas Lights Switch-On on 21 November would be the first major public event in McKee Clock Arena and the showcase event for the season. It would introduce the landmark tree and lighting scheme and encourage visitors to engage with both the new waterfront space and the wider city centre.

Santa and the Mayor would arrive at 6pm (tbc) for a spectacular switch on, with technology allowing them to 'flick a switch' and turn the McKee Clock Arena into a magical, festive space, with all the trees in the newly renovated area brightly light. Seasonal musical performances would accompany.

Over the following four weekends (up to 22 December), it was intended that lower-intensity animation, including street entertainment, music, choirs, arts and family activity, would maintain activity and provide further opportunities to visit the new space. This would elongate the Christmas programme beyond the usual one-day Switch-On with the aim of engaging more residents and visitors with the space and increasing footfall across the city.

Stakeholder engagement

The Bangor City Local Action Group had been updated on progress at Marine Gardens and on the developing approach to Christmas activity. The Events Team had engaged the Group on Christmas animation options and associated programming, and members had had the opportunity to feed into the direction of the plans. Feedback had supported an approach which extended activity over a longer period rather than concentrating the offer solely on a single day. At its meeting on 7 August 2026, the Group also received a detailed update from Bangor Marine Ltd on construction progress and the intended first handover milestone. Engagement would continue as the opening and Christmas arrangements were finalised.

Delivery considerations

The initial programme would be delivered through cross-service working, supported by the Place Animation Officer, existing events and communications resources, and procured suppliers or operators where required.

Key dependencies included timely handover of the McKee Clock Arena, completion of the required electricity infrastructure and safe separation from continuing

construction works. Officers would monitor these dependencies and refine the detailed programme as necessary.

The initial opening of McKee Clock Arena and the Christmas 2026 programme provided an important opportunity to introduce the public to Marine Gardens and demonstrate its potential as a civic, cultural and destination space. Although the plans had been reframed to reflect the part of Phase 1 now expected at the first handover, the phased approach allowed the Council to mark a series of milestones, learn from early activity and build momentum as the remainder of the Gardens became available.

A co-ordinated opening, a high-quality four-week Christmas programme and continued engagement with the Bangor City Local Action Group and other partners would help establish Marine Gardens as a vibrant and well-used part of Bangor's regeneration from the outset.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the phased opening and activation approach for Marine Gardens; and the proposed Bangor Christmas Switch On detail and 4-week animation programme.

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

Councillor McCollum remained concerned about El Niño, which meant rain, storms and wind, and its potential effect on a fully planned programme of events and animation. Contingency planning was top of her list of concerns.

She put those concerns to officers and the Head of Communications and Marketing agreed that weather could be dreadful in July and better at Christmas and it presented a challenge to every outdoor event.

Officers did plan contingency, and considerable work would be done with emergency planning partners, Council staff and health and safety colleagues on how an event could be held safely and what levels of rain and wind could be tolerated.

In relation to Christmas at Marine Gardens the focus was not solely on a one-afternoon switch-on, as much of the animation would run over a longer period, so there was scope to shift the date if everything could not proceed on 21 November. Marine Gardens was an outdoor space and officers would have to work with the weather available, but local people were resilient and very often came out despite difficult conditions.

Councillor Gilmour asked at what point, if there were further delays, an option B or alternative location for the Christmas tree would be needed and the plans amended.

She asked for clarity on the lighting being tamper-proof, as noted in the earlier Local Action Group report, whether officers were confident the new tree would withstand the seafront winds and seawater.

She also wondered whether there were plans for a more attractive purpose-built surround, as crash-barrier type surrounds were not aesthetically pleasing and there was no point putting up a magnificent tree and surrounding it with poor barriers.

She asked whether alternative options to the big wheel were being considered given how close matters were to Christmas. Finally, recalling that the tree had previously been at the McKee Clock and had drawn large crowds with the Passport Trail, she noted that some businesses still felt people were not moving around the city. She asked whether the animation was to be widened beyond the McKee Clock Arena.

The Head of Communications and Marketing advised that the Passport had worked well and brought footfall, though Local Action Group feedback was that it raised awareness without always bringing trade. Officers would look at that again with the Group.

The Chamber would also be engaged given that there would be four weeks of activity, the tree and a big wheel. She confirmed the big wheel was coming, with some paperwork remaining to be signed, as there had been a lot of interest in what would be a brand new site.

Officers wanted to discuss with the Chamber the animations which could run throughout the City centre on Small Business Saturday, which might work better than the switch-on itself, as parents bringing excited children to a switch-on were unlikely to go shopping afterwards. There was more scope in trails and in using the other days available.

In relation to the tree, which was very tall and wide, the company would provide infrastructure underneath to keep it secure, it would still need to be barriered off at night, but officers would do that as attractively as possible and the new Place Animation Officer would consider it.

On the lighting, sites such as Antrim Castle Gardens could use low-level features because they closed at the end of the day, whereas Marine Gardens was open, so everything brought in either had a height advantage or would be hidden, with other measures to make it as tamper-proof as possible.

In terms of an option B timeline, she advised that being in communications and marketing rather than events and did not want to communicate that an event was happening in one place and then move it. Officers normally allowed a six-week run-in, so matters were getting tight if the event had to be relocated. Bangor Marine had advised the previous day that the site would be available from the start of November, allowing a couple of weeks to work with the site. Officers had some ideas around option B but hoped not to have to use them.

Councillor Hennessy was delighted with what officers had put in place and liked the signature lighting installation, the dynamic lighting and the skyline projections. He asked what period the £80,000 animation budget covered and whether it included the Place Animation Officer post for the two-year period.

The Head of Communications and Marketing advised that the £80,000 was for animation activity and that the salary for the two-year post was separate. It ran until the end of March and would include a contribution towards Christmas activity, though there was also an events budget for the switch-on. On the opening of the site, money would go towards signage, wayfinding, branding and promotional activity, and officers wished to have a website created. Additional budget had already been agreed for the following year.

Councillor Newman felt it was important to pull out all the stops to increase public confidence in the scheme, and hoped a plan B was in place should weather or other issues arise.

Councillor Brady said that receiving only the McKee Clock Arena back presented an opportunity to link up a bigger event space, perhaps by pedestrianising the adjacent street and drawing activity towards Holborn Square. He asked whether that was being planned for and the officer confirmed that it was.

As less of the gardens was available than anticipated, a road closure would be needed to manage capacity. The site held around 5,000 once a tree and big wheel were in place, whereas even a poor switch-on could attract between 8,500 and 10,000 people.

Officers would talk to the Chamber about what activity it might run. Holborn Square had worked well for Beats and Rhythms and as part of Bangor Vibes, and while hospitality might not wish to put resource into the same outdoor activity at their busiest period, officers were open to those conversations.

Councillor Brady was sympathetic to Councillor Gilmour's concerns about the tree and its barriers, and was worried the tree might look too artificial.

The Head of Communications and Marketing confirmed it was an artificial tree. She had put herself in the position of the small children who would come and who wanted something bright and colourful, which might not be the aesthetic older people would choose. The artificial tree at the City Hall was attractive and that was the effect being aimed for.

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

13. GO SUCCEED ACTIVITY UPDATE – QUARTER 1 2026/27 (FILE ED135)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that Members would be aware that Go Succeed went live on 1 November 2023 with combined 18-month targets for Engage and Foundation delivered by Enterprise NI (ENI) and associated Local Enterprise Agency network and Growth and Scaling delivered by Full Circle consortia partners.

All aspects of the service were up and running, with the first 18-month cycle now complete.

A one-year extension was granted through the Shared Prosperity Fund from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026 to continue the delivery of Go Succeed in a similar manner.

From the 1 April 2026, the Local Growth Fund became a co-funder of the Go Succeed Programme. The current phase of the programme would run until 31 March 2027. In parallel, all 11 councils were working together to design the next phase with procurement expected to begin shortly to ensure delivery agents were in place when the new programme started.

The report provided an update on Go Succeed activity and performance during the period from 1 April to 30 June 2026.

Go Succeed Participation

Go Succeed Pillar	12 Month Target	Q1 Actual
Engage	243	111
Foundation	45	13
Growth	119	43
Scaling	1	0

Engage

As at 30th June 2026 (12-Month Target of 243)	
Go Succeed clients assigned on Engage Pillar completed Diagnostics	120*
Project Sign Off carried out by LEA's *	48
Jobs Created	29

- *Please Note: sign-off include Business Plans and Enterprise Action Plans to determine Job Creation. Of the 120 diagnostics completed 9 of these were for clients who applied for Go Succeed support prior to 1st April 2026*

The chart below indicated by postcode that 111 Go Succeed Engage clients registered from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026. The chart included 14 clients who registered but did not progress further with the service and were recorded as withdrawals. Reasons for withdrawal might include a change in circumstances, illness, lack of time, loss of interest, progression into employment or education or being assessed as ineligible. Before a client was recorded as withdrawn, three attempts were made to contact them by email and telephone.

A further 12 clients progressed to the Foundation pillar after completing the engage pillar.

The total also included individuals who had been referred to other economic inactivity support services, as outlined later in the report under Community Outreach and Economic Inactivity Support.

Foundation

As of 30th June 2026 (12-Month Target of 45)	
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Go Succeed clients assigned on Foundation Pillar completed Diagnostics	24*
Project Sign Off carried out by LEA's *	3
Jobs Created	2

- *Please Note: sign-off include Business Plans and Enterprise Action Plans to determine Job Creation. Of the 24 diagnostics completed 11 of these were for clients who applied for Go Succeed support prior to 1st April 2026*

The chart below indicated by postcode 13 Go Succeed Foundation clients registered from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026, these included withdrawals.

Growth

As at 30th June 2026 (12-Month Target of 119)	
Go Succeed companies registered on Growth Pillar (estimate)	43
ANDBC Officer Diagnostic Approved	58*
Mentor Hours Allocated	243
Existing clients with additional hours	1
Clients returning post 12 months of initial mentoring ending	2

- *Please Note: budget allows for average of 15hrs support per company. Of the 58 diagnostics completed 15 of these were for clients who applied for Go Succeed support prior to 1st April 2026.*

The chart below indicated by postcode 43 Go Succeed Growth clients registered from 1 April 2026 to 30 June 2026.

Future activities scheduled for next three quarters

Go Succeed Grants would have its fourth open call that might provide funding of up to 50% of costs for eligible capital items up to a maximum grant award of £4,000 and minimum grant award of £1,000.

Grants were available under the Foundation, Growth and Scaling pillars and applying for this grant would be through a targeted competitive call. Go Succeed clients would be eligible to apply once they had completed at least 60% of their mentoring; however, grants could not be drawn down until the mentoring was fully complete. Grant applications would open on 1 September 2026 and close on 13 October 2026.

The Ultimate Pitch Competition: This pitching competition gave local entrepreneurs the opportunity to compete for up to £6,000 in investment for their business idea. There were two heats, local and regional. Applicants could compete for £1,000 at a local council heat, with the potential to progress to the regional final and compete for an additional £5,000.

The competition opened 27 July 2026 and closed on 17 August 2026, with local heats leading to a final in November during Global Entrepreneurship Week.

Future Founders a youth entrepreneurship programme in partnership with Young Enterprise NI and the six Further Education Colleges targeting students from age 16-24 to encourage and support future entrepreneurs and develop creativity and innovation.

This year's events commenced in September with the Introduction to Ideation. The Innovation Camp would be held in October, with a team based workshop where students would pitch an original business concept in a Dragon's Den style event. The programme finished in November 2026 with the Entrepreneurship Hub event, an open forum format where students got direct mentorship with three local business owners in a Q&A session discussing their business journey from idea to running a successful business.

Community Outreach was activity that informed targeted groups about the Go Succeed Service through a series of information sessions with the aim for individuals to register onto the service. An analysis of recent applications for Go Succeed had revealed that while urban areas demonstrated high engagement, four key areas; Donaghadee, Carrowdore, Millisle and Portaferry had a low registration rate. To address this, planning was in place to host four targeted information sessions between September and December 2026.

Finance: The Go Succeed Programme was funded through the Local Growth fund with match funding provided by Councils.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the content of the report.

Councillor McCollum proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer felt that the programme had gone from strength to strength. The Ultimate Pitch was the Council's version of The Apprentice and she praised the quality of the projects put forward the previous year - she was delighted that some could go on to achieve measurable success, and welcomed Future Founders as another brilliant initiative.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter said the Ultimate Pitch was very good for those starting out and she welcomed the prospect of microbusinesses springing up throughout the Borough and noted the difference a £1,000 grant would make for them.

She welcomed Future Founders, recalling the buzz created when Young Entrepreneurs came into Regent House and young people fired out ideas. This gave them more of a base from which to launch. She continued to believe the Borough had not hit the tip of the iceberg in terms of business growth, and it was schemes such as these which gave local people the confidence to take the step into business, from which everyone benefited.

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

14. **LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP – QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT (FILE RDP 47)**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place and Prosperity detailing that the Ards and North Down Labour Market Partnership (LMP) was established in August 2021 to address local employment and skills needs.

The Council provided secretariat support to the LMP. The report provided an update on delivery of the 2025–26 Action Plan and progress with the 2026–27 programme.

LMP Funding and Action Plan for 2025–26

The LMP Secretariat received a Letter of Offer from DfC on 15 May 2025 for administration and programme delivery. In November 2025, DfC provided approximately £109,792.26 in additional funding. This enabled participant numbers to be increased for the Transport Academy and the Academy for People with Disabilities, and two new academies to be introduced: an SIA Licence Academy for 12 participants and a Taxi Academy for 16 participants. DfC approved the revised budget and associated change requests on 27 November 2025.

LMP Funding and Action Plan for 2026–27

DfC had provided two interim allocations of £100,942.90, each covering a three-month period from 1 April to 30 September 2026. As the Executive had not yet agreed a budget, the Council was awaiting a formal Letter of Offer.

An update on delivery of the 2025–26 Action Plan was provided below.

2025-2026 Action Plan Update

Signposting Employability and Skills Register

Two registers had been produced: an Employer Register and a Participants Register. Both were available to download from the Council website, and printed copies were also available. Distribution of printed copies was reported separately, as it could not be captured through website download data.

Between April 2025 and 19 March 2026, the registers were downloaded as follows:

- Employer Register: 74 downloads
- Participants Register: 112 downloads

The following registers had been given out at recent events:

Name of event	Number handed out
Entrepreneur Road Show – Employer Guide	1
West Winds – Skills and Employment Support Clinic	1
Donaghadee – Skills and Employment Support Clinic	5
Millisle – Skills and Employment Support Clinic	3

Disability Employment and Support Day – 25 November 2025	6
Job Fair, Aurora – 5 February 2026	70
Disability Employment and Support Day – 26 February 2026	40
Apprenticeship Careers Fair – 19 February 2026	120
Total	246

In total, 432 guides were downloaded or distributed during 2025–26. The guides would be updated to reflect current projects and programmes, with reprinting funded through the 2026–27 Action Plan.

Transport Academy

The academy recruited 66 participants across its HGV/coach and driving licence elements. Fifty participants completed the HGV/coach training, with 45 moving into employment. Six participants passed their driving test, with four moving into employment. One further participant secured employment before completing the driving test. The academy had been extended to 30 September 2026 to complete the remaining activity and monitor further employment outcomes.

Academy for People with Disabilities

The academy was expanded by 15 places, bringing the total to 45 participants. All places were filled and both cohorts had completed the programme. Fourteen participants had moved into employment against a target of 15. Delivery was extended to 30 June 2026 to support achievement of the remaining employment outcome.

Greentech Academy

The academy was complete. Twenty-eight participants gained 49 qualifications, with 14 reporting improved employment outcomes against a target of 11. Further employment outcomes would continue to be monitored.

Catering Academy

The academy recruited 15 participants across two cohorts, with 12 moving into employment. Delivery was extended to 30 September 2026.

Classroom Assistant Employability Academy

The academy recruited 25 participants across two cohorts. Twenty-one participants moved into employment, exceeding the target of 13. The academy was now complete, and further employment outcomes would continue to be monitored.

Health and Social Care Academy

The academy was reduced from 22 to 17 places to support an increase in the Taxi Academy. All 17 places were filled, and 10 participants moved into employment against a target of 11. Delivery was extended to 30 June 2026.

Employer Led Upskilling Programme

The programme supported 54 companies and 103 employees. Grants totalling £20,073.90 were awarded to 23 companies. Of these, 19 completed the training, enabling 53 employees to gain 57 qualifications. A further 50 employees attended

group training funded through an additional £3,000 allocation. The programme exceeded its targets of 46 participants and 12 employers and was completed in March 2026. Employment outcomes would continue to be monitored.

SIA Academy

Training was completed on 16 March 2026 by all 10 participants, all of whom passed. Four participants had moved into employment, and four others had received their licence. Delivery was extended to 30 September 2026 to allow remaining licence and employment outcomes to be confirmed.

Taxi Academy

Six participants had completed the required tests, with three moving into employment. Other participants were progressing through medical, AccessNI, theory or practical requirements. Two participants were removed from the programme following non-attendance and no further engagement. Delivery had been extended to 30 September 2026.

Employment Support Clinics

Three clinics were delivered and were now complete.

Employer Information Session

One session was delivered and was now complete.

Disability Employment and Support Days

Two events were delivered and were now complete.

Job Fairs

Two job fairs were delivered and were now complete. DfC confirmed that the March 2026 event resulted in 34 filled positions, including 10 secured by people who were previously unemployed.

Apprenticeship Careers Fair

One fair was delivered and was now complete.

PR Campaign

The campaign generated 80 expressions of interest. The campaign analytics were shown below. Fifteen promotional displays were produced and distributed across community centres and partner organisations throughout the Borough. One display had been retained for future events, and a further display would be provided to the Housing Executive in Bangor.

Webinar

One webinar was delivered and was now complete.

Easement Bids

ADR Training Easement Bid

A £5,000 easement bid was approved to provide ADR training for 10 current or former Transport Academy participants. ADR is the specialist qualification required to transport dangerous goods by road.

Initial interest from Transport Academy participants was limited to three. Following wider promotion through the Council's Facebook page, 33 expressions of interest were received, including five from outside the Borough.

Three participants had completed the training, two were scheduled to begin in August 2026, and the remaining five were scheduled to complete it between October and December 2026.

Childcare Academy

People 1st was appointed to deliver the academy. An initial upskilling offer attracted no applications, so the programme was revised to support people who were economically inactive, underemployed or at risk of redundancy to enter the childcare sector and gain a Level 2 accredited qualification. Seven applications had been received to date.

Funding was available for eight participants and had to be spent by 31 December 2026. As the programme was funded by the Department for the Economy, it had to support employment in the childcare or childminding sector.

25-26 AND LMP Job Outcomes

Programme / Project	Job Targets	Job Outcomes	Progress Update
Academy for People with Disabilities (45 participants)	15	14	All 45 places were filled and both cohorts completed the programme. Delivery was extended to 30 June 2026.
Transport Academy (66 participants)	42	49	Across two HGV cohorts, 50 participants completed training and 45 moved into employment. Six participants completed the driving licence element, with four moving into employment.
Classroom Assistant Employability Academy (25 participants)	13	21	The first cohort recruited 12 participants, with nine moving into employment. The second recruited 13, with 12 moving into employment.
Catering Academy (15 participants)	16	12	The first cohort achieved five employment outcomes

			and the second achieved seven. Delivery was extended to 30 September 2026.
Health and Social Care Academy (17 participants)	11 (revised)	10	Twelve participants joined the first cohort and five joined the second. Ten participants moved into employment.
Greentech Academy (28 participants)	11 enhanced employment	14 enhanced employment outcomes	Twenty-eight participants gained 49 qualifications. Fourteen reported increased working hours or higher-paid employment.
Childminding Academy (six participants)			No employment target or outcome is reported.
SIA Licence Academy (10 participants recruited)	9	4	All 10 participants completed the training and nine passed. Four moved into employment, and four others received their licence.
Taxi Academy (22 participants)	15	3	Six participants have completed the required tests. Other participants are progressing through medical, AccessNI, theory or practical requirements.
Childcare Academy (eight funded places)	5		Seven applications have been received. Recruitment remains open.
ADR Training (10 participants)	6 (enhanced employment)		Three participants have completed the training, two were scheduled to begin in August 2026, and five are scheduled between October and December 2026.
Jobs, Support and Training Fair – 5 February 2026			53 exhibitors and 122 attendees.
Apprenticeship Careers Fair – 19 February 2026			33 exhibitors and 320 attendees; 144 people

			registered for programmes.
Job Fair – 19 March 2026		34	55 exhibitors and 351 attendees, including nine pupils. DfC confirmed that 34 positions were filled, including 10 secured by people who were previously unemployed.
Disability Employment and Support Day – 25 November 2025			17 exhibitors and six attendees.
Disability Employment and Support Day – 26 February 2026			15 exhibitors and 60 attendees; 35 people registered for programmes.
Skills and Employment Support Clinic, West Winds – 10 September 2025			Six people attended.
Skills and Employment Support Clinic, Donaghadee – 17 September 2025			39 people attended. Belfast Works Connect subsequently engaged with a community representative and is supporting more than 20 women.
Skills and Employment Support Clinic, Millisle – 21 October 2025			Nine people attended. Four community groups engaged with Belfast Works Connect and Disability Action.
Employer Led Upskilling Programme	19 enhanced employment outcomes		33 participants reported increased working hours or higher earnings.
Total Employment Outcomes, 2025–26	162 (126 jobs + 36 enhanced jobs)	147 jobs + 47 enhanced jobs = 194	

Year to date Job Outcomes update

The 2025–26 Action Plan had delivered 147 employment outcomes and 47 enhanced employment outcomes to date. This figure remained subject to confirmation as outstanding outcomes continued to be monitored.

2026-2027 Action Plan Update

As a formal Letter of Offer had not yet been received, programme activity had been limited to date. The interim funding provided salary cover until 30 March 2027.

Delivery agents had been appointed for the following academies:

- Warehouse Academy for 16 participants, providing manual handling and forklift licence training.
- Classroom Upskilling Academy for 25 participants. Recruitment had commenced, with delivery scheduled to begin in September 2026.
- Administration and Business Services Academy for 17 participants.

Signposting Employability and Skills Register

The Employer Register and Participants Register were being updated as part of the 2026–27 Action Plan.

Between April and 8 June 2026, the registers were downloaded as follows:

- Employer Register: three downloads
- Participants Register: two downloads

Printed copies distributed at events were set out below:

Name of event	Number distributed
Community Volunteer Celebration Event	8
Total	8

In total, 13 guides were downloaded or distributed between April and 8 June 2026.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the content of the report.

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

Councillor McCollum praised the programme and the breadth it covered was clear, with a considerable amount of research directing its focus.

She was, however, disappointed in relation to the Disability Employment Day, at which she had attended. There had been 17 exhibitors but only six attendees, and she asked whether officers had any comment. The Head of Economic Growth did not have the details to hand but would report back to the Member following the meeting.

Councillor Gilmour found the report encouraging, particularly where schemes had been adapted to meet further demand.

She had met people who had been through the programmes and had described what a boost to confidence it was for those out of employment or looking to take a step up but unsure what qualifications or skills they needed.

In relation to the Classroom Assistant Employability Academy, people who had completed the scheme had subsequently been appointed to posts through the Board

of Governors on which she sat. It was important that the Council continued to have that flexibility so that provision worked as well as possible for residents.

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

15. NOTICES OF MOTION

15.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Smith and Councillor Chambers

Notice of Motion 726 referred to Committee by Council submitted by Alderman Smith and 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.

(Alderman Smith joined the meeting remotely to propose his Notice of Motion – 8.38pm)

Alderman Smith proposed, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the notice of motion be adopted.

Alderman Smith explained that businesses on or outside the core town centre boundary were unable to apply for a range of Council grants. It was timely, as item 6 had highlighted the good outputs of the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme, the successful applicants for the Glow Up and Freshen Up Grants and the further application under the Local Growth Fund Vacancy and Dereliction Scheme.

Those projects were positive if a business could apply, but a sizeable number could not. In Comber the boundary stopped at Castle Lane, so businesses on Mill Street as far as the Glen Road fell outside the scheme, even though many saw themselves as part of the town centre.

The point had been highlighted the previous May when the owner of a public house at the top of Mill Street, who contributed £20,000 in rates, applied for a Glow Up Grant believing he met the criteria and was told he fell outside the zone. He had featured on the front page of the local press. That was one example and he had no doubt there were others across the Borough.

Alderman Smith emphasised that the criteria were set by the Department for Communities and not by the Council, which had to adhere to them. The crux of the proposal was therefore that the Council write to the Department asking it to vary its process to allow businesses on the fringes of town centres to apply. That did not prevent the Council from examining its own funding and processes, and while it was not part of the proposal he hoped officers would consider whether there was flexibility to expand the boundaries.

It would be good for the Council to show it was listening to business and to lobby the Department so that those businesses could get into the game rather than remain excluded and frustrated.

The seconder, Councillor Chambers, was sure that Members appreciated the value of the grant schemes in supporting investment, improving premises and helping local businesses, but there was a need to review the position of businesses just outside the designated boundaries.

It was difficult for a small locally owned business to understand why being on one side of a line meant it qualified while a short distance on the other side meant it did not. Those businesses employed local people, paid rates and faced the same pressures, and sometimes more.

He was not suggesting the focus on town centre regeneration be abandoned, but there should be a conversation about flexibility, perhaps through a buffer zone, a limited proportion of funding, or a separate scheme. A boundary should help administer a scheme but should not automatically rule a business out.

Speaking in support of the Motion, Councillor Edmund commented that all businesses paid rates and needed support where possible, and these were local family businesses employing local people.

Councillor McCollum was supportive and referred to Bangor's Gray's Hill as an example of what had been a unique street with small coffee shops, good restaurants and independent shops, and was now on the edge of the new waterfront development, yet had become tired and had fallen outside the last raft of Glow Up funding.

At the Masterplan workshop that day she had also seen that connecting the town centre to the waterfront was a priority in Holywood, yet the Departmental boundary lay along the carriageway which divided the two. As Councillor Chambers had said, where the boundaries fell could create resentment, and town centres were always evolving. John Caldwell in Donaghadee had called for this for several years and she understood the Director had done so himself, so there was now a bank of voices calling for it.

Councillor Gilmour welcomed the Department's willingness to fund town and city centres, but as she had said many times she represented Bangor West, which fell neither within the red line nor within the areas eligible for village funding. She recalled that during one of the COVID schemes the Council had succeeded in getting the Department to widen the boundaries, she believed to the point where the speed limits changed, and recalled a walkaround with the Department to identify the red lines when she was a Councillor in Holywood during the public realm work.

That was some time ago and a review would be right and proper. There was an element of linking into the Local Development Plan, which identified town centre boundaries. In Bangor the red line was very tight for the size of the city, whereas the historical villages of Clondeboy, Rathmore and Ballyholme had their own communities and thriving businesses but were not eligible for support. She did not,

however, think the boundaries should be abandoned entirely so that the whole Borough could apply, as an industrial estate did not have the same footfall as a town centre.

Councillor Morgan said building flexibility into these grants was important and this rule was a particularly irritating one, as her understanding was that the red line was a planning tool rather than a tool for economic development, which was why there was such friction against it. If Members could help by putting forward evidence to support the argument she was sure they would be willing to do so.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter was frustrated that some thriving streets in Newtownards did not even receive Christmas lights. This was due to a restriction caused by BMAP and the Ards and North Down area plans. As the town centre and Borough grew there was a need for the Department to align with the Council.

The Local Development Plan would eventually establish the boundaries more accurately, but that was 2030 or beyond and too far away to wait. The motion was therefore useful in asking the Department for the same flexibility it had shown over the Glow Up funding, and to allow access to businesses on the fringe which were part of the economic life of the town centres. She noted particularly the position of her colleague in Bangor West, who was not invited to a Local Action Group because her area was classed as fringe when it was in fact thriving.

Councillor Brady was very happy to support the motion. A lot of businesses in Bangor city centre felt the Department's boundary was arbitrary and unfair, especially those falling just outside it, and he hoped the motion would push the Department to widen the boundary to encompass the whole city centre. Councillor Newman put on record her support. As someone relatively new to the Council she thought it was time the boundaries were revisited.

Alderman Smith, summing up, thanked Members for their comments and support. Councillor Gilmour had mentioned the Local Development Plan, which had a role, but he shared her view that the focus had to be on town centres. Town centres had grown and had outgrown arbitrary red lines which might have been a good idea many years ago. What was sought was greater flexibility and creativity from the Department, but it was also for the Council to see where it could be flexible within its own remit, and he urged officers to consider that.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the notice of motion be adopted.

(Alderman Smith and Councillor Chambers withdrew from the meeting – 9pm)

RECESS

(The meeting adjourned at 9pm and resumed at 9.15pm)

15.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean

Notice of Motion 729 referred to Committee by Council submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean, that this Council recognises that our city, towns and villages in our Borough are summer destinations for many. Therefore, the Council agrees to bring an officers' report back on reviving the annual 'Dressing the Town' budget which was previously provided for banners and bunting and other decorative measures during the summer months. The aim of such a budget would be to provide visitors and residents with a summer welcome to our Borough, especially our seaside destinations.

(Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean joined the meeting remotely at 9.15pm)

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the notice of motion be adopted.

Councillor Cathcart noted that the Council had a dedicated budget to decorate the city, towns and villages at Christmas, with trees, lights and festive decorations, which was absolutely right, but had no similar budget for the summer despite the Borough being much more of a summer destination.

Other than the Christmas switch-ons all of the Council's festivals and events took place during the summer, and even outside the seaside towns, the Comber Earlies Festival took place in June.

Despite that focus there was no budget to ensure the towns looked their best in the busiest period.

Councillor Cathcart said the point had been brought home at the Sea Bangor Festival, where bunting along the seafront had brightened the place and given it a real summer feel but had had to be taken down shortly afterwards as it was needed elsewhere by the events team.

That had annoyed a number of members of the public, who questioned why the Council could not retain relatively inexpensive bunting to decorate the town during the summer and felt that this suggested the Council did not care about how the area looked.

Bunting had previously been placed on the piers in Bangor and banners along the promenade, and legacy North Down Borough Council had held a budget specifically for lamppost banner and bunting dressing in Bangor, Holywood and Groomsport from April to September.

Following the merger that funding had been reallocated to other tourism projects and the dressing budget had ceased to exist from 1 April 2019. He did not believe reinstating it would cost a great deal, bunting was inexpensive and reusable, and following much engagement with the Department for Infrastructure, lamppost banners could now be used, with no budget as far as he was aware, to replace them.

Councillor Cathcart added that the Bangor seafront development might present an opportunity for further banners and bunting, and that additional planters or improvements to the parklets could also be considered.

The Local Action Groups could be involved in deciding how each town was decorated and businesses could be involved to give a whole-town feel.

There were wider issues of maintenance and weed removal at prominent sites which he was carrying forward as Chairman of the Environment Committee, but a small Dressing the Town budget should be considered, as small things added up to make a real difference and showed that the Council cared about its destinations.

The seconder, Councillor McClean explained that the motion was to keep things simple and to scour other boroughs around the United Kingdom for what had been done well and cheaply for maximum impact. That meant lighting things up nicely, keeping the streets clean, and making sure a planter was attractive and not full of weeds, rather than spending large amounts on infrastructure which was then not maintained.

He lived on Victoria Road, where the bunting during Sea Bangor had looked lovely. Referring to the earlier discussion about the Christmas tree being surrounded by grey security fencing, he had found many examples of places which had made their trees attractive, surrounding them with a barrel structure or with market stalls at the base.

Visuals mattered. They were why people went on holiday and took photographs and why businesses made money, as people came to visit in order to put themselves on social media, and he pointed to the umbrellas outside the Duke of York in Belfast.

He wanted officer time to be spent taking the best ideas from around the country to make the Borough's places look more beautiful for very little money, as getting the basics right was what people expected and the first thing they noticed.

Councillor McCollum was very happy to support the Notice of Motion, which built on what had taken place that summer in relation to Sea Bangor. She would expect the dressing of the Borough's towns to be wholesome, universally appealing, universally welcome and inclusive. That would be very welcome in Holywood, where flags had appeared for the first time along the High Street and were not welcome.

While her imagination had been caught by Councillor McClean's encouragement to take ideas from elsewhere, she had every confidence that the Council's officers could generate their own.

Her support, and that of her party, was conditional upon the dressing being universally appealing, welcoming and inclusive.

Councillor Gilmour recalled the old town dressing budgets in legacy North Down Borough Council and appreciated that there had been changes following the merger, as legacy Ards had not had the same provision. The fund had disappeared when the Department for Infrastructure did not allow banners to be put up.

Each town had its own unique aspects, so rather than single generic corporate branding there was scope to do what worked best for each. She had been in York

during the summer, where one particular area had umbrellas branded, and each town had its own feel and its own events or periods when most visitors came.

Councillor Morgan urged that, when the report came back, consideration be given to how businesses, the Local Action Groups and the community could be involved, as individual towns would probably want different things.

In Comber that summer, in support of Comber in Bloom, primary schools had produced pictures which were made into posters and displayed on street lamps around the square, which looked fantastic.

Her concern was that what was described as a small budget would not be small once multiplied across the city and the towns, so thought was needed on how businesses and the community could be engaged to help deliver it.

Councillor Cathcart, in summing up, welcomed the support of the Committee. It was for the Council to determine the budget it allocated, and businesses could be involved to expand the scheme, as could other funding opportunities which the Local Action Groups fed into.

This was about doing basic things and doing them right. He referred to a similar approach discussed earlier in relation to painting shop fronts. Small things made a considerable difference to the environment of a town centre.

Responding to Councillor McCollum, he considered it good for the Local Action Groups to have a general discussion about what they would like to see and he did not anticipate anything offensive. It was something done before by the legacy council and by this Council and needed to be considered again, as the focus of the Borough was on the summer.

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

(Councillor Cathcart and Councillor McClean withdrew from the meeting – 9.31pm)

16. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

17. RETROSPECTIVE SINGLE TENDER ACTION – MARINE GARDENS CHRISTMAS TREE

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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

Members were asked for retrospective approval for a Single Tender Action to procure a new Christmas tree for the Marine Gardens site in Bangor.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the recommendation be adopted.

**18. BELFAST REGION CITY DEAL ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26
(FILE RDP22) (Appendix X)**

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

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

Members were asked to approve the BRDC Annual Report 2025/26, which remained embargoed until the end of September.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the recommendation be adopted.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the public and press be readmitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.35pm.

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 8 September 2026 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman Smith

Aldermen: Brooks (Zoom)
Graham
McIlveen

Councillors:	Chambers	McBurney (Zoom)
	Cochrane	McCracken
	Gilmour	Moore
	W Irvine	Thompson
	S Irvine	Quinn

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), Compliance Officer (L Porter), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (J Alexander)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Alderman Graham for late arrival at 7.03pm. No other apologies were received.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought declarations. No declarations of interest were declared.

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION

There were no deputations received.

NOTED.

REPORTS FOR APPROVAL

4. DRAFT ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT 2025/26 (APPENDIX I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing the key points within the Annual Self-Assessment Report, including progress achieved in 2025/26 against the Performance Improvement Objectives.

Background

The Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 put in place a framework to support continuous improvement in the delivery of council services in the context of strategic objectives and issues that were important to those who received the services.

Section 92 of the Act placed a requirement on councils to assess and report on their performance against the previous financial years; and to compare its performance, so far as was practicable, with the performance of other councils in the exercise of the same or similar functions. The comparison and assessment report covering 2025/26 should be published by 30th September immediately following the financial year to which it related.

The purpose of the report was to review our performance in the delivery of our agreed Improvement Objectives for the 2025/26 financial year and to assess our performance in discharging our duties under Section 84 of the Act. The intention of the report was to:

- give an assessment of the effectiveness of our continuous improvement arrangements and reflect on our performance against the 2025/26 Performance Improvement Plan;
- provide an assessment of wider performance aspects including statutory indicators and self-imposed indicators; and
- provide an update on progress against proposals made in the NIAO Audit and Assessment Report 2025/26.

Key Issues

Progress summary – 2025/26 Performance Improvement Plan objectives

Performance Improvement Objective 1: We would increase economic growth by attracting more jobs and businesses

The majority of measures were on target, demonstrating strong overall progress.

Momentum continued across the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Programme during 2025/26. The Pickie Fun Park and Bangor Yacht Club Watersports Centre projects progressed through design and pre-application community consultation, with planning and marine licence applications submitted for the Watersports centre. Procurement also progressed for the Urban Waterfront and Public Realm project, while preparations continued for the appointment of the Marina Wetside consultancy

team in 2026. Work also continued to secure private-sector investment across the waterfront. Significant progress continued to be made within the Go Succeed programme with job creation under this scheme increasing from 77 in 2023/24 to 179 in 2025/26.

In 2025, the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme commenced, with the Glow Up Grant and Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Schemes being successfully rolled out. The programme had moved into continued delivery with the third strand, the Freshen Up Grant, available to support further capital improvements by businesses. Collectively, these strands provided a practical mechanism for improving the commercial environment and strengthening the conditions that helped retain, attract, and grow rate-paying businesses.

Performance Improvement Objective 2: We would reduce carbon emissions as we transition to net zero

Strong progress was made across most measures, with the majority meeting target; however, a few measures fell slightly below expectations.

Waste management household recycling % had increased from 2024/25 (now 58.5%) and was above the statutory target however still remained a challenge for Council.

Significant progress had been made towards achieving the Council's estate energy emissions reduction objectives. Performance was currently ahead of the committed target trajectory, and with continued investment and delivery, officers remained confident that the long-term targets could be achieved. However, fuel-related emissions from the Council's fleet remained a significant challenge, particularly in relation to heavy goods vehicles, for which viable decarbonisation solutions were not yet fully established. Although fleet electrification offered a potential pathway to reduce emissions, it would require significant capital investment, increased electricity capacity, and substantial investment in renewable energy generation and grid infrastructure to ensure that the full carbon reduction benefits were realised.

Annual target of 15,000 trees planted exceeded, along with 132,00 0m2 of rewilded lands being maintained and target being exceeded.

A number of measures within this objective had been carried forward to 2026/27 Performance Improvement Plan as they still remained a priority for Council in terms of reducing carbon emissions as we transitioned to net zero.

Performance Improvement Objective 3: We would improve wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality

The majority of measures were on target, demonstrating strong overall progress.

Council celebrated the completion of works in 2025/26 of the new Whitespots line of the Comber Greenway – a transformative 5.4k active travel route linking Newtownards and Bangor. The new shared-use path strengthened opportunities for walking, wheeling, and cycling through a safe, accessible, and scenic route.

Significant development work was completed in 2025/26 to progress other major capital and strategic projects that would provide outdoor facilities aimed at improving health and wellbeing including further Greenway development, the Whitespots redevelopment project and the Ward Park redevelopment project. Officers would continue to progress these projects, along with other outdoor recreation projects, in 2026/27.

2025/26 saw the launch of Council's 10-year Leisure Strategy "Getting Active, Staying Active", which links clearly with the Council's Corporate Plan, and would contribute to 'A Sustainable Borough' through innovation in our services and greater partnerships with our residents and other organisations. The Strategy sets out a clear direction for developing leisure across Ards and North Down, promoting an inclusive and sustainable approach that supports health and wellbeing for all.

Significant work was completed by the Parks and Cemeteries Service including £36,052 invested in 'In Bloom' projects, 8 'In Bloom' /Best Kept awards achieved, 7 Green Flag awards for the Borough achieved and 104 community gardening projects delivered.

Performance Improvement Objective 4: We would be a high-performing organisation

Strong progress was made across most measures, with the majority meeting target; however, a few measures fell slightly below expectations.

A new digital financial management system was introduced across Council to improve access to, and understandability of, financial information for non-finance managers; improve management information in relation to financial commitments and contract management; and improve efficiency within the Finance service.

A new 'Electronic Document and Records Management System' and supporting Corporate File Plan was developed and implemented across the organisation. This programme of work had been a significant step forward in how the Council managed, governed, and used its information. It represented a key culture change transformation that strengthened information governance and supported staff to work in a more collaborative way.

Next Steps

Subject to Council approval, the annual Self-Assessment Report for 2025/26 would be published on Council's website by the legislative date of 30 September 2026.

Summary

As the Council continued to work towards its vision to be 'A Sustainable Borough,' the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan 2024-2028 drove the annual Performance Improvement Plan objectives to ensure our focus remained on achieving the commitments Council had set for the remainder of the four-year period.

The past few years had seen the Council and the Borough face unprecedented challenges; however, Council was confident that it was demonstrating good overall

performance and would continue to further develop, monitor and manage its activities to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions.

RECOMMENDED that Council Approve the draft annual Self-Assessment Report for 2025/26 attached at Appendix I for publication by the required deadline date of 30th September 2026.

Councillor McCracken referred to page 43 of the Self-Assessment Report on staff absence. He noted that, following a strategic review of sickness, Council had set a deadline of March 2026 to achieve its three-year target of 5% staff absence, which it had failed to achieve, with the most recent reported sickness rates at 7.46% and long-term absence at 7.5%. Councillor McCracken noted Item 21 and asked that it be moved out of the In-Committee section. He voiced concern that, given that half the Council budget was spent on staff, recent sickness rates represented a huge loss of productivity every year and noted their effect on Council's corporate objective to be a high-performing organisation.

Councillor McCracken added that, during his tenure on Council, he had sought to work with officers to help reduce the concerning levels of absence and he noted that sick pay terms and conditions were constantly used as justification for long-term absence. He advised that sick pay entitlement and capability management were different, and that a contractual right was separate to ongoing management responsibility, noting that Council should be supporting staff on sick leave, including supporting their return to work as soon as they were able to do so.

He recognised that sickness records for most Council staff were very good and stressed that his concern about sickness levels was neither an attack on staff, nor on trade unions. It was about understanding the reasons for staff sickness and addressing them.

Councillor McCracken noted that ONS figures reported average sickness in the English public sector as 2.9% and suggested that the issue in Council may be cultural in that workplace factors contributing to staff sickness may include disagreements with management, disciplinary matters, failed applications for promotion, and feelings of having been treated unfairly. He was not suggesting that those reasons were illegitimate but suggested that Council should not accept a culture in which unresolved workplace issues may become long-term sickness absence.

Councillor McCracken added that the Northern Ireland Audit Office had consistently raised this issue as a major concern for over a decade. The people of Northern Ireland deserved a high-performing public sector, and its leaders should come together with employees and trade unions to discuss this issue.

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

5. **DRAFT WORKFORCE PLAN 2026 – 2031** (APPENDIX II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing the key points within the Draft Workforce Plan 2026-2031.

Background

The Ards and North Down Borough Council Workforce Plan 2026–2031 set out how the Council would attract, retain, develop, and support the workforce needed to deliver its Corporate Plan and become a high-performing, future-ready organisation. The plan responded to:

- An ageing population and workforce.
- Increasing service demand and financial pressure.
- Recruitment and skills shortages across local government.
- Growing need for digital, data, AI, transformation, and leadership capability.
- Changing employee expectations around flexibility, development, inclusion, and wellbeing.

External evidence identified shortages in frontline, technical and digital roles, slow recruitment processes, ageing workforces, limited succession planning and gaps in change, digital and leadership skills. Locally, the greatest priorities were:

- Succession planning and knowledge transfer.
- Stronger leadership and management.
- Modernised recruitment and employer branding.
- Digital confidence, collaboration, and responsible AI use.
- Improved recognition, engagement, wellbeing, and attendance.
- More structured workforce intelligence and skills planning.

The future ambition of the Council, was that it aimed to become:

- An employer of choice.
- An organisation with strong and effective leadership.
- A skilled and digitally enabled workforce.
- An engaged and inclusive workplace.
- An employer that actively invests in staff wellbeing.

Six delivery priorities:

1. Effective Resource Planning – employer branding, reward and recognition, recruitment modernisation, responsible AI in recruitment, improved onboarding, and early-career pathways.
2. Digitally Enabled – digital and AI governance, targeted digital skills development, digital leadership, and continuous improvement.
3. Employee Engagement and Wellbeing – culture change, employee listening, wellbeing programmes, mental-health support, and confidential counselling.
4. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion – fair policies, inclusive recruitment, staff networks, awareness, and improved monitoring.
5. Outstanding Leaders and Managers – structured leadership development, succession planning, coaching, mentoring, and career support.

6. Performance and Development Culture – stronger appraisal, workforce skills audits, internal career pathways, knowledge sharing, and consistent performance management.

Actions ran from 2026 to 2031, with named owners, timescales, and success measures. Progress would be delivered through service plans and reviewed annually. Key indicators included improvements in recruitment, retention, attendance, engagement, leadership capability, digital confidence, equality outcomes, and internal progression.

As part of the Policy Review Procedure, consultation had occurred with management, trade union partners, and the Staff Consultative Committee.

RECOMMENDED that Council Approve the Workforce Plan for the period 2026 to 2031.

The Head of Strategic Change advised the Committee that Ards and North Down Borough Council was the first Council in Northern Ireland to produce a Workforce Plan. It had given recognition to the issues Council faced in terms of an ageing population, ageing staff members, financial pressures, service demands, upskilling in relation to IT, and AI. She advised that the five-year Workplan was very substantial and should address many of the problems that had been raised.

Councillor Quinn expressed her interest in the upskilling element of the report, particularly as she worked in post-primary education where classes had been introduced such as working in the uniformed services. Pupils needed role models and could be informed about Council and the pathway they could take to become involved.

Councillor W Irvine addressed Council's aim of being an attractive employer and advised that certain sectors would find that particularly difficult. He noted that the private sector was more attractive to prospective employees than the public sector and asked if Council was struggling to recruit, particularly in the leisure sector.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that there were acute problems at certain points and for certain disciplines. In leisure, some staff had left to go to another council for the same job but at a higher salary. More broadly, there were areas where skills were scarce, particularly in procurement. He advised that Council's Procurement Department had not had a full complement of staff for several years. Council had also struggled to recruit for a Digital Services Manager despite re-grading the role and changing the job description. These difficulties were largely caused by the competitiveness of salaries.

He advised that potential solutions had been implemented including more reliance on digital services, outsourced contracts where external companies provided more services for the Council, and feedback from former applicants and those who had abandoned their job application.

Alderman McIlveen referred to pages 10 and 11 of the report regarding comments on the importance of EDI support within organisations. Council did not have an EDI

strategy, following its decision not to go along with the Employment Commission, as it did not want to create an unfair playing field and he was aware that, in Northern Ireland, there had been some wholly inappropriate exclusions due to EDI strategies.

Alderman McIlveen asked for assurance that the Workforce Plan was not an attempt to introduce an EDI strategy by other means despite Council's previous decision.

The Director responded that EDI was mentioned within the first half of the Workforce Plan. There were also some actions relevant to Priority 4, which was workforce equality, diversity, and inclusion and what the Council planned to do in that area. The Plan did not include the development of an EDI strategy, but a review of the existing employment policies and practice recruitment policy and processes to ensure that they were fair, inclusive, and consistently applied.

Alderman McIlveen took the response as general assurance but emphasised that he remained uncomfortable with EDI being mentioned within the Workforce Plan, adding that he did not want a situation where people were disadvantaged as a result of Council policies, as had happened in other organisations.

The Director clarified the broad view of what EDI meant in terms of the Council. He advised that the Council had progressed with several strategies in relation to, for example, age-friendly strategies which were about inclusivity. The Council had a track record of undertaking EDI activity that it was comfortable with.

Alderman Graham voiced concern about the absence of a full complement of Procurement staff, and the resulting increase in the Council's susceptibility to litigation. He asked if the Council had had any communication with SOLACE, the universities or other higher education institutions with regard to ensuring that students were being trained to fill the demand within local government.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that conversations had taken place with SOLACE but not with higher education institutions. Collaboration with other councils had also been explored before. He further advised he and the Head of Finance were looking at collaboration with other councils in relation to the procurement of internal auditors. However, this required other councils being similarly interested in collaboration.

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

6. REQUEST FOR CIVIC RECEPTION – DONAGHADEE PARISH CHURCH

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that a formal request had been received from Councillors Thompson, Cochrane and Gilmour proposing that a Civic Reception be held in honour of Donaghadee Parish Church.

The proposed reception would commemorate the Church's 400th anniversary. Given the historical importance of Donaghadee Parish Church and the significance of its

400 years of ministry and service, it was considered appropriate that a Civic Reception be held in 2026 to mark this notable anniversary.

(Councillor Chambers joined the meeting at 7.23pm.)

Key Issues

Council Policy on Civic Receptions

The Council's Policy for Civic Receptions required requests to be submitted in writing to the Chief Executive and signed by at least three Elected Members. The request, once received, was assessed against set criteria and an officer's report, with an appropriate recommendation, was prepared for consideration by the Corporate Services Committee.

Assessment Criteria for a Civic Reception

The criterion against which each request would be assessed were as follows:

1. Exceptional Service to the Borough/Local Community and a Significant Anniversary. The exceptional service should be in the areas of Voluntary or Charitable work AND the anniversary should be a milestone of 25-year increment anniversaries. OR
2. A Very Significant or Unique Achievement - An achievement which would be recognised throughout Northern Ireland and beyond and the recipient had a strong association with the Borough.

Next Steps

This request was submitted in line with agreed procedures and met the criteria for a civic reception as stated in point 1 above - Exceptional Service to the Borough/Local Community and a Significant Anniversary. The cost could be met from the 2026/27 civic budget.

RECOMMENDED that Council Agree to offer Donaghadee Parish Church a Civic Reception to acknowledge 400 years since its formation and, should the offer be accepted, proceed to arrange same on a date to be agreed by relevant parties.

Councillor Thompson thanked Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Gilmour for putting their names to this proposal and expressed his hope that the Committee would support the proposal and the reception itself.

Councillor Cochrane advised that he was happy to see the proposal coming before the Committee as 400 years was an incredible and rare achievement. He stated that he knew Donaghadee Parish Church was very active with their motorbike show and fair, and that it was very much involved in community outreach. So, essentially, it was a very old church looking forward to the future. He advised that the church was to be treated as part of the Ulster-Scots Festival so it would be fitting to have a civic reception to complement the year of festivities and acknowledgements.

Councillor Gilmour echoed previous comments. For those who were not familiar with the building and its history, she advised that it had taken part in the European Heritage Open Day, and that it would be open on Saturday, 12 September 2026, to

showcase its history. She noted that, during her year as Mayor, there had been a couple of institutions, including churches, celebrating 125 years but a church celebrating 400 years was worthy of a significant civic reception.

Councillor Quinn agreed with Councillor Gilmour's comments and welcomed the proposal for a civic reception.

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

REPORTS FOR NOTING

7. CORPORATE PLAN ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT YEAR 2 (APPENDIX III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing the key points within, and progress against, the Council's Corporate Plan (2024 – 2028).

Background

Ards and North Down Borough Council's third Corporate Plan (2024-2028) was approved by Council in June 2024 and published in July 2024. The Plan was driven by three corporate priorities that aligned with the three pillars of sustainable development:

1. Economic - Increasing economic growth by attracting more jobs and businesses.
2. Environmental - Reducing carbon emissions as we transitioned to net zero.
3. Social – Improving wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequalities.

The Plan identified seven outcomes that needed to be achieved to meet our priorities. They were (not in order of priority):

1. An engaged Borough with citizens and businesses who had opportunities to influence the delivery of services, plans, and investment
2. An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets
3. A thriving and sustainable economy
4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses, and investors
5. Safe, welcoming, and inclusive communities that were flourishing
6. Opportunities for people to be active and healthy
7. Ards and North Down Borough Council was a high performing organisation

Across the seven outcomes, 48 separate measures were agreed that would demonstrate whether we had been successful or not in achieving each outcome.

Key Issues and Next Steps

As we entered the second half of the Corporate Plan, an evaluation of the first two years of activity had been undertaken to assess progress against our measures and desired outcomes. Crucially, this review had also highlighted the work that must be prioritised over the next two years to ensure continued successful delivery of the plan.

Summary

The attached report provided a comprehensive summary of the first two years of activities, each of which had been assigned a ‘RAG’ rating, and the table below highlighted the overall RAG status of all 48 measures.

Key

	Year 1 (2024/25)			Year 2 (2025/26)	
Completed/ Ongoing	10	21%		15	31%
Started/ Ongoing	37	77%		33	69%
Not Started	1	2%		0	0%
TOTAL	48	100%		48	100

RECOMMENDED that Council Note the Corporate Plan Annual Performance Report for Year 2 (2025/26) attached at Appendix 1.

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

8. **THE BRIDGE PROJECT**
(APPENDIX IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing the key points within the BRIDGE Project and its training, networking, and collaborative governance development work.

Background

The BRIDGE (Building Resilient Institutions for Development, Governance & Engagement) Project was a 36-month cross-border project, co-funded by the European Union and the UK Government through the PEACEPLUS Programme. It was led by East Border Region Ltd (EBR) in partnership with the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN).

What BRIDGE Delivered

BRIDGE engaged 12 councils and two cross-border groups through a structured programme of training, networking, and collaborative governance development. The project was organised around three work packages:

Work Package	Title	Key Activities
Work Package 1	Leadership & Skills Development	Governance training, cross-border working groups, marketing & communication skills
Work Package 2	Collaboration & Institutional Networks	Cross-border networking, European Knowledge Exchange Symposium, Consensus Decision-Making Framework
Work Package 3	Project Management & Communications	Project steering, monitoring & evaluation, branding, launch and celebration events

Training Programmes at a Glance

Across the three years, BRIDGE delivered targeted training to as many as 775 participants including elected members and council officers:

Training Module	Activity	Participants
Strategic Leadership & Decision-Making	1.1	100
Collaborative Governance & Ethical Leadership	1.1	80
Financial Management & Budgeting for Public Bodies	1.1	60
Cross-Border Governance & Policy Alignment	1.2	75
Cross-Border Working Groups (Tourism, Economic Development, Environment)	1.2	90
Marketing, Communication & Public Engagement	1.3	50
Digital Media & Public Messaging	1.3	40
Border Corridor & Functional Area Networking	2.1	60
Cross-Border Knowledge Exchange & Institutional Collaboration	2.1	80
European Knowledge Exchange Symposium	2.2	60
Consensus-Based Decision-Making Framework Workshops	2.3	80

A consultation session took place on 15-16 April 2026, with 39 elected members attending. These sessions provided an opportunity to:

- Hear a full presentation on the BRIDGE project, its objectives and timeline
- Meet the project team and ask questions
- Contribute views on training priorities and programme design
- Network with elected members and colleagues from councils on both sides of the border.

Elements of project delivery had already commenced. However, there would be a focus on activity and engagement with council officials during the early part of 2027, partly due to the timing of the forthcoming local government elections.

RECOMMENDED that Council Note the information provided on the Bridge Project.

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

9. NOTICE OF MOTION

9a Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Brady and Councillor McKee

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

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Brady to the meeting and invited him to address the Committee.

Councillor Brady stated that he was asking the Committee to reverse the decision to pull Ards and North Down Borough Council out of the National Association of Councillors (NAC). The NAC had approached the Minister for Communities and were now in regular contact and building a productive relationship. The Minister had said that he would keep his door open and continue to engage with the NAC and the membership, and that the NAC membership remained relevant.

Councillor Brady advised that the NAC was the only body that was run by councillors and that it existed to represent, advocate for and defend the interests of councillors. He recognised that it was not perfect. Speaking as an Independent, he stated that it was the only place that he could go to for support if something were to happen and he needed fair and impartial advice and representation. He added that, without the NAC, there would be no pension scheme for councillors and that it was also partially responsible for the introduction of the Independent Remuneration Panel. While the matter of strike action that precipitated this issue, it was also a right that everyone should enjoy, and at times was the only lever that could force through needed and meaningful changes. He acknowledged that strike action should be and was reserved for situations when all other avenues had been exhausted.

Councillor Brady added that to take the NAC off the table entirely, significantly weakened councillors' position in future negotiations. Ards and North Down had an historic connection to the NAC in that the old Ards Borough Council was involved in its founding and played an important role in its establishment. The NAC had relied on the Council for administrative support. He emphasised that the NAC was unique as it was the only organisation solely dedicated to representing councillors. NILGA represented councils but not individual councillors and there was no significant overlap in their responsibilities.

He noted that there were many scenarios where the interests of an individual councillor might diverge from the interests of the council they represented and if, for example, a case were to go to the Ombudsman, the NAC would represent the councillor, regardless of party. Every major party was represented on the NAC, and it was where councillors from across Northern Ireland worked together. The other ten Councils remained members and all parties were represented. He concluded that he believed that Ards and North Down Borough Council should be brought back in line

with the rest of Northern Ireland as Independents such as himself were being deprived of a potentially vital service.

Councillor McKee advised that earlier in 2026, members had had the opportunity to hear directly from representatives of the NAC when they made a deputation to the Council. On that occasion, they outlined the organisation's history and the role it continued to play in representing councillors in discussions with the government. Therefore, the arguments being put forward were not new. The Committee was being asked to reconsider the decision taken in 2025 and to take on board the fact that other councillors and councils in Northern Ireland had continued to maintain their NAC membership.

He asked the Committee to consider whether the NAC provided value to elected members. Having listened to the case made in April, he believed that it did. Given that councillors managed increasing workloads, growing expectations from their constituents, and an increasingly complex local government environment, he believed it was reasonable for elected members to have access to a body whose focus was advocating on councillors' behalf.

Councillor McKee advised of the NAC's achievements including its engagement in and advocacy for the pension scheme, the Dependent Carers' Alliance, and the financial recognition for councillors' responsibilities. What was being asked of the Committee was nothing new; it was the restoration of a longstanding relationship in this Council area.

In terms of executive positions within the NAC, he advised that these were available to elected members from all parties, so this argument was not about party politics or left versus right. It was about whether councillors in the Ards and North Down Borough should have access to the same representative body's opportunities for engagement as other councillors in Northern Ireland. Every other council remained a member, had looked at the question of value and had seen the benefit of its councillors having access to that collective voice. He and Councillor Brady were simply asking for the restoration of that access to the councillors of Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Councillor Chambers thanked the two members for bringing the Motion to the Committee and for the opportunity to discuss it. However, he stated that he would be voting against the Motion; not on the basis of whether the NAC provided a useful service to councillors, but rather on the basis of whether membership of the NAC was an appropriate use of public money. Ultimately, the membership fees were coming from the ratepayers.

He remarked that when residents paid their rates, they had a reasonable expectation that their money was going to be used to provide services and facilities for the residents of the Borough. They expected their bins to be emptied, parks and public spaces to be maintained, and leisure centres, playgrounds, cemeteries, and community amenities to be provided and well maintained. They expected the Council to deliver the services that everyone relied on. The ratepayer expected to see and experience the tangible benefits of paying their rates.

Councillor Chambers asked members to consider what the ratepayer would get in return if their money was used to pay councillors' NAC membership fees. There was a very important distinction between something that was beneficial to councillors and it being an appropriate expenditure for the Council. He stated that he had no objection to councillors believing that the NAC provided them with valuable representation and advice, and he understood that there was no opportunity for individuals to join the NAC. However, that should not mean that the Council should pay the membership fee on their behalf.

Councillor Chambers noted that when Council discussed expenditure, the need to scrutinise Council spending and look for efficiencies to ensure that money was spent wisely was prioritised. The same test had to be applied to this issue. The NAC membership fee was considered modest but collectively would be a significant amount. The Council's responsibility was to decide what was right for the Borough and the decision on NAC membership had already been decided in 2025, after extensive debate.

He remarked that, most importantly, the principle of using ratepayers' money appropriately mattered. For these reasons, he would not be supporting the Motion.

For clarification, the Chairman advised that the NAC membership fee was approximately £4,000.

Alderman McIlveen welcomed Councillor Chambers' remarks, adding that the DUP had rehearsed those arguments often over the years with varying degrees of success. He stated that he had no objection to individual NAC membership, but that councillors should pay their own membership fees. It was not for the ratepayer to pay a corporate fee. He added that the NAC was placed in a very privileged position with corporate membership paid by the ratepayers of 11 Northern Ireland councils. They were able to go into negotiations representing all 462 councillors, whether those councillors wanted to be members, or agreed with the NAC. It was a position that he felt the NAC had abused.

Correcting one of the proposers' statements, Alderman McIlveen clarified that councillors did not have the right to strike. The NAC was not a union. Councillors could withdraw their services, but the electorate would have something to say about that. He recognised that councillors were in a very privileged position in terms of standing for election and being elected by the people to serve the people, not themselves. That was one of the fundamental problems with the NAC; it expected the ratepayer to fund its lobbying to make councillors better off. In that, he agreed completely with Councillor Chambers.

Alderman McIlveen reminded members of the letter they previously received from the NAC, giving them three options: (1) a full strike and withdrawal from all Council duties; (2) a work to rule, limiting councillors' work to 20 hours per week and attending only selected meetings; and (3) accepting the Minister's decision. The NAC's recommendation was Option 2 in the first instance and there was anticipation that they would move to a point where the work of the Council would have ground to a complete halt. It was unacceptable.

Alderman McIlveen noted that, at the time of the NAC's presentation to the Council, DUP members had asked the NAC whether, on reflection, they regretted their actions and would they have done anything differently. There was no reflection, no apology, and no apparent self-awareness about how awful their proposed course of action had been. They also ignored the fact that this Council had cancelled its NAC membership. He added that an organisation that cannot bring itself to reflect on its actions was not worth this Council considering. Council had written to the NAC, asking that it change its constitution to enable individual members to join. That letter was ignored. Alderman McIlveen stated that he would welcome a change in the NAC constitution. He would not join but others would have that opportunity. On the basis of the aforementioned, Alderman McIlveen stated that would not support the Motion and requested a recorded vote.

Councillor Moore asked for clarification of the membership fee and the Director of Corporate Services advised that it was between £3,000 and £4,000.

Councillor Gilmour confirmed her party's consistent criticism of the NAC's approach to corporate membership and emphasised that it was not about party politics. It was about wrong versus right, and it was wrong that ratepayers, if Council were to rejoin the NAC, would be forced to pay for corporate membership. She stated that at one time the NAC website had referred to individual membership. At the time of the NAC delegation to Council, she had challenged them as to whether they had made any considerations about individual membership, to which they suggested that the Council should write to them. The Council had, and they ignored the letter.

In conclusion, Councillor Gilmour suggested that the members who brought the Motion to the Committee should turn their focus on the NAC and challenge them to have individual membership. Then, if they wished to be members, they could join and pay for their own membership rather than expecting the ratepayers to foot the bill.

Councillor Brady summed up by stating that he was disappointed with the view of his colleagues and reminded them that ultimately the ratepayer would pay, regardless of whether members paid the contribution voluntarily or through a corporate membership. He added that councillors were currently underpaid based on the recommendation of the independent panel, making it very difficult to serve their constituents full-time, if they chose to. He believed that ratepayers would value councillors being paid properly, which would allow them to devote more time to representing their constituents' interests. The NAC was the only body pushing for that. He thanked the Committee for hearing the Motion.

The Chairman proceeded to a recorded vote.

On the motion being put to the meeting, with 4 voting For and 10 voting Against, the MOTION FELL.

(Alderman Graham left the meeting at 7.52pm)

9b Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Newman

On the night of 15th-16th April 1941, as the Luftwaffe attacked the City of Belfast, fourteen bombs also fell in the town of Bangor, killing five local residents. During the course of the raid, 35 Bangor residents sustained injuries. Carnegie Library was set up as a temporary morgue for the fatalities. As part of the current Cathedral Gardens redevelopment, there would be a fitting memorial to those who lost their lives in the Belfast Blitz. The casualties in Bangor would not be named.

On the basis that there appears to be no knowledge of any memorial to the people who lost their lives here in Bangor, Officers be tasked with a report on the potential for a memorial or suitable plaque within Ward Park, Bangor (with the inclusion of the Carnegie Library), marking the local loss of life.

Councillor Wray thanked members for the opportunity to bring the Notice of Motion to the Committee.

He noted that, on the nights of 15th and 16th April 1941, as the Luftwaffe attacked the city of Belfast, 14 bombs also fell on the then town of Bangor. Matilda Lillian Gratton and her daughters, Sheila Gratton and Angelina Gratton died as a result of the bombing. Margaret Briars Watt was the fourth victim of the Luftwaffe attack and Robert Wright died the following day in a local hospital from the injuries he sustained. The Carnegie Library was set up as a temporary morgue for the fatalities which was, for him, a chilling thought given how thriving and beautiful it was today.

Councillor Wray advised that, in Spring 2027, as part of the current Cathedral Gardens redevelopment beside the Ulster University Belfast Campus, there would be a fitting memorial to those who lost their lives in the Belfast Blitz. However, the Bangor casualties would not be named, and he felt it was up to the Council to acknowledge those victims in Bangor. He noted that the Belfast memorial had a lot of investment, but he was proposing a more modest memorial in Bangor.

On the basis that there appeared to be no knowledge of any memorial to the people who lost their lives in Bangor, he and Councillor Newman were proposing that officers be tasked with a report on the potential for a memorial or a suitable plaque within Ward Park, Bangor, with the inclusion of the Carnegie Library, marking the loss of life. He advised that, beside the war memorial in Ward Park, there was a plaque mentioning the Easter bombings but that no names were detailed on it. He noted that the plaque was in a bad state and was very difficult to read.

Councillor Wray advised that the proposal went further than a brief reference on the plaque and that it should name the victims, as it was important that such times in Bangor's history were remembered. The victims were parents, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters, and remembering through memorials and plaques would help keep their stories alive. He noted that, considering the current geopolitical situation across the world, it was even more important that people understood the human cost of war. Remembering past tragedies would help people to value peace in our part of the world. It was also important that everyone understood the devastating impact of violence so that everything possible could be done to stop such conflicts happening in the future. Finally, he welcomed comments and questions from the Committee.

Councillor Newman welcomed the opportunity to second the Notice of Motion before the Committee. In her view, it was an issue that had been overlooked for 85 years, and it was time for the Council to take meaningful steps to properly remember what happened in Bangor during the Blitz. She acknowledged that there was a plaque at Bangor's War Memorial but there was a compelling case for a dedicated standalone memorial to the people of Bangor who were directly affected by the Blitz. Five people in Bangor lost their lives and 35 others were injured during that bombing, but the existing memorial did not name those five individuals or tell the story of what happened in Bangor. That distinction was important. There was a difference between acknowledging that people lost their lives and remembering those individuals by name. A dedicated memorial would give people the opportunity to do exactly that by naming the five people who were killed, acknowledging the 35 who were injured, and providing a short explanation of the events of April 1941. This would allow future generations to understand that the Blitz was not something that happened just in Belfast during World War II. It reached Bangor and ordinary people paid the ultimate price.

Councillor Newman noted that Carnegie Library remained an important and much-loved community and education building. A memorial there would have a direct connection with the events of April 1941, and it could become a place of not only educational resource for future generations, but a place of remembrance. She advised that the Second World War and the Blitz continued to form an important part of children's education across the Borough and so a properly designed memorial could help bring that history to life by connecting what students learned with the experience of people who lived in their city.

Given that 85 years had passed, Councillor Wray proposed that very few people who experienced the Belfast Blitz and the Bangor bombings in 1941 were still with us and, with each passing year, the opportunity to capture and preserve those memories became less. Therefore, it was the right time to take action. She believed that Council officers should be asked to examine the feasibility, design, and cost of a memorial, with Carnegie Library and Ward Park among the locations to be considered. That would allow the Council to establish exactly what could be achieved and consult with relatives and the wider community to ensure that the memorial was historically accurate, appropriate and meaningful.

In conclusion, Councillor Newman advised that the War Memorial told people that lives were lost in the Second World War. The proposed memorial would tell people who those victims were, what happened to them and it would ensure that their connection to Bangor was never forgotten. She urged members to support the Motion because 85 years was long enough.

Councillor S Irvine thanked Councillor Wray and Councillor Newman for bringing a fantastic Notice of Motion to the Committee. He and Alderman McIlveen had brought a similar proposal to the Committee in 2025 for the UDR4. He advised that the Borough was steeped in military history.

Councillor W Irvine also thanked the two Councillors for bringing this important Motion forward. He expressed his strong support for the establishment of a permanent memorial to commemorate those who lost their lives in Bangor during the

1941 bombings. He also noted that, although Belfast suffered most of the death and destruction, many areas of Bangor were also affected. He agreed that it was important to honour the victims and to support the memorial as an important education piece, including the introduction of QR codes for educational purposes now that the technology was available, allowing people to interact with memorials through their smartphones.

Alderman McIlveen also thanked the proposer and seconder of the proposal and added that he was surprised that there was no memorial in place. He recalled a memorial at the Newtownards Cenotaph for the 13 soldiers killed in the Blitz at Newtownards Airfield. He remarked on the importance of remembrance for us, as a nation, to bring our history to life for children, such as his own, who had visited the Northern Ireland War Memorial. Alderman McIlveen concluded by confirming that he had no difficulty in supporting the Motion.

Alderman Brooks also welcomed the Notice of Motion and advised that he lived in Ashley where many of the bombs and incendiary devices hit. Fortunately, no serious fires broke out. Famously, local boys collected 12 tail fins from unexploded incendiaries. He added that he now lived two doors away from where the Gratton family had lived. The family had been sheltering from the attack in their bomb shelter when tragically it was hit by a high explosive bomb.

Councillor Wray thanked the members for their support and agreed with Alderman McIlveen in terms of the dignified and correct manner in which this country remembered, and the importance of that remembrance in ensuring that such tragedies never happened again.

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

10. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

No 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.

11. EXTENSION OF AGENCY WORKERS CONTRACTS

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

Council carried out a tendering exercise for the Provision of Agency Workers to Ards and North Down Borough Council in 2023. The contract was awarded for the two-year period 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2025 and included an option to extend for a further three x twelve month-periods, to be reviewed annually and subject to satisfactory performance.

In 2025, Council approved a twelve-month extension of the contract to 31 October 2026.

Following a satisfactory service review, Council was asked to approve the extension of the Agency Workers contracts with the companies ranked 1 and 2 in respect of each Lot until 31 October 2027.

The recommendation was that Council accede to the request.

The recommendation was adopted.

12. TENDER EXTENSION FOR EVENT SUPPORT SERVICES

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

A contract for the provision of Event Support Services was awarded on 18 October 2024 to ACK Productions for two years until 17 October 2026, with the option to extend for a further 3 x 12-month periods, to be reviewed annually.

Following a satisfactory service review, Council was asked to approve the extension of the Event Support Services contract with ACK Productions, for a further one-year period from 18 October 2026 to 17 October 2027.

The recommendation was that Council accede to the request.

The recommendation was adopted.

13. TENDER EXTENSION FOR PROVISION OF SIGNAGE AND FIXINGS

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

A contract for the Provision of Signage and Fixings was awarded on 22 November 2024 to (Lot 1) Beyond Signage and (Lot 2) PWS for two years until 21 November

2026, with the option to extend for a further 2 x 12-month periods, to be reviewed annually.

Following a satisfactory service review, Council was asked to approve the extension of the Provision of Signage and Fixings contract with (Lot 1) Beyond Signage and (Lot 2) PWS, for a further one-year period from 22 November 2026 to 21 November 2027.

The recommendation was that Council accede to the request.

The recommendation was adopted.

14. BUDGET STRATEGY FOR ESTIMATES 2027/28 (APPENDIX V)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

Council was asked to agree to the budget strategy for setting the 2027/28 budgets and district rates. This covers a review of the outturn for 2025/26, internal and external context, working budget assumptions, budget principles and a timetable.

The recommendation was that the budget strategy for setting the 2027/28 budgets and district rates be agreed.

The recommendation was adopted.

15. BALLYHOLME YACHT CLUB PROPOSALS (APPENDIX VI)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

Exemption: relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person
Council was asked to agree to a request that no future built development be permitted within an area of land adjacent to the proposed development of the new BYC complex.

The recommendation was that the request be acceded to and that consideration be given to registering this as a burden on the title of the subject land.

The recommendation was adopted.

16. WHITESPOTS – LAND ADJACENT TO SOMME CENTRE
(APPENDIX VII)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE
FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON
(INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)**

Council was asked to agree to acquire land for the development of Whitespots Country Park.

The recommendation was that the request be acceded to.

The recommendation was adopted.

17. WHITESPOTS – LAND ACQUISITION

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

This item was withdrawn from the agenda in advance of the meeting.

18. GREENWAY LAND AT COMBER
(APPENDIX VIII)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE
FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON
(INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)**

Council was asked to agree to a timeframe being issued to landowners in respect of land required for the Greenway.

The recommendation was that the request be acceded to.

The recommendation was adopted.

19. NORTH DOWN HOCKEY CLUB – REQUEST FOR LICENCE
(APPENDIX IX)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL
PRIVILEGE.**

Council was requested approve the request from North Down Hockey Club to renew the licence for the paths and shed subject to the terms and conditions.

The recommendation was that Council acceded to the request.

The recommendation was adopted.

20. COMBER REC FC – REQUEST FOR LICENCE
(APPENDIX X)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 5 – A CLAIM TO LEGAL PROFESSIONAL PRIVILEGE.

Council was asked to approve a retrospective request from Comber Rec FC for the gate they have installed between their grounds and Council Land at Comber Parkway.

The recommendation was that the request be acceded to.

The recommendation was adopted.

21. ABSENCE UPDATE Q1
(APPENDIX XI)

**** IN CONFIDENCE ****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

An update on the Council absence and action plan was provided.

The recommendation was that the report be noted.

The recommendation was adopted.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.06pm.

ITEM 8.4

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ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid (in person and via Zoom) meeting of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, and via Zoom, on Wednesday 9 September 2026 at 7.00pm.

Present:

In the Chair: Alderman Cummings

Alderman: Brooks (Zoom)

Councillors:	Ashe (Zoom, 7.22pm)	W Irvine
	Boyle (7.02pm)	Kerr (Zoom, 9.19pm)
	Chambers	McBurney
	Cochrane	McClean
	Douglas	McKee (Zoom)
	Hollywood	Moore
	S Irvine	Quinn

Other Elected Members in Attendance: Councillor Cathcart (Zoom) and Councillor Gilmour (Zoom)

Officers in Attendance: Director of Active and Healthy Communities (A Faulkner), Head of Community Services (A Barton), Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services (G Kinnear), Head of Leisure (A Cozzo) and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

Others in Attendance: Iain Greenway (NCLT), Simon Boyle (NCLT) and Padraic Murphy (S3 Solutions)

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies received.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Chambers – Item 3 – Deputation NCLT

Councillor W Irvine – Item 3 – Deputation NCLT (declared he was a Council representative of NCLT Board but intended to remain in the meeting throughout the deputation)

(Councillor Boyle entered the Council Chamber – 7.02pm)

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION – NORTHERN COMMUNITY LEISURE TRUST

(Appendix I)

(Councillor Chambers withdrew from the meeting having declared an interest in Item 3 – 7.02pm)

The Chair welcomed representatives of the Northern Community Leisure Trust (Iain Greenway, Chair, and Simon Boyle, a Trust member) to the meeting and invited them to address the Committee.

Their address was summarised as follows:

- The deputation was to update the Committee on the Trust's work over the past year and on its direction for the year ahead.
- The Trust was a not-for-profit Registered Society with two Council representatives appointed by the Council, Councillor W Irvine and Councillor McCracken, and was contracted to provide leisure services in North Down from 2013 to 2028.
- It had appointed Serco Leisure to provide those services, but all staff working in Queen's Leisure Complex, Bangor Sportsplex and Aurora were employed by the Trust. It was not a commercial entity and was not SERCO.
- As a not-for-profit body it could apply for grants and become involved in community activities, which was how social value was delivered.
- It was strongly connected to the Council and to delivery of the Leisure Strategy, which was about much more than running leisure centres and ran across the Borough through two different delivery methods.
- The motion agreed in September 2025 set out how leisure services would be delivered post-2028 and contained three commitments: greater mutual access to services, an audit and plan for capital improvements and maintenance, and comparable metrics.
- The Trust's view, put to party group leaders at a meeting in September 2025, was that if those things were good for post-2028 they were good for now and should not wait until 2028 or any other arbitrary date.
- The Trust worked closely with the team in Ards to deliver the best services for citizens and ratepayers, which included learning from each other. Each did some things better, and best value came from putting pathways in place so that people travelled in either direction to access what was excellent in one centre.

- The Five Centre Membership approved by the Committee and Council was an early example.
- Social value generated in 2025/26 stood at £4.88m, a growth of 25%, measured against a UK-wide standard now being adopted across organisations to drive improvement.
- Visits stood at 954,833, again up on the previous year.
- Particularly pleasing were the inclusion measures, with 12,506 Active Ageing participations, a growth of 46%, and 1,192 disability participations, a growth of 53%.
- There were good results in QUEST, covering health and safety and compliance, and performance improvements and control in the food, pool and technical audits, which stood at 98%.
- A greater focus had been placed on grant income and a part-time post created to pursue this, which had been very successful with limited resources.
- A £1,000 Power NI Brighter Communities grant had funded an eight-week programme for young people aged 12 to 15 from disadvantaged areas of North Down, and an Arts Council grant of £3,150 had funded a 10-week Celebration of Dance and Art bringing local artists and older people together.
- The key performance indicators had been reviewed for the coming year and grouped into five pillars, with social value central and further pillars covering customer experience, operational excellence, participation and fit for the future.
- A primary indicator sat under each, the aim being balance rather than driving one element over another, delivering good cost control while maintaining a positive customer experience and delivering social value.
- The Trust was actively enthusiastic about doing more cross Borough working.
- There was clear excellence in gymnastics in Ards and no reason to compete with it - feeder and beginners programmes would continue in both centres and the question was how North Down could feed those showing interest and ability into Ards.
- Equally, with the diving pool working again, there was scope for people from Ards to be signposted to use that facility.
- A pilot sport was to be identified within the Leisure Strategy and the Trust was keen to work with Ards on whichever sport the Strategy Implementation Group selected.

- All four main leisure centres went through the same QUEST process at different levels for their scale and there was learning to share across them, as there was from Lynxight at Bangor - an AI assisted support system to lifeguards, and from key performance indicators and social value measurement.
- The Trust also had access to Serco Leisure's expertise across a wide range of national facilities.
- Technical and parks issues had persisted since Aurora was built in 2013, including roof and tanking leaks and water entering the Swim Ulster offices, and similar issues affected both the grass and artificial pitches, ISSUES which the Trust understood was not confined to its own facilities.
- There had been real improvement since the current Director and officers came into post, though a sense of a slump over the summer which it was hoped would now lift with schools back, as those issues were getting in the way of delivery for citizens.
- The 2025 motion had committed the Council to an audit and plan for capital improvements and maintenance, and the Trust awaited the opportunity to participate and contribute its expertise.
- In summary, the Borough had the best of both worlds in in-house and contracted-out delivery, with much to be learned across the two, and the Trust was keen to work across them. It believed it was delivering a high-quality performance and could still do more, and its annual report would be issued to each councillor.

The Chair thanked the deputation and invited questions from Members.

Councillor Boyle explained his long standing preference for a single in-house sporting model. He agreed that the Borough was stronger together but at times it appeared that the leisure centres were operating in two different boroughs.

He questioned the geographical coverage of NCLT's marketing, and if they intended to expand it beyond Bangor and Holywood. He also queried the Trust's vision and its plans to become part of the whole Borough rather than being focused primarily on one part of it.

In response, Mr Greenway explained that discussions had been taking place with the Director of Active and Healthy Communities about communication channels and sharing material. There was nowhere else in these islands with two centres of that magnitude within six miles of each other and more should be made of that, but without appearing to trample on the Council or confuse people with the messaging.

Councillor W Irvine noted that for a centre to work effectively all of its facilities needed to be working all of the time, and that issues had been raised about the 3G pitch not achieving the lifespan it should. He felt the internal workings between the

Council and the Trust could be improved, and asked about opening up the Trust to enable as wide a group of people as possible to become part of the leisure process.

Mr Simon Boyle believed that access to capital grants often appeared easier than securing an ongoing maintenance budget but that it was now introducing visual standards audits as a key performance indicator, scoring the appearance of facilities monthly and improving on the back of that.

(Councillor Ashe joined the meeting remotely – 7.22pm)

Where the standard was right, the maintenance requirement fell over time, as those areas were treated better, and the Trust was driving that approach across all facilities.

Mr Greenway advised that non-elected members of the Trust were nominated through an open call, and a further call was due shortly for Queen's Leisure Complex, where the Trust no longer had a member actively involved.

In terms of pitches, Bangor FC had installed their 3G pitch a year before the Aurora pitch and a comparison showed which looked older.

The Council's de-compacting machine for 3G pitches was based in Ards and did not travel up the A21 to service the North Down pitches, which was frustrating, as the matting had to be lifted before it became too compacted.

The Chair thanked Mr Greenway and Mr Boyle for their presentation. He appreciated the distinction drawn at the outset between the operator and the Trust itself, and the emphasis on social value, which ran to the core of what everyone was trying to achieve.

(Mr Greenway and Mr Boyle returned to the public gallery – 7.24pm)

(Councillor Chambers returned to the Council Chamber – 7.24pm)

NOTED.

4. COMMUNITY STRATEGY (FILE REF: CDV58)

(Appendix II – V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Council had commenced the development of a Community Strategy for the Borough in June 2025.

Following a procurement process, Sector 3 Solutions was appointed in July 2025 to undertake the development of the Strategy and supporting evidence base. As part of this process, an extensive programme of engagement and research was undertaken to assess current community services provision, community development activity and the operation of Council-owned community centres and halls.

The consultation and engagement programme included:

- 14 public drop-in engagement sessions.
- 6 semi-structured focus groups.
- 2 online surveys.
- 25 stakeholder interviews.

This work resulted in the production of three interrelated documents:

- Building Stronger Communities Together: Community Strategy 2026-2035.
- Review of Community Development Direct Provision.
- Review of Community Centres and Halls Provision and Operating Models.

The Community Strategy provided the overarching strategic framework for Community Services over the next ten years, while the two review documents provided the evidence base, analysis and recommendations which informed the Strategy and accompanying three-year Action Plan. Together, the documents established a clear line of sight from consultation and research through to strategic priorities and future actions.

The Community Strategy, Building Stronger Communities Together: Community Strategy 2026-2035, set out Council's long-term vision for Community Services and aimed to improve wellbeing through social inclusion, reduce inequality and ensure equitable access to community services and facilities across the Borough.

The Strategy vision was:

To improve wellbeing through social inclusion and reduced inequality and to ensure that all people have equitable access to community services.

The Strategy mission was:

To connect communities by working in partnership to provide accessible, inclusive and sustainable community services and welcoming community spaces that improve wellbeing, build local capacity and enable people to thrive.

To achieve this, five strategic themes had been identified:

- Strengthen our Connections to Communities.
- Improve Access to Existing Community Services and Opportunities for All.
- Develop a Sustainable, Skilled and Empowered Community Sector.
- Improve Partnership, Collaboration and Whole-System Working.
- Create a Fit-for-Purpose Community Centres and Halls Estate.

Community Strategy

The Community Strategy 2026-2035 established Council's strategic direction for Community Services over the next decade. Consultation highlighted a range of challenges including declining volunteer capacity, funding pressures, increasing operating costs, uneven awareness of Council services and facilities, and the need for more consistent access to support across the Borough. The Strategy provided a

framework to address these issues through improved partnership working, service accessibility, community capacity building and sustainable service delivery.

Review of Community Centres and Halls Provision and Operating Models

The review confirmed that community centres and halls were important community assets which contributed significantly to health, wellbeing, inclusion and local community development. The review identified opportunities to improve marketing, awareness, booking systems, performance monitoring, accessibility, maintenance planning and utilisation of facilities. The long-term ambition was to develop centres as inclusive community wellbeing hubs which responded to local need and maximised community benefit.

Review of Community Development Direct Provision

The review found that Community Development Direct Provision delivered significant value for local communities and contributed positively to prevention, inclusion and wellbeing. However, pressures relating to ageing demographics, rural accessibility, social isolation, volunteer recruitment and financial sustainability were identified. The review recommended that future provision should be evidence-led, targeted towards need and focused on achieving measurable outcomes for residents.

Subject to Council approval, the Community Strategy and Three-Year Action Plan would move into implementation. Key actions would include:

- Establishment of a Community Strategy Implementation Group to oversee delivery, monitor progress and coordinate activity across Community Services and relevant partners.
- Development of annual delivery plans and performance measures aligned to the Strategy's five strategic themes.
- Delivery of priority actions within the Three-Year Action Plan.
- Progression of the recommendations arising from the Community Centres and Halls Review, including improvements to promotion, booking systems, performance monitoring, trusted-user arrangements and partnership opportunities.
- Progression of recommendations arising from the Community Development Direct Provision Review to ensure services are targeted, evidence-led and focused on improving wellbeing outcomes.
- Strengthening partnership working with statutory, community and voluntary sector organisations to maximise resources and improve service delivery.
- Development of a comprehensive communications programme to increase awareness of community services, facilities, grants and support opportunities across the Borough.
- Identification and pursuit of external funding and investment opportunities to support implementation of priority actions.
- Regular monitoring and reporting to Members on progress against the Community Strategy and Three-Year Action Plan.

The Implementation Group would review progress annually and oversee the formal review of the Three-Year Action Plan to ensure delivery remained aligned to emerging community needs and Council priorities.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves Building Stronger Communities Together: Community Strategy 2026-2035; the Review of Community Development Direct Provision and the Review of Community Centres and Halls Provision and Operating Models.

The Chair invited Mr Padraic Murphy of S3 Solutions to give Members an overview of the strategy.

His presentation was summarised as follows:

S3 Solutions, an independent consultancy, had been commissioned to formulate the Community Strategy for the next 10 years, and had also undertaken a review of community development provision and of community centres and halls provision.

Phase 1 engagement had taken place in October and November 2025 with seven walk-in sessions across the District Electoral Areas, together with an online survey attracting 233 respondents, roughly half from the community and voluntary sector and half from the wider public. Actions developed from that had been tested with the community at a second engagement in March 2026.

The key emerging themes were that grant awards for running costs were reducing year on year as more groups reapplied. There was increasing pressure and competition to draw down external funding, which in turn discouraged collaboration as associations felt they received a smaller share; that experienced staff were not being retained because of fixed-term contracts; and that there had been a decline in volunteerism, with concern about the age profile of volunteers.

Consultation also identified a desire for more visible connections between residents and Council services through existing networks and forums, for equity in community development support across the Borough and particularly in rural areas, and for more initiatives based on social connection and wellbeing, with emphasis on young people, older teenagers, older people, people with disabilities, women and girls affected by domestic abuse, and people from areas of social deprivation.

There was low awareness of the community centres and halls offer and its potential, with little knowledge of what took place in the halls. Feedback indicated that the halls were treated as venue hire rather than active hubs as in the past, and that booking systems were too long with no online option.

The strategy was built around five themes: strengthening connections to communities; improving access to existing community development opportunities for all; developing a sustainable, skilled and empowered community sector; improving partnership, collaboration and whole-system working; and creating a fit-for-purpose community centres and halls estate. Theme 4 in particular reflected that this was a Council-informed and led strategy but a whole-system strategy for the Borough, with the Council as driver of a multi-agency approach.

Actions under those themes included a communications plan to raise awareness of the offer, inclusive participation across a broad range of ages, building on the existing community development toolkit and a mapping exercise to inform additional support, delivery of grant funding in line with the Council's grants policy with possible consideration of a tiered system based on the size of a group or its ownership of a facility, support to access external funding, and support for volunteer awareness, training and retention. Summer schemes, playgroups and over-50s provision had received very positive feedback.

On the halls review, benchmarking against the other nine council areas showed the Borough's halls to be very competitive on price, with scope to price per facility rather than on a flat basis, and commercial hire significantly lower than elsewhere. Further work was needed on opening hours, including whether halls should open on bank and public holidays and the staffing and remuneration implications.

Booking data showed a wide range of hours available across the estate, as each centre contained a number of different hall offers. Usage among the busiest six ranged from 42% to 21%, and the subvention required to keep the twenty-hall estate running was approximately £800,000 a year. Subvention was normal across all councils, as the purpose of the halls was to provide a service to residents rather than to generate income, but there was disparity between centres in the ratio of income to expenditure.

Provisional recommendations had been prepared for each centre and were set out in the report, ranging from retention as a community service to a licence or lease agreement, a service level agreement, community asset transfer, transfer to another Council department or examination of a development opportunity. Mr Murphy stressed that these were first-cut recommendations and discussion points which would need to be teased out further, alongside further scrutiny of the financial detail provided by Council.

(Councillor Boyle left the Council Chamber – 7.42pm)

On delivery, the report recommended a Community Strategy Implementation Group to oversee delivery and monitor progress against the performance measures aligned to the five themes, together with annual delivery planning and the delivery of priority actions identified in a three-year action plan. Priorities for the halls were promotion, improved utilisation and an improved online booking system, and for direct provision, targeted and evidence-led services, strengthened partnership working, a communications programme and the pursuit of external funding and investment, including potential engagement with the Department for Communities.

(Councillor Boyle returned to the Council Chamber - 7.43 pm)

The Chair invited questions from the Committee and Councillor Hollywood explained that he was broadly supportive and welcomed that Redburn Community Centre was so well used and recommended for retention.

He noted that the strategy aimed to improve equitable access, retain accessible community spaces and ensure that future provision was evidence-led. He asked whether the potential loss of existing community provision at Queen's Hall, arising from the proposed innovation hub, had been factored into the strategy and the assessment of provision in Holywood.

Responding, Mr Murphy confirmed that it had, and that Redburn was one of the key halls recommended to be retained, with recommendations linking to the Community Development Strategy and the Leisure Strategy which could increase Council interventions there in terms of programming.

The Chair sought a proposal but Councillor McClean felt that this was an enormous and very well put together report running to some 200 pages which would set the direction of travel for the next 10 years. He and probably other Members would have many questions so the preference was for a fulsome debate and as many questions as possible before Members gave direction.

There were a number of points in the report stating that the Council would decide, check or review a matter and therefore felt Members were not in a position to be signing off something running for 10 years.

The Chair acknowledged the volume of content and the questions it would generate. This was the first step in the process and it was advisable to take questions and get a feel for the report before a proposal was made.

Councillor Chambers was glad that neither Groomsport nor Donaghadee had made the list of seven centres prioritised for change, but noted that a range of options was applied to them in terms of the future operating model, including retention, a licence or lease, or a service level agreement.

He was intrigued by the reference to introducing new activities or piloting a leisure activity and would be interested to hear residents' views. He would also like to see the boathouse better utilised, as there were long quiet lulls despite it being above the Council average. He asked when decisions would be expected on the future operating models, particularly at Groomsport and Donaghadee, and whether activities would be trialled before any decision on the model was reached. He also asked how the public would be engaged in that process.

The Director advised that the timeline for beginning to implement the actions was the next three years, but that it was a high-level action plan and officers would need to establish the priorities within it in consultation with elected Members and service users. There was no specific timeline for individual actions and no certainty that every recommendation would be carried out, as further consultation would be required.

Councillor Chambers felt it important that residents and the wider population were consulted rather than Members alone, and that Members needed to establish why there was under-utilisation of centres across the Borough. The Director confirmed that there would be community consultation with existing and prospective users, advising that the report referred to internal and external stakeholders.

Councillor McBurney queried if the Council planned to strengthen volunteer recruitment and its planned role in volunteer retention and recognition.

She wondered if additional funding or resources would be provided to enable community development organisations to develop their own volunteer training, or whether the Council would look to the likes of Volunteer NI.

The Head of Community Services advised that volunteer recruitment had been identified in the review and that Volunteer NI had been approached. The aim was to strengthen the resilience of groups through training and support so that people would take up posts.

The Director added that volunteering across the Council was recognised and there was an understanding that the volunteering demographic was ageing, so a volunteering strategy was being developed across the board, working with existing groups, developing new ones and getting young people involved.

(Councillor Hollywood left the meeting at 7.54 pm)

In a further query, Councillor McBurney noted that community development was widely recognised as a lever in preventing poverty and that the Council had agreed a Notice of Motion seeking to strengthen its contribution to poverty alleviation, she asked how implementation of the strategy and the three-year action plan would align with any future anti-poverty strategy. The Head of Community Services advised that this approach sat within the strategy under community planning, with improved access to services and reduced social isolation contributing to it. Any plan would be developed by the Council and its partners and officers would ensure the priorities were reflected and supported.

(Councillor Hollywood returned to the meeting at 7.57 pm)

Councillor Moore noted that the Council could not deliver without working with communities and, referring to theme 4 and the implementation group, asked what the structure and make-up of that group would be and how that could be embedded in the delivery.

The Director advised that the initial thinking was for an internal Council group as an umbrella, with different groups underneath it feeding community input across the Council. Terms of reference had yet to be developed and there was an opportunity to consider how it would operate with the groups being used to feed into the themes of the strategy.

Councillor McClean felt that the issue at its heart was that Members were being asked to agree a 10-year strategy together with two reviews which would have implications for how the Council delivered, and that was messy. The minutes would read that the Committee had endorsed all the recommendations in the two reports, which was hasty. He could agree the 10-year strategy but felt Members needed time to look over the reviews.

The cover report stated that there were no cost or resource implications, which he did not accept when the proposals included new resources such as installing a booking system and establishing an implementation group for example. He also felt the Council was relying repeatedly on incredible work being done for free by volunteers with no concrete help provided to them until 2028. The Council did not want to lose the volunteers doing that work. He would therefore be content for the 10-year strategy to be approved with the two subsequent reports noted.

Councillor McKee sought clarity on what the report was asking of Members at this stage. He was not comfortable making a decision on the future of the estate without knowing what was being signed up to, noting that the Council had allowed some assets to become run down and had then used that condition as evidence to justify selling them off.

He felt that nuance had been lost in the information presented and he was worried about the lack of consultation with the community in the actions proposed. He would not want to sign off decisions which changed the status of assets without the engagement required with users.

The Director advised that the report and the reviews by S3 Solutions were being presented as the consultant's recommendations and were for discussion. The recommendations in relation to community halls were for the Council to consider, scrutinise and prioritise itself. The intention was to look at the recommendations further and any decisions on assets would be taken following consultation.

Councillor Boyle felt that Councillor McClean and Councillor McKee had made good points, and felt any decision taken by the Committee would be questioned by the full Council.

He believed it was more appropriate for the newly elected Council in 2027 to make the decision next year. While he was not happy to sign it off and had reservations, he was happy to work through parts of it, noting that some centres were not affected at all and that there was a wide scope of people the Council needed to get this right for.

Councillor W Irvine felt it was a lot to ask and that, with the community practitioners forum upcoming in his own area, it made sense to take the reviews step by step and hold a full Member workshop, as many Members would have questions about the centre in their own District Electoral Area.

The Council had been struck with a low budget from the Assembly which had affected what could be given out for community use, and groups had fed back that they were being asked to do more with less. He also noted that Skipperstone Community Centre was without a Community Association at present and that made consultation difficult. He also noted that some areas did not have strong community representation so wondered if establishing a specific group would assist that consultation process.

Alderman Brooks wondered if a special meeting would be possible, explaining his own concerns and noting that he had been at the Corporate Services Committee the

previous day where the Director had advised that big decisions would be taken with the new Council.

The Director stated that whilst it was possible, a special committee meeting would exclude other elected colleagues from participating, and suggested an alternative would be a workshop for all Members. There was also the option of deferring the decision to the new Council in 2027, or of approving the strategy tonight at Committee with further work to be undertaken on the other two documents.

Councillor S Irvine felt a special committee meeting would be better, followed if necessary by a workshop though Alderman Brooks had no issue with a workshop and felt it was the more sensible first step. He felt a special committee would be appropriate when it came to making decisions to allow debate on each point following consultation.

The Director advised that there would be many decisions in relation to the community halls as the recommendations progressed, taken hall by hall and all brought back to Committee. It was unlikely that a single report would set out the approach to every hall at the same time. There would have to be prioritisation because of officer resources, so the halls would be dealt with in phases.

The Chair noted that there were clearly a lot of questions and a great deal of consultation still to take place, and that he accepted that the officers recommendation before Members would not run that evening. He set out the options raised by the Director and again sought a proposal.

Councillor Boyle sought clarity on the urgency of the matter, and the Director advised that the decision was not urgent. The report had come forward because the consultant had completed the work and Members had been waiting for it. It had originally been anticipated for the March committee but there had been delays relating to wider community consultation and changes in personnel in the team.

Councillor Boyle asked whether it could therefore be deferred to the new Council, and at what pace the matter would move over the following months, noting that there would be no committees in April, May or June and that March was the cut-off. He was not comfortable rushing the strategy to have a box ticked by March if he was not satisfied it was a good job, and the Council would then be dealing with half a new Membership which had not been party to the discussion. He felt it would be better dealt with by a council which would be in place for four years rather than by Members who would be there for only a few months.

The Chair invited a proposal but none was forthcoming. He accepted this as an indication that the Committee would prefer to revisit the issue at a later date.

ITEM FELL.

5. **CONSULTATION RESPONSE – FLAGS AND EMBLEMS BILL** **(FILE REF: CW183)**

(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Committee for Infrastructure was seeking views on the Display of Flags and Emblems Bill.

Under the Assembly's usual legislative process, the Display of Flags and Emblems Bill would only be subject to detailed scrutiny by the Committee for Infrastructure if it passed Second Stage. However, in anticipation of that, the Committee was inviting views on the Bill's objectives, proposals and potential impacts. Should the Bill proceed to Committee Stage, this evidence would help inform the Committee's detailed consideration.

Relevant links on the Bill and submission responses were provided within the report.

Need for Clear Definitions: Clarify key terms and decision-making criteria to ensure consistent application of the legislation.

Council Involvement: Establish a clear role for local councils in consultation, community engagement and decisions affecting council assets and public spaces.

Robust Code of Practice: The success of the Bill would depend on detailed guidance covering display, consultation, removal processes and implementation arrangements.

Balancing Rights: Ensure the legislation appropriately balances cultural expression with the need for shared, inclusive and non-intimidating public spaces.

Transparent Processes: Notification, consultation and complaints procedures must be accessible, fair and transparent.

Proportionate Enforcement: Removal powers should be supported by engagement, mediation and clear operational procedures.

Partnership Working: Effective coordination between the Department, councils and PSNI would be essential for implementation.

Resource Considerations: Potential staffing, training and financial implications required further assessment.

On approval from members to submit responses from Council on clauses by closing date of 17 September 2026, outlining that this was subject to Council ratification.

Council supported the overall objective of the Display of Flags and Emblems Bill, particularly its focus on reducing intimidation and promoting inclusive shared spaces. However, the Council highlighted a number of key issues requiring further scrutiny: clarity of definitions and decision-making criteria; detailed and practical guidance through the proposed Code of Practice; safeguards around the notification portal; proportional and community-based enforcement arrangements; clear protocols involving the PSNI; consideration of resource implications; and ensuring an

appropriate balance between cultural expression, human rights, equality duties and public confidence in the legislation.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves response submission to Department of Infrastructure.

Councillor Cochrane proposed, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the Council does not submit a corporate response and that the matter be left to individual parties and Members to respond.

Proposing, Councillor Cochrane said he did not believe it appropriate for the Council to submit a corporate response, as the Bill had nothing to do with Ards and North Down Borough Council. It gave the Council no new role in removing flags or regulating emblems. The proposed powers sat with the Department for Infrastructure, with the PSNI involved where appropriate, and the Council had no substantive statutory function in delivering what the legislation proposed.

Individual councillors and political parties were entitled to a view and the Assembly was entitled to debate the legislation, but that did not mean Council officers should spend much-needed time and resources preparing corporate political responses on a matter outside the Council's remit. Resources were finite and there were plenty of genuine local issues which were the Council's responsibility.

Councillor Cochrane disagreed with Alliance Party views in the Assembly, that suggested without the legislation there was no ability to deal with harmful or problematic flags, which he argued was not the case. The Department already had powers in relation to unauthorised attachments to its infrastructure, and where there were issues of criminality, intimidation, public disorder or criminal damage associated with a proscribed organisation there were existing legal powers available to the PSNI.

He questioned who would fund the proposals, given the extent of the Department's existing problems with wastewater infrastructure and the roads network, and whether it would be the sole arbiter of what was or was not acceptable, and he felt the legislation could be used as a tool to discriminate against one culture or tradition.

Councillor W Irvine concurred. Flags and emblems was a particularly thorny issue and he suspected the Committee would not reach an agreement on it. History and culture were complicated and both British and Irish identities were realities, that did not require the disappearance of identity but required people to tolerate the peaceful expression of identities and the aim should be mutual respect rather than enforced cultural uniformity. The consultation also raised issues of territorial marking. Rather than enter a lengthy debate, he felt it right that individual parties and individuals made their own responses, and that it was for the Department and the Assembly to bring forward the rules.

Councillor Moore could not support the proposal. There was no reason why the Council could not respond as well as individual parties, and she thanked officers for a considered and practical response. She supported the principle of the Bill, to which her party colleague Paula Bradshaw MLA was responding, and it was the main issue

in her inbox in the run-up to May, June and July. Other parties might consider why they did not receive the same volume of correspondence.

Residents were very concerned about the proliferation of flags, territorial marking and the impact on how communities felt. This was not about preventing legitimate cultural expression but about recognising that public and shared spaces should belong to everyone, and that displays associated with intimidation, territorial control or proscribed organisations had a very different effect from genuine cultural expression and celebration.

Councillor Moore added that Northern Ireland was not reduced to two communities. Society was much more complex and many people did not identify with reductive emblems. Everyone should be uncomfortable with territorial marking in public spaces and should welcome communities being empowered to speak out. She welcomed the Council's support for a clear statutory framework, particularly around schools, leisure centres, libraries, parks and other shared spaces, and did not accept that the existing framework was sufficient or being implemented.

Councils provided many of the facilities which brought people together and it made sense that they were properly involved in developing the code of practice and in decisions affecting Council-owned or managed spaces. She recognised the questions raised on equality, cost and implementation as fair, but noted that the Equality Commission had been consulted before the Bill was introduced and identified no potential adverse equality impacts, and that the financial implications had been considered. The code of practice would be crucial and her party wished it to be robust and informed by the cross-party Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition process.

Councillor Boyle was stepping back and would not become involved in the 2027 election spats between the DUP and Alliance groupings.

He had driven up from Portaferry that evening and noticed that, four months on, flags remained in place throughout the area and they were no longer flags but rags, and he questioned how much pride there was in that. He was not opposed to flags or to anyone's culture, but it would be hypocritical of the Council to support the report when it would not have the courage to implement what followed from it, and there were many aspects on which it would have to perform a U-turn.

He felt it was a good and common-sense report which Northern Ireland needed to wake up to in order to move on from structures in which nothing ever changed. He did not have flags where he lived and wished the whole Borough could be the same, and he would therefore not be supporting the proposal.

Councillor Chambers asked why, when the Council was invited to make a consultation response, the matter was not brought to the Committee before the response was prepared, rather than officers carrying out the work only for it to be rejected.

The Director advised that this was due to timing of consultations, which usually allowed an eight or twelve week response period. To bring the question to

Committee, then to Council for ratification, then for the officer to prepare the response and bring it back would be very difficult within twelve weeks.

Councillor Chambers asked whether it could be brought directly to a full Council meeting rather than through Committee.

The Director advised that some could be if the timing worked, but a consultation might be received only four weeks before the next Council meeting. All consultation responses came to the Corporate Leadership Team and were allocated to the relevant Head of Service, who worked with the other Heads of Service to determine whether the Council was a stakeholder. In this instance the response focused on clarity as to the Council's role rather than on anything else.

Councillor Chambers thanked the Director but felt it a shame that in some cases there was a good deal of unnecessary work and effort by officers.

On being put to the meeting, with 9 voting FOR, 6 AGAINST, 0 ABSTENTIONS and 1 ABSENT, the proposal was declared CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cochrane, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the Council does not submit a corporate response to the consultation on the Display of Flags and Emblems Bill, and that the matter be left to individual parties and Members to respond.

6. FOOD CONTROL SERVICE PLAN 2026-2027 UPDATE (Appendix VII)

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 Control Service Plan 26/27 was first reported to Council in June, when the decision on whether to approve the plan was deferred until a response was made 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?

Response

The Council could not provide a blanket assurance that no enforcement action would be taken in relation to goods coming from Great Britain, as any enforcement decision had to be based on the relevant food law requirements applicable in Northern Ireland and the specific circumstances of any identified non-compliance. Authorised officers were required to discharge their statutory duties in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice (Northern Ireland), which required enforcement activity to be proportionate, consistent, risk-based and evidence-led.

The origin of a product was not, in itself, a determining factor in enforcement decisions. Any action would relate to identified non-compliance with legal requirements applicable to food placed on the market in Northern Ireland, particularly where there was a risk to consumers or where significant regulatory requirements had not been met. Enforcement action, where considered necessary, would therefore be directed at the nature and seriousness of the non-compliance rather than the fact that goods had been sourced from, or moved through, Great Britain.

While regulatory divergence existed in some areas because Northern Ireland continued to apply certain EU goods legislation under the Windsor Framework, the

legal position was complex and products moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland might be subject to specific arrangements that permitted their lawful sale in Northern Ireland. Whether enforcement action was appropriate would therefore depend on the particular product, the applicable legal requirements and the circumstances of the case.

The Council's food safety service was delivered in accordance with the Food Safety (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was domestic Northern Ireland legislation and provided the primary framework for food law enforcement in Northern Ireland. The Order was broadly equivalent to the Food Safety Act 1990, which applied in Great Britain, and both provided a similar basis for food law enforcement across the United Kingdom. Food Service Plans were a standard feature of food regulatory arrangements across the United Kingdom and were not unique to Northern Ireland.

Should the Food Control Service Plan be approved, 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'.

The report also provided clarification regarding the legislative framework governing food controls in Northern Ireland and the scope of enforcement activity delivered under the Plan. 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 26/27, attached as Appendix 1.

Councillor Moore proposed, seconded by Alderman Brooks, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Cochrane appreciated the work undertaken by officers but was unable to support the recommendation. His Party felt it was tied too closely to the Windsor Framework regulations and it would not have been possible for him to bring an amendment that evening. He noted that if the plan was not approved it would have no operational impact on food standards, but he was unable to support it.

On being put to the meeting, with 7 voting FOR, 6 voting AGAINST, 2 ABSTENTIONS and 1 ABSENT, the proposal was CARRIED.

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

7. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 671 – PUBLIC CONSULTATION FINDINGS (FILE REF: NOM671) (Appendix VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that a Notice of Motion relating to Responsible Dog Walking in Public Spaces was adopted at the Environment Committee Meeting in September 2025.

It stated that the Council, as a Dog Friendly Borough, recognised the need to balance animal welfare, public safety, and shared use of parks and footpaths. It raised concerns about individuals walking multiple dogs, the rise of unlicensed professional dog walkers without insurance, and the associated risks to people and pets. It noted that other councils, including Belfast City Council, had introduced limits on the number of dogs walked at one time and suggested similar measures be considered. More specifically, the Notice of Motion proposed that the Council resolves to:

- 1. Produce a report outlining the costs and steps required to introduce a local restriction under the relevant provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environments Act (Northern Ireland) 2011: Limiting the number of dogs that any one person may be in charge of to a maximum of four at any given time in public spaces.
- 2. Mandating that professional dog walkers must have dogs on leads at all times to ensure dog control and accountability for dog behaviours.
- 3. Include in the report, the provision and cost of a complementary public education campaign, to inform residents, recreational and professional dog walkers about the new limit, about what it means to have a dog under your

control in public spaces (whether on or off lead), and what promoting responsible dog control and safety in shared spaces should be.

- 4. To write to the DAERA Minister to ask him to introduce, and provide funding support to Councils to enforce, mandatory registration of professional dog walkers to help to ensure suitable animal welfare standards, the provision of suitable training, experience, insurance, and public safety.

Subsequently, reports were brought to the January and March 2026 meetings of this Committee. Following the March meeting, it was agreed to proceed with carrying out a consultation to assess public opinion, with a range of options on what a future Dog Control Order (DCO) might look like. Additionally, it was agreed that officers bring a report on options for a responsible dog ownership and dog control education campaign. In May 2026, members approved the consultation document prepared by officers.

Following approval of the consultation document, officers undertook a public consultation exercise to seek views on the proposed approach and to inform the Council's consideration of any future Dog Control Order. Members were advised that the consultation was publicised through the Council's social media channels and website and was also advertised in local newspapers on two occasions to encourage public awareness and participation. The survey could be completed using an online form, with responses also accepted by email or by letter.

The public consultation was undertaken between 1 June and 5 July 2026 to seek views on a proposal to introduce a maximum limit of four dogs per person when walking dogs in public spaces across Ards and North Down. A total of 465 responses were received. A detailed summary of the consultation findings was attached as Appendix 1, with the main points highlighted below.

The majority of respondents (85%) indicated that they walked dogs within the Borough, with most respondents (78%) typically walking one or two dogs at any one time. 7% reported walking five or more dogs simultaneously.

Overall, the proposal to limit the number of dogs walked received more opposition than support. 69% of respondents either opposed or strongly opposed the proposed four-dog limit, while 29% supported or strongly supported it and 2% expressed a neutral view.

Those opposed to the proposal generally questioned whether a numerical limit would effectively address the issues identified. Common concerns included the potential impact on professional dog walking businesses, a perceived lack of evidence demonstrating a significant problem, and a view that existing dog control measures and enforcement should be prioritised. Many respondents stated that irresponsible ownership, dogs being off-lead, and dog fouling were more significant concerns than the number of dogs being walked. It should be noted that the Council had not received any complaints to date regarding an individual walking excessive numbers of dogs, or more generally the actions or practices of professional dog walkers.

Key arguments in support of the proposal centred on concerns regarding public safety, dog control, dog fouling, impacts on wildlife, and the difficulties associated

with managing larger groups of dogs in shared public spaces. Respondents supporting the proposal frequently highlighted experiences involving uncontrolled dogs, intimidation of other users of parks and beaches, and concerns about interactions with children, cyclists and other dog owners.

When asked whether an alternative limit would be more appropriate, 49% agreed. Among those who provided an alternative figure, six dogs was the most frequently selected option, accounting for 48% of responses to that question. Many respondents referenced industry practice and insurance arrangements for professional dog walkers, which commonly permitted up to six dogs.

Views on safety were mixed. While 42% of respondents felt that walking multiple dogs increased risks relating to dog control and public safety, 57% did not agree. Similarly, 61% did not believe that introducing a four-dog limit would improve safety or encourage more responsible dog handling in public spaces.

Responses from professional dog walkers indicated that the proposal could have a significant operational impact. Of those who identified as professional dog walkers and answered the relevant question, 67% currently walked more than four dogs at one time and would therefore be directly affected by the proposed restriction. More than three-quarters indicated that the proposal would have some or a significant impact on their business or daily routine.

If restrictions were introduced, 63% of respondents favoured limiting them to specific locations rather than applying them across all public spaces, with town centres identified as the most suitable areas for inclusion. A further 67% supported the availability of exemptions, particularly for assistance dogs, working dogs and multiple dogs from the same household.

The consultation also identified wider concerns relating to dog management within the Borough. Recurring themes included dog fouling, dogs being off-lead in inappropriate locations, discarded dog waste bags, the need for additional enforcement activity and dog wardens, and requests for more litter and dog waste bins in identified hotspot locations.

The consultation indicated limited support for the introduction of a universal four-dog limit in public spaces. A majority of respondents opposed or strongly opposed the proposal, and most did not consider that introducing such a limit would improve safety or responsible dog handling. On the basis of the consultation responses, and taking account of the absence of complaints received to date regarding excessive numbers of dogs being walked, the evidence available at this stage did not indicate a clear need for a Borough-wide numerical restriction.

It should also be recognised that responses to a number of later survey questions related to the potential design and implementation of a restriction, rather than indicating support for its introduction. Some respondents further commented that an explicit option to oppose the introduction of additional controls would have better reflected their views.

If Council was minded to progress a restriction, the consultation feedback suggested greater support for a more targeted approach, including application in specific locations, consideration of exemptions for assistance dogs, working dogs and dogs from the same household, and alternative arrangements for professional dog walkers. However, introducing exemptions might create practical challenges for enforcement, as officers would need to establish at the point of contact whether an exemption applied and whether sufficient evidence was available to support it. This could make the restriction more difficult to apply consistently, might lead to disputes or uncertainty in individual cases, and would need to be clearly addressed through any future scheme design, guidance and public communications.

The consultation also identified a recurring theme that improved enforcement of existing controls relating to dog fouling and dogs off lead should be prioritised, whether or not any new measures were introduced.

Any decision to introduce controls and/or the proposed education programme would have associated resource implications relating to implementation, communications, maintenance, monitoring and enforcement. These requirements would need to be considered as part of Members' decision-making process. The projected costs in the table below were first reported to this Committee in December 2025. Stage 1 had been removed from the table as it covered the consultation process.

Proposed Costs Summary

Item	Year 1 costs	Year 2 costs	Total cost	Notes
Stage 2 – Should Council approve following consultation				
Signage for Council sites	£50,000	-	£50,000	New signs at locations frequented by dog walkers
Additional Enforcement Officer (Salary)	£38,000	£38,600	£76,600 (and continuing)	Per full time officer
IT Provision for Enforcement Officer	£5,000	£2,000	£7,000	Initial setup and ongoing costs
Vehicle Provision	£36,000	-	£36,000	Purchase cost
Vehicle Running Costs	£7,000	£8,000	£15,000	Fuel, maintenance
Public Education Campaign	£5,000	£1,000	£6,000	Press and billboard ads
Total (1 officer)	£143,000	£49,600	£192,600	Approximate combined costs
Total (3 officers)	£315,000	£146,800	£461,800	

Following consideration of the consultation findings, Members were requested to determine whether any dog control measures should be introduced and, if so, the locations and nature of any such measures.

Members were also requested to consider whether an educational and awareness-raising programme, as proposed within the original Notice of Motion, should be developed and implemented either as a standalone approach or in conjunction with any approved control measures.

Subject to Members' decisions, officers would:

- Communicate the outcome of the consultation process and Committee decision.
- Develop proposals for any approved educational and awareness-raising initiatives.
- Progress any legal, operational and practical arrangements required to implement any restrictions or control measures approved by Members.
- Identify and report on the resource implications associated with the implementation, enforcement and ongoing management of any approved measures and/or educational initiatives.
- Monitor the effectiveness of any measures introduced and report back to Members as appropriate.

In March 2026 Members agreed that a public consultation process be undertaken to gather views on responsible dog walking and the potential introduction of dog control measures within the Borough. The consultation sought views from residents and stakeholders on a range of options and had generated a diverse range of responses.

This report presented the consultation findings, highlighted the key issues raised and outlined the considerations arising from those responses. Members were requested to consider the findings and determine whether any dog control measures and/or an educational and awareness-raising programme should be progressed. Any measures approved by Members would have associated implementation, communication, monitoring and resource implications which would require further consideration.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees not to proceed with the creation of a Dog Control Order (DCO), restricting the number of dogs that may be walked by an individual in the Borough, having regard to the evidence gathered through the public consultation, the absence of complaints concerning this issue, and the potential resource implications associated with increased enforcement. It is further recommended that Council approves the introduction of an education campaign to promote responsible dog walking.

Councillor McKee proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McKee welcomed the report and thanked officers for their work on the consultation, which had been beneficial. The most significant outcome, beyond the issue itself, was that it demonstrated the value of proper consultation, and he felt the

Council should do this more often where the opportunity arose, as it had given a clear steer of public opinion and a good deal of constructive feedback. It was clear that the majority of respondents did not support a four dog limit such as that operating in Belfast City Council, and he accepted that there was insufficient support or evidence to justify progressing it.

Councillor McKee felt it important not to lose sight of why the motion had been brought forward, which was concern raised by the public to elected Members about dog control and public safety arising from large numbers of dogs not under control.

The consultation had given people an opportunity to discuss those issues and many respondents had offered suggestions and alternative approaches. What had also stood out was that the conversation had evolved beyond numbers to whether dogs were under effective control, with repeated feedback that concerns reduced where multiple dogs were on leads and properly managed and increased where they were off the lead, which was valuable feedback for officers to take on board.

He felt the education campaign which he and Councillor Kendall had brought forward as part of the motion had to be delivered as thoroughly and ambitiously as possible, as people were crying out for help on the issue and were frustrated by what they saw in parks and open spaces. Including the campaign within dog licensing communication, explaining what keeping a dog under control meant and setting out how residents could report dog control issues, would be significant. He thanked everyone who had contributed to the consultation and asked whether officers might in future bring back a report exploring what other practical measures the Council could take in response to the issues identified.

Councillor W Irvine felt the right decision had been reached after listening to the consultation. The main reason being the impact on professional dog walkers, three quarters of whom had indicated that the proposal would have some or a significant impact on their business or daily routine, together with the financial impact on the Council. Proceeding with the education piece was fine, but not proceeding with the dog control order was the correct decision.

Councillor Chambers noted that Members were always asking for consultations and that responses were not always strong, so it was excellent to see such a healthy response. The message was very loud and clear that those who responded did not welcome the introduction of the restrictions and did not think them merited, and it was important that Members took heed and implemented the recommendation. The motion had been well meant and had good intentions and those who brought it forward had not plucked it out of thin air, but on digging into the detail he had always felt there were far too many variables involved, including how responsible each individual walker was, the types and sizes of dogs, how many were let off the lead at any one time and where they were being walked.

Councillor Chambers added that the Council had far more important dog walking issues to address, namely fouling, dogs off leads in areas and at times where they should not be, and the lack of resources to deal with those matters. He walked along Groomsport beach regularly and considered the number of dogs off the lead outside the season, and the resulting fouling, to be out of hand, and he was sure every

Member could give an example from their own DEA. Efforts should be concentrated on those issues, and importantly the public should be encouraged to report them at the time so that enforcement officers knew where the hotspots were and could build a picture of where their efforts needed to be directed.

Councillor McClean praised the proposer for being extremely gracious in defeat, which he meant sincerely. Councillor McKee had not got his own way but had taken the positives from what had been learned.

He agreed with Councillor Chambers, and explained that dog fouling was the number one issue along with the seafront and had been for 10 years, with potholes now coming in behind.

He wanted to see the Council stick to the education campaign, he was sometimes sceptical of such campaigns but felt this was probably a good case, as many people owned dogs in good faith and did not contain them safely, not out of malice but because they had not thought about it. He asked whether the point of issuing a licence was the right moment to address this, perhaps with something the owner could sign up to, and whether there was good practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services advised that at an earlier meeting officers had discussed tying the potential education campaign to renewals and new licences so that the information was shared at that point.

Councillor McKee had also mentioned the Dogs Trust and other initiatives launched around responsible dog walking. Those matters, together with the consultation responses and how the public felt about particular issues, would help ensure officers were fully informed as to what was important to the public in terms of how dogs were controlled in the Borough.

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

8. UK WIDE FIREWORKS CONSULTATION (Appendix IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the UK Government had launched a consultation on proposed reforms to the regulation of fireworks and pyrotechnic products.

While fireworks continued to play an important role in public events, community celebrations and personal milestones, concerns had increased regarding their negative impacts on individuals, communities and animals.

The Government had previously introduced a range of non-legislative measures, including public awareness campaigns, guidance for community fireworks displays, and engagement with retailers and trade associations. However, it considered that these measures had not fully addressed public concerns, resulting in increasing calls

for legislative reform through public petitions, parliamentary activity and representations from stakeholders.

The consultation sought evidence and views from a broad range of interested parties, including consumers, emergency services, public safety bodies, veterans' organisations, fireworks retailers and importers, professional pyrotechnics businesses, healthcare professionals, local authorities, animal welfare organisations and the devolved administrations. The consultation applied across the United Kingdom. However, it recognised that certain aspects of fireworks legislation were devolved in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

A link to the host page for the consultation was provided within the report.

The consultation proposals were intended to address the principal harms associated with the misuse of fireworks while preserving their use for legitimate and responsible purposes. The key issues identified by the Government included:

- Excessive noise and disturbance.
- Risks to public safety and personal injury.
- Anti-social behaviour involving fireworks.
- Distress caused to vulnerable individuals, including those with sensory sensitivities and veterans affected by post-traumatic stress.
- Impacts on domestic animals, livestock and wildlife.
- Risks to property and wider community safety.

In Northern Ireland, the sale and use of fireworks were already subject to more stringent controls than elsewhere in the UK through the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002. These regulations restricted the sale of Category F2 and F3 fireworks to members of the public unless they held a licence issued by the Department of Justice. Possession and use of these fireworks was also restricted, and sales might only be undertaken by registered retailers.

Local councils were responsible for enforcing fireworks labelling requirements and acted on behalf of the Department of Justice in assessing applications for fireworks display licences, providing advice on whether licences should be granted for non-council events.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) was responsible for enforcing legislation relating to illegal sales and use of fireworks, including sales by unregistered retailers or sales to persons who did not hold the necessary licence.

The UK Government had stated that it wished to gather evidence from across all parts of the United Kingdom before determining whether amendments to the regulatory framework were required.

Environmental Health and Regulatory Services had prepared a draft consultation response for submission to the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), reflecting the Council's experience of the regulation, sale and use of fireworks within Northern Ireland and the potential implications of any proposed changes.

In developing the response, consideration had also been given to the concerns previously expressed by Council through Notice of Motion No. 692, which highlighted the impact of fireworks on animal welfare, vulnerable individuals and local communities. The response therefore reflected local concerns regarding the distress and harm that could arise from the inappropriate use of fireworks, while recognising the need for a proportionate regulatory approach that balanced public safety, animal welfare and the continued responsible use of fireworks for cultural and community celebrations.

Environmental Health and Regulatory Services had prepared a response for submission to OPSS regarding the UK Government consultation on proposed changes to the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015.

The consultation sought views on measures aimed at reducing the harms associated with fireworks misuse while maintaining their availability for safe and responsible use during cultural, community and celebratory events. The principal proposals were to:

- Restrict higher-noise fireworks from general public sale, making them available only to professional users.
- Add high-risk pyrotechnic products to the existing list of prohibited products under the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015.
- Review the classification and regulation of lower-risk fireworks and pyrotechnic products to ensure regulatory controls are proportionate to the risks they present.

The Council's response had been informed by both operational experience and the concerns previously raised through Notice of Motion No. 692 regarding the impacts of fireworks on residents, animals and local communities. The Government would consider the evidence received through the consultation before deciding whether changes to the existing regulatory framework were required.

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

Councillor Moore proposed, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McKee felt it was good to see the government responding to public concern about fireworks. Northern Ireland had its own version of enforcement and regulation, but the problem of antisocial use stretched across these islands, and the Committee would be aware that he and Councillor Kendall had previously brought a motion on the matter.

He highlighted that during the meeting itself, and in daylight hours, his wife had had to comfort their terrified dog after fireworks were set off in Castle Park, so the season had already started and the issue was not going away.

The Council needed to do everything it could locally and within the legislation, and it was very good to see the United Kingdom government looking at better regulation

and better outcomes, given what had happened to other animals which had not been as fortunate.

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

9. CONSULTATION ON RESTRICTING PROMOTIONS OF PRODUCTS HIGH IN FAT, SUGAR AND SALT (Appendix X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland and the Department of Health had launched a public consultation on proposals to introduce restrictions on the promotion of products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS).

The consultation sought views on proposals to restrict volume price promotions, such as multibuy offers, and the placement of HFSS products in prominent locations in stores and online to support healthier shopping environments and shift the balance of promotions to increase the affordability of healthier options.

Similar restrictions were already in place in England and Wales, and Scotland would be introducing similar restrictions in October 2026.

Obesity remained a significant public health challenge in Northern Ireland and was associated with an increased risk of a range of serious health conditions.

Evidence showed that:

- Volume-based price promotions, such as multibuy, significantly increase purchasing and overconsumption of HFSS food, particularly among children.(1)
- Placement of HFSS products in prominent locations increases impulse purchasing and contributes to unhealthy dietary patterns.(2)
- The consumption of HFSS food and drink is a key driver of overweight and obesity, which in turn increases the risk of diet related noncommunicable diseases including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.(2)

The purpose of this consultation was therefore to seek views on proposed measures to:

- Reduce people's exposure to HFSS promotions and impulse purchase drivers.
- Support healthier shopping environments and shift the balance of promotions to increase the affordability of healthier options.
- Ensure Northern Ireland maintains policy coherence with the rest of the UK food market to minimise complexity for industry.

While the draft response was supportive of the proposed measures, should enforcement responsibility fall to local councils, there might be significant resource

implications for the Council. These would include the need to identify which businesses and products fell within scope, assess complex compliance requirements, and gather sufficient evidence to support any enforcement action. There would also be an extensive programme of education required prior to implementation.

The draft response also outlined that councils might not be the most appropriate body to enforce this due to the Council's remit for food law enforcement being primarily focused on food safety and enforcement to be prioritised to high risk areas such as hygiene and allergens; instead it was suggested that Trading Standards might be better placed as they already had responsibilities for marketing, pricing and advertising standards.

The consultation was available on the Department of Health website. A draft consultation response was attached as Appendix 1 for consideration.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the draft consultation response.

Councillor McClean made an alternative proposal, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that Council approves a response to the FSA/DoH consultation limited to Questions 1, 2, 5, 9, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26 and the enforcement-related elements of Question 30 as set out in the officer draft, with the answer to Question 19 amended from 'Not Sure' to 'No'; and that Council does not respond to the remaining questions, on the basis that they call for a policy judgement outside Council's statutory remit, leaving individual members and parties free to submit their own responses directly to the consultation.

Councillor McClean took Members through the questions concerned. Questions 1 and 2 covered organisation identification and the Council's status as an administrative body. Question 5 concerned the Northern Ireland specific enforcement structure and whether that lay with Trading Standards or the council. Question 9 sought evidence on the operational burden on business and question 18 evidence on the impact on smaller franchise businesses. Question 19 asked whether councils as enforcing authority was a good idea and question 20 covered enforcement approach options.

Question 21 concerned the resources required for enforcement, question 22 the challenges to consistent or proportionate enforcement, and questions 23 and 24 the implementation timeline and operational barriers. Question 26 sought evidence on business compliance costs, and question 30 retained the enforcement related comments already drafted.

The questions to be left blank were those asking whether restrictions should be introduced at all and by what legislative route, the product categories and nutrient profiling model, questions 10 to 13 on multi-buy, placement, online and free refill restrictions, questions 14 to 17 on size and floor area thresholds, question 25 on evidence of health impacts, question 27 on consumer and household budget impacts, and questions 28 and 29 on equality impact assessment.

Councillor McClean explained that the intention was to take a neutral approach. Some questions were within the Council's statutory authority and it ought to be helpful in answering them, particularly those concerning enforcement, resourcing, the practical impact on local businesses and the capacity of the environmental health team, which was known to be stretched. The other half of the consultation was a politically charged document and, following Councillor Chambers' earlier comments, the Council did not need to spend valuable officer time on something which would end in a substantial debate.

He felt that where the Council responded outside its statutory authority the questions were either trivial, in which case there was no need to respond, or politically charged, in which case there was no need to spend time on them. A member of the public would find it entirely understandable to ask who the Council thought it was in putting forward a position that buy one get one free offers could be banned during a cost of living crisis. He was not taking a position on the substance that evening, but noted that England had delayed such restrictions on three occasions, that there was a disproportionately high number of people struggling, and that the data underpinning the proposals was not nearly as clear as had been taken to be the case in preparing the report.

Councillor McClean added that he would prefer the Council did not respond at all, but there were questions which had been answered and which would be helpful to the Department of Health inquiry, particularly question 19, where very good reasons had been given as to why councils should not be the enforcing authority and why it should be Trading Standards, and yet the draft answered "not sure" rather than "no". That should be a clear no, as it was not within the Council's capacity, remit or budget. Where matters arose about what people could and could not buy, he wanted those left to the political parties to take a position on rather than officers preparing reports for Members' perusal, and the Council did not need to feel obliged to complete every consultation sent to it by what was in this case a perfectly well meaning public health body.

Councillor Moore raised a general point and felt that the proposal was complex and detailed and Members had had no opportunity to consider it. Her party might well have supported it, but they had not had time to consider it. She felt it did a disservice to Council colleagues and to residents not to afford Members the time to consider the implications of something so detailed.

On being put to the meeting, with 9 voting FOR, 4 AGAINST and 1 ABSTENTION and 2 ABSENT, the proposal was declared CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that Council approves a response to the FSA/DoH consultation limited to Questions 1, 2, 5, 9, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26 and the enforcement-related elements of Question 30 as set out in the officer draft, with the answer to Question 19 amended from 'Not Sure' to 'No'; and that Council does not respond to the remaining questions, on the basis that they call for a policy judgement outside Council's statutory remit, leaving individual members and parties free to submit their own responses directly to the consultation.

RECESS

(The meeting was adjourned at 9.04pm and resumed at 9.19pm)

(Councillor Hollywood and Councillor Ashe left the meeting – 9.04pm)

(Councillor Kerr joined the meeting remotely – 9.19pm)

10. **PORTAFERRY SPORTS HALL FLOOR UPDATE (FILE REF: CW74)**

(Appendix XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the previous Portaferry Sports Centre (PSC) update on 15 April 2026 to this Committee, explained that the Department of Education (DE) had provided written confirmation that they would provide budget for the intrusive investigations on the PSC Sports Hall floor issue.

Sports Hall Floor Update

Subsequently, Leisure and Estates officers in collaboration with the school arranged a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey to be completed on 1 July 2026. The purpose of the survey was to detect and map any potential voiding under the floor slab.

The survey reported that there were no signs of any structural issues or subsidence beneath the floor slab and the GPR data was consistent throughout the survey. This was positive news and alleviated the previous concern that structural remedial works were required. Currently, two potential options were being considered as next steps:

- Remove the sports hall floor and inspect screed integrity, provide renovating self-levelling screed over the existing screed and provide new sports hall floor.
- Remove the sports hall floor and screed, provide new screed and sports hall floor.

Whilst Option 2 was likely to require a longer period of closure, it was understood that the longevity of this type of repair was likely to be more robust than option 1.

To complement the information gleaned from the GPR survey and to ensure an informed decision making process was achieved regarding Option 1 or 2, a small intrusive opening of the surface of the floor to determine the exact composition of the layers of the floor was completed on 14 August 2026. At the time of writing this report officers awaited the results of this process and would provide a further update when this information was available.

The GPR survey was included in this report as Appendix 1 for reference.

Whilst progress was now underway towards a resolution to the floor issue it was acknowledged that the disruption to PSC users from Leisure's perspective was still

relevant. The other 2 courts were still being used to provide fitness classes and other activities in the hall, and the school holidays had mitigated the impact for the school temporarily. It was noted that there would be a period of complete closure of the Sports Hall to enable the repair works to be completed (Option 1 or 2). Communications with PSC Leisure customers and the school would be actioned as soon as the information was available; officers would attempt to mitigate the impact as much as possible for their users.

Officers had been in contact with DE and provided the GPR survey for their information. The GPR survey, further process on 14 August, and any subsequent recommendation and estimated costs by the contractors would be communicated with DE as soon as possible to enable them to complete their business case required to proceed with the next steps.

Management Agreement Update

Members might recall that officers from Leisure in collaboration with other Council officers had been working towards updating the Management Agreement between the 'Trustee of St Columba's College and Ards and North Down Borough Council in respect of Dual Use of the sports facilities located at St. Columba's College, Portaferry' (PSC).

In July 2026 officers received a Trustee approved version of the agreement by the Diocese of Down and Connor.

Officers were now reviewing this version of the agreement to ensure alignment with the operational and strategic use of PSC, in addition to ensuring clarity on points such as liability and responsibility for maintenance issues and costs given the recent challenges on this issue. Further Council discussions were required on the agreement before discussions with the Trustees took place. The Committee would be kept informed on this process. To ensure a mutually beneficial and robust agreement was achieved it was anticipated that the new agreement would be introduced effective from 1 April 2027.

Ongoing communication within various Council departments and external partners were gaining momentum towards the resolution of the Sports Hall floor issue and Management Agreement at PSC.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle placed on record his appreciation to the Director and to the Head of Leisure for their ongoing work, and was sure they would be glad to have the matter closed.

He asked who was paying for the works and the Head of Leisure advised that the Department of Education had confirmed that it was paying and had paid for the works completed to date.

A contractor's report was awaited in respect of works completed in and around 14 August, and the Department had indicated that it would use the outworkings of that report to inform a business case which it hoped would release the money to pay for the remedial works required.

Councillor Boyle asked whether there was any idea of costings, and the Head of Leisure advised that the Council was looking to proceed with option 2 as outlined in the paper, but that this was pending the outworkings of that report.

Councillor Boyle said option 2 would clearly be his own choice for the longevity of doing the job properly. He asked whether the entire facility would close for the works or whether the gym would remain open, and how long any closure might last.

The Head of Leisure advised that under either option the sports hall would close, but that the intention was to retain the gym and to provide other classes in the surrounding area, for example using the Market House. No timescale for the closure was available at that stage and Members would be informed as soon as it was confirmed.

Councillor Boyle asked whether the new agreement would be in place by April 2027 so that everybody would know where they stood, as people needed to know who was responsible for what, which was part of the problem. The Head of Leisure advised that this was the feeling among all the stakeholders and among the partners the Council was working with, and that clear roles and responsibilities needed to be attributed to each of them.

Councillor Boyle noted that by June of the following year the hall would have been out of commission for five years, which was a long time for a leisure centre to be without its main hall. There had been two or three years when there was no movement at all because nobody knew which way matters were going. There were now signs of movement and he asked that the pressure be kept on.

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

11. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 711 – INVICTUS GAMES **(FILE REF: LEI34)**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members might recall Notice of Motion 711 which stated as follows:

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.

The Invictus Games was an international biennial event overseen by the Invictus Games Foundation (IGF) which was an independent charity. The inaugural Games were held in London, 2014 involving 14 nations and the Games had now grown as a result of events in Orlando, Toronto, Sydney, the Hague, Dusseldorf, Vancouver/Whistler. The next Games were to be held in Birmingham in July 2027.

The ethos of the Games was unique in that participants were not chosen solely because of their ability, but because their participation would help them in their recovery journey of injury or illness suffered as a result of service to their country. It was anticipated that 25 nations would compete at the Games in July 2027 with approximately 550 participants from various Armed Forces personnel that were wounded, injured or made sick (WIS) during service to their country. Next year's event would involve nine core sports, with each nation able to bring in new elements (for 2027, the UK would be introducing Pickleball, the fastest growing sport in the World; Laser Run (a biathlon involving running/pushing and shooting) and eSports.

For reporting purposes, the NoM had been separated into two parts.

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

Officers had contacted Invictus Games through their website to enquire on the partnership and sponsorship opportunities of the Games. Details of the partnership and sponsorship opportunities were listed below.

Champions Programme

The Champion's Programme was specifically designed for SMEs and provided a means to support the Invictus Games Birmingham 2027 and the Armed Forces community. Details of the 3 levels of the programme were summarised below however it appeared they did not directly support the athletes:

Bronze £500

- The organisation's name is listed on the online Champions Programme Roll of Honour
- A recognition certificate
- Access to priority booking for Invictus Games Birmingham 2027 tickets at The NEC
- 10x virtual Places at a Champions Programme leadership event, connecting the core values of the Games with those of the businesses supporting the Games
- The first 100 sign-ups receive two Festival Quarter passes at the NEC for a day at the Games

- Champions Programme communications and impact updates
- Two exclusive IG27 T-Shirts and caps
- Discount on official Invictus Games merchandise

Silver £1,500

- 20 virtual places at a Champions Programme leadership event
- The first 100 sign-ups receive four Festival passes
- Champions Programme communications and impact updates
- Access to exclusive discounts on official merchandise
- Use of the Official Invictus Games Birmingham 2027 logo

Gold £3,000

- Two complimentary guest places at a pre-Games event
- The first 100 sign-ups receive x4 Leadership event places
- The first 100 sign-ups receive x8 Festival passes
- Use of the Official Invictus Games Birmingham 2027 logo
- All other Champion Benefits

It should be noted that Officers were unable to determine whether the bronze, silver and gold levels of support were used to support athletes in their preparation or participation in the Games and therefore did not believe that joining the Champion's Programme suitably answered part (a) or (b) of the NoM.

Direct Sponsor

The second option for financial support for the games noted on the Invictus Games website was by becoming a Direct Sponsor; the website did not offer sufficient detail on this option but Officer research had shown that this was more likely to be Commercial level sponsors investing upwards of £1,000,000.

It was noted that other partners were listed on the Invictus Games website and Officers had contacted these organisations. As yet, some had not responded however an online meeting had been arranged between Officers and Help for Heroes on 8 September.

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.

Goldcard

Officers had considered the Goldcard scheme as a potential mechanism to support athletes from the Borough with their training needs whereby they could use Leisure facilities free of charge for a period of time before the Games. However unfortunately Sport NI did not recognise the Invictus Games and therefore to ensure officers' compliance with the Sports Forum Grants Terms and Conditions the awarding of a Goldcard in this instance was not possible.

Blair Mayne Bursary Award Scheme

Members might be aware of the Blair Mayne Bursary Award Scheme that was established using surplus funds raised during the public appeal to raise funds for the bronze memorial statue in Conway Square Newtownards.

The Bursary welcomed applications from residents of the Ards and North Down Borough who were aged 25 years or younger under the following four categories:

- academic study
- sport.
- adventure training
- disability

Each bursary was £1000.

Additionally, the late William John Blair Mayne in his Will bequeathed £2,000.00 to “the Blair Mayne Bursary to be used by the Trustees thereof in their absolute discretion but I express the wish that the said legacy be used to augment any funds that the bursary has in place for supporting those persons who might be able to participate in the Paralympics or to provide such a fund.”

The Blair Mayne Bursary Award Scheme was administered by a sub-committee of the Corporate Services Committee. At a meeting on 26 March 2026 the sub-committee considered whether it would be appropriate to use the bequeathed sum of £2,000 from the late William John Blair Mayne to support the selected Invictus Games participants currently residing within the Borough as no Paralympic participants had applied for the Bursary. Members noted that it was not known if, or when, the Blair Mayne Bursary would receive future applications from Paralympians from the Ards and North Down area.

All sub-committee members agreed that allocating the funds in this manner would be appropriate in principle, with the caveat that the late William John Blair Mayne is formally recognised, and that the Blair Mayne Bursary is referenced in any related communications or documentation.

Therefore, should an athlete from the Borough be selected to compete in the Games, or if Members agreed to further explore the Champions Programme or Direct Sponsor options with the Games, Leisure officers would undertake the necessary next steps and provide a subsequent update report for further consideration.

Existing Veteran Support

Members might be aware that emergency services personnel, including military veterans, were currently entitled to a 20% discounted Leisure membership price upon receipt of proof of status.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

AHC 09.09.2026 PM

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(The Chair, Alderman Cummings, vacated the Chair for this item and Councillor S Irvine, Vice Chair, took the Chair)

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

Alderman Cummings thanked the Director and officers for their diligent work on the report, which had involved a number of conversations over recent months.

Earlier in the year he had brought forward a notice of motion asking the Council to support local participants in the Invictus Games, a multi-sports event for wounded, injured and sick military service personnel, both serving and veterans. He welcomed the report, particularly as it expanded on the anticipated Games and recognised the important role that affordable access to leisure facilities played in maintaining both physical fitness and mental resilience.

He added that for those injured, recovery took time and demanded a careful and coordinated mix of physical and psychological therapy over a concentrated period. As someone who had sustained gunshot wounds as a serving police officer many years previously, he knew at first hand the value he had placed on exercise and physical activity on the road to recovery.

It was a long and difficult road both physically and psychologically, but with the right support it was one which could be conquered. In seeking to support those participating in the 2027 Games through the Blair Mayne Trust, the Council also recognised the wider veteran community and those of the emergency services, with particular reference to discounted access to leisure services, and the decision reinforced the value placed upon veterans and the emergency services collectively.

He trusted it would serve as an encouragement to them to rediscover the benefits of physical activity in redressing the often hidden pressures attributed to their vocation.

The seconder, Councillor Douglas, concurred, adding that she was pleased to read that if an athlete from the Borough was selected for the Games the Council agreed to explore further options to support their participation in Birmingham the following year. She also highlighted a veterans evening to celebrate the return of the Games, taking place on 1 October from 7pm to 9pm in the Island Centre, Lisburn. It was a free event open to all veterans and members of the Armed Forces community, with friends and family welcome, and registration was through the Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner's website.

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

(Alderman Cummings resumed the Chair)

12. SPORTS FORUM GRANTS Q1 2026 & 2027 (FILE SD155)

(Appendix XII – XVII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that Members would be aware that on 26 August 2015 Council had 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.

£90,000 had been allocated within the 2026/2027 revenue budget for this purpose.

During April, May & June 2026, the Forum received a total of 131 applications, of which 112 were successful (2 Coach Education, 7 Goldcards, 12 Equipment, 10 Events and 81 Individual Travel/Accommodation).

A summary of the 112 successful applications was detailed in the attached 2026/27 Successful Coaching, Equipment, Event, Goldcard and Travel/Accommodation Appendices.

2026/2027 Budget £90,000	Annual Budget	Awarded to Date	Committed Funding Awarded April, May & June 2026	Remaining Budget
Anniversary	£3,000.00	£0	£0	£3,000.00
Coach Education	£2,500.00	£0	£750.00	£1,750.00
Equipment	£28,000.00	£0	£8,260.61	£19,739.39
Events	£13,000.00	£0	£11,385.98	£1,614.02
Seeding	£2,000	£0	£0.00	£2,000.00
Travel and Accommodation	£38,500.00	£0	£15,407.72	£23,092.28
Discretionary	£1,000.00	£0	£0	£1,000.00
Schools/Sports Club Pathway	£2,000.00	£0	£0	£2,000.00
Remaining Budget				£54,195.69

7 Goldcards Awarded in Q1 April, May & June 2026.

Budget Remaining

Please note that the following budget remaining breakdown was subject to receipt of all outstanding information required to process payments, such as proof of travel, accommodation or equipment purchases. In the rare event that committed funding was not awarded, the budget would be returned to the relevant funding stream.

The remaining budget for Coaching of £1,750.00 was based on a committed funding award for April, May and June of £750.00.

The remaining budget for Equipment of £19,739.39 was based on a committed funding award for April, May and June of £8,260.61.

The remaining budget for Events of £1,614.02 was based on a committed funding award for April, May and June of £11,385.98.

The remaining budget for Travel and Accommodation of £23,092.28 was based on a committed funding award for April, May and June of £15,407.72.

Remaining budget allocations not awarded during April, May, and June:

- Anniversary Fund: £3,000
- Discretionary Fund: £1,000
- Schools/Sports Fund: £2,000
- Seeding £2000

The remaining budget for 2026/27 was £54,195.69 (40% of the 2026/27 budget spent).

This report outlined the Q1 (April – June 2026 only) of grants that had been administered and approved by the Ards and North Down Sports Forum and was for noting purposes only. This was in line with the Council's Grant Policy and the Council ratifying delegated authority to the Sports Forum on 12 November 2025.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle felt matters were going well within this section of the Council and it was good to see the applications coming in, the interest that was there, the team behind it and the working group which attended the meetings.

He noted the new appointment now in place and asked that thanks be passed through the Head of Leisure and the Director to the Sports Development team and to all those who made it work so well.

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

The Chair advised that, where the subject matter of reports was closely related, they could be taken together, and he suggested that items 13 and 14 fell into that category.

13. GOOD RELATIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26 (FILE REF: GR18)

(Appendix XVIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Ards and North Down Borough Council Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan outlined a comprehensive plan to promote inclusivity, cohesion, and positive community engagement across the Borough.

Developed through community consultations including focus groups, one to one meetings and survey responses, the strategy identified key challenges and prioritised action areas in alignment with the “Together: Building a United Community” (T:BUC) framework.

The Good Relations Strategy (2025-2028) informed an annual action plan, which was submitted to the Executive Office for assessment. The Action Plan was based on the four key themes of the Executive’s Strategy Together Building United Communities:

- Children and Young People
- Shared community
- Safe Community
- Cultural Expression

The action plan’s aim was to promote the use of shared spaces, provide educational programmes for young people, and develop targeted cultural expression programmes. It also prioritised support for inclusive cultural events and education on shared history. By addressing entrenched divisions and leveraging opportunities for collaboration, the strategy aimed to build a thriving and peaceful Borough.

The Good Relations section was funded 75% externally from the Executive Office and 25% by Council.

The 2024-2025 Programme operated within a challenging budgetary environment and continued budget cuts from the Executive in 2025-2026. This had the potential at the beginning of the financial year to reduce the number of programmes in the 2025-2026 action plan. The total Good Relations budget from TEO was reduced in 2025-2026 from £170,053.50 to £127,540.12, a reduction of 25%.

However, in July 2025, following the riots in Ballymena, the Executive office offered Councils an (additional) £20k budget to address racial and social cohesion. The application was approved and did not require match funding from Council. In September 2025 a further £30k was offered, and again match funding was not required. In January 2026 a further £12,700 was offered, and again match funding was not required.

The total amount awarded to ANDBC was £190,240.12 enabling the Council to deliver targeted Good Relations interventions despite the uncertainty and reduction of funding in the first quarter of the financial year.

The annual 2026-2027 action plan had been submitted to the Executive Office for approval and based on the 2025-2026 initial funding that was asked for of £170,053.50. Indeed, as reported in LoO for DGRP (District Good Relations Plan) 2026/27 there had been a reduction in funding to £114,460.66.

The Good Relations Team had been able to deliver all projects captured in the 2025-2026 Action Plan. However, there was recognition that reduced funding at the beginning of the financial year created pressures on the team to potentially consider reducing and removing projects. The additional funding from TEO over three application processes from July 2025 allowed officers to fully deliver all Good Relations programmes while ensuring outcomes of funding were achieved.

The Good Relations section worked closely with PCSP, PEACE and Community Development sections to avoid duplication and ensure a cohesive delivery of programmes to the community.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the Good Relations Annual report 2025-2026.

14. DISTRICT GOOD RELATIONS PLAN 2026/27 (FILE REF: GR18) (Appendix XIX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that in January 2026 Council approved the District Good Relations Action Plan 2026 – 2027 prior to its submission to the Executive Office for approval in order to draw down funding.

The initial Action Plan requested an amount of £170,053.50 from TEO with Council match funding this at 25% with £56,684.50.

A Letter of Offer for 2026 – 2027 had now been received offering financial assistance from TEO totalling £114,460.66 to deliver the AND Good Relations Action Plan. However there was a deficit of £55,592.84.

Section 1.2 in the attached DCGRAP (District Council Good Relations Plan) outlined in red the reduction in the amount of budget available under each theme. Once salaries were removed from the financial assistance there was reduced budget to run programmes for the remaining months of 2026-2027. Maximum budget available for programmes was £31,473.21 compared to £105,597. The Council would work with departments such as PCSP (Policing and Community Safety Partnership) and other stakeholders and agencies to deliver the Good Relations Action Plan.

It was anticipated, as in previous years, that there would be further rounds of funding from TEO that would be made available throughout the financial year. However, this was not guaranteed and any further funding would be updated through Committee.

Members had previously been made aware of the reduction in the budget and releasing of small amounts of funding well into the financial year made delivery and impact of projects extremely difficult. The Good Relations Team continually sourced alternative and additional funding and worked in partnership with all agencies and stakeholders to mitigate against these issues.

Members should note that due to the reduction in funding of £55,592.84 the action plan had been highlighted in red with reduction in programmes under all aims and removal of Children Relations Through Sport Project, Holocaust and Other Genocide

Programmes and Intergenerational Programmes. This would continually be reviewed and if further funding became available from TEO members would be advised accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Councillor Quinn, that the recommendations for Item 13 and Item 14 be adopted.

Councillor Boyle thanked officers for the reports, praised the range of areas that were covered.

The seconder, Councillor Quinn, considered the Good Relations work invaluable. She worked across many primary and post-primary schools in Ards and North Down and had been on the Somme trip a couple of years previously.

She was disappointed to see that it had been cut, but understood that something similar was being organised. Face to face contact was really important for children, particularly after COVID, in finding out about their heritage, and Bangor, North Down, Ards and Comber were rich in that. It had been valuable to visit and research street names and connections, and it was good to see the Shared Voice work coming in from Primary 4, with children from many different backgrounds coming to appreciate one another, and the work at post-primary level.

She hoped the funding would continue, as a price could not be put on what it did for the children, and she saw the outworkings of it all the time.

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

15. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 703 – FEMICIDE (FILE REF: NOM703) (Appendix XX – XXI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that in February 2026 Council agreed to NoM 703, which requested that a letter to be written 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.

The letter was attached as Appendix 1.

The NoM stated Femicide is defined as the intentional killing of a woman due to factors such as hatred, discrimination or subjugation.

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

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 that 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.

A response had been received (Appendix 2) from the Justice Minister citing her commitment to tackling gender-based abuse and violence in all its forms. Minister Long remained open to learning from developments in other areas and continued to keep this area under review and concluded that policy work on this was ongoing as part of the consideration of sex/gender as a protected characteristic in hate crime legislation.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Councillor McKee proposed, seconded by Councillor Moore, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor McKee welcomed the Minister’s commitment to tackling violence against women and girls, both in the letter and in her work in the Assembly, but he was disappointed that she had ruled out a standalone femicide offence at this stage.

At a time when far too many women continued to experience violence, abuse and intimidation, every possible avenue for reform should be explored, and he hoped the Department’s commitment to learn from developments elsewhere and to remain open to strengthening the law would be carried through.

Councillor Moore also welcomed the Minister’s response. Tackling violence against women and girls was a priority for her Party, and the level of abuse women continued to face and the number of women who had lost their lives, something which had been very close to home for many, was a matter which all of society should be appalled by. The Minister had clearly indicated that she supported the intent behind the original motion, and she thanked Councillor Brady and Councillor McKee for bringing it. This was a complex area of law and the priority had to be ensuring that any change was legally robust, workable in practice and genuinely strengthened protection for women, rather than creating an offence which was difficult to apply or which duplicated existing protections.

Councillor Moore added that the Minister was not ruling out a specific offence of femicide forever but was saying that more work was needed, and it was important to make that distinction. She recalled that Women’s Aid had been one of the charities supported by her party colleague Councillor McCollum during her term as Mayor, who had used that platform to raise awareness and funds for the issue.

As a practical example, remote evidence centres had been introduced for domestic abuse cases under the Minister’s leadership. Their use had grown significantly and outcomes were strong, with conviction rates of around 90% and a substantial proportion secured through guilty pleas, which meant that many complainants did not have to give oral evidence at trial. That showed how the reforms could reduce the burden on victims while still delivering effective justice, and the Minister’s focus was on measures which improved outcomes, reduced the trauma of engaging with the justice system, held perpetrators to account and fitted within the wider framework already under way.

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

16. DRINKING WATER QUALITY REPORT 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that the Drinking Water Quality Report 2025, produced by Northern Ireland Water (NIW), was attached as Appendix 1.

The report indicated a 99.9% level of compliance with an extensive array of drinking water quality parameters as laid down in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 as amended in 2018.

The map in the report showed the various supply zones in the Borough.

The table below demonstrated compliance levels of drinking water in Ards and North Down when sampled at the customer’s tap since 2020.

	Target	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Northern Ireland Compliance	99.7%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%
Ards and North Down Compliance	99.7%	100.0%	99.9%	100.0%	99.9%	99.9%

During 2025, enforcement action taken by the Drinking Water Inspectorate, a branch of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, was successfully concluded in relation to drinking water quality in the Ards and North Down area. Enforcement Notice Regulation 31(4) 2021/001 required NI Water to install and operate a treatment system at Drumaroad Water Treatment Works capable of removing or reducing aluminium to achieve a final water quality result within the maximum regulatory limit of 200 µg/l by 30 April 2025. The Notice was issued on 8 July 2021 and subsequently amended, with works completed by 30 September 2025. Following evidence provided by NIW demonstrating that the new treatment process met the

requirements of the Notice, the Drinking Water Inspectorate issued a Revocation Notice on 19 December 2025.

One Major Drinking Water Quality Event was recorded across Northern Ireland in January 2025, when Storm Éowyn affected all areas. In the days preceding the storm, NIW took action to maximise water levels at service reservoirs and clear water tanks to optimise treated-water storage levels and mitigate against customer supply interruptions.

Severe winds across Northern Ireland disrupted electricity and telecommunications services and damaged NIW infrastructure. Around 6,000 properties experienced mains water supply interruptions. Substantial resources, including generators, bottled water and asset-to-asset tanker transfer, were deployed to restore and maintain customer supplies. Drinking water quality was not impacted.

In the week preceding Storm Éowyn, one Serious Drinking Water Quality Event affected all areas of Northern Ireland, when a period of freezing weather followed by thaw caused burst mains across the network, increasing water demand and interrupting supply. NIW declared a Category 1 Incident. Proactive measures were put in place by NIW ahead of the thaw period in anticipation of increased demand. Burst repairs were prioritised, output from treatment works was increased to meet demand, and re-zoning and asset-to-asset tanker transfer were used where necessary to restore water levels. Drinking water quality was not impacted.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

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

17. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION 685 – RUBY’S LAW **CORRESPONDENCE (FILE REF: NOM685)**

(Appendix XXII – XXV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Active and Healthy Communities detailing that a Notice of Motion relating to Ruby’s Law was adopted at the Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting in November 2025.

Ruby’s Law was a legislative reform campaign launched in England in January 2025, aimed at closing critical gaps in the Family Law Act 1996 and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, to protect companion animals used as tools of coercive control. The proposal sought to grant courts the power to include pets in Non-Molestation and Occupation Orders, allowing survivors to retain custody and legal protection for their animals when fleeing domestic abuse. A parallel campaign to introduce Ruby’s Law was underway in Northern Ireland, with the matter debated at Stormont in October 2025. Ards and North Down Borough Council was the first local authority in Northern Ireland to publicly endorse Ruby’s Law.

The Notice of Motion read as follows:

“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 United Kingdom, 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 council resolves to:

- 1. Write to the Ministers for Justice, Communities, Finance, DAERA, and Health, calling for: (i) The introduction of Ruby’s Law in Northern Ireland; and (ii) 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.”

A draft letter to the Ministers was approved by Council in March, and responses from the relevant departments had now been received. The correspondence was attached as Appendices 1-4. No response had been received from the DAERA Minister to date.

Correspondence received in response to the proposed introduction of Ruby’s Law in Northern Ireland indicated broad support for recognising the role that threats of harm, or actual harm, to pets and animals can play within domestic abuse, coercive control and intimidation. The Justice Minister confirmed support for amendments to the Justice Bill which would strengthen consideration of animals within domestic abuse-related protections, including non-molestation and occupation orders, and future Domestic Abuse Protection Notices and Orders. The Health Minister also expressed support, noting the Department’s joint leadership with the Department of Justice of the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and recent engagement with Causeway Coast Dog Rescue on the proposals.

The responses also recognised that responsibility for relevant protections cut across a number of Departments, particularly Justice, Health and Finance. While existing legislation might already allow courts to take pets and companion animals into account where relevant, there was acknowledgement that making such protections more explicit could assist both courts and victims, and that additional legislation which removes barriers preventing victims from leaving dangerous situations was to be welcomed. Overall, the responses demonstrated support for further consideration of additional safeguards, with ongoing engagement anticipated as Justice Bill

amendments, family law reform work and wider domestic and sexual abuse policy progress.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

Councillor Moore proposed, seconded by Councillor McKee, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Moore welcomed the responses received. The multiple letters from multiple ministers reflected the complexity of the issue and the fact that it required a joined up response from across the Executive, with both the Department of Justice and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs having important roles.

The DOJ was strengthening the legal protections while the DAERA was progressing practical animal welfare measures, including specialist domestic abuse animal fostering services. The most impactful approach was to protect victims in law while also ensuring there was practical support for them and their animals.

Councillor McKee welcomed the report and the responses from the ministers. It was important to recognise that the work had begun with a notice of motion brought forward by his colleague Councillor Kendall, who would have liked to speak that evening but was unable to attend, and it was remarkable that Ards and North Down had become the first council in Northern Ireland to formally support Ruby's Law, which was something all Members could be proud of.

Ruby's Law addressed an issue which was often overlooked, as the abuse of companion animals could play a significant part in coercive control and domestic abuse, and anything which could be done to help people in that situation should be done. It was encouraging to read the broad support reflected in the responses and the recognition that stronger protections could help remove the barriers facing victims and survivors.

Councillor McKee also acknowledged the work of Causeway Coast Dog Rescue and the campaign led by Christina Warner, whose advocacy had been instrumental in bringing the issue to public and political attention and in highlighting the link between animal welfare and tackling violence against women and girls.

This was a good example of a council showing leadership on an issue of real societal importance, and while there was work still to do he welcomed the progress and hoped to see more momentum behind Ruby's Law despite its complexity and the number of departments involved.

Councillor W Irvine was glad to see the departments acknowledging the issue, but urged them all to remain true to their stated commitments and to work collectively to ensure that Ruby's Law progressed without delay. Victims, families and support organisations had made clear the importance of the safeguards, and it was vital that the momentum was maintained as amendments to the Justice Bill, family law reform and wider domestic and sexual abuse policies continued.

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

(Alderman Brooks and Councillor McKee left the meeting at 9.40pm)

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.

(Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Gilmour joined the meeting remotely to propose the Notice of Motion – 9.40pm)

Councillor Cathcart advised that there was a typo in the Notice of Motion as it appeared on the agenda, in that the final line referred to the rejection of any lowering of the age of criminal responsibility when it should refer to any increase, as nobody was calling for the age to be lowered. He proposed the Notice of Motion with that change of one word, and the Chair was content that it was a non-substantive amendment.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the Notice of Motion, as amended, be adopted.

Councillor Cathcart said that when the Borough enjoyed good weather, Bangor and the other seaside destinations also became a destination for those wishing to engage in underage drinking, antisocial behaviour and other illegal activity rather than simply enjoying the seaside.

Some of the images seen that summer were unacceptable and had done reputational harm. He thanked all those involved in tackling antisocial behaviour along the seafront, including police officers, Translink staff, community safety officers, street pastors, the YMCA and all the agencies and volunteers involved.

Trouble had eased as the summer progressed, having been more prevalent in the early stages, and he paid tribute to the work done, which was not an easy task given that incidents could occur anywhere from Seapark to Ballyholme across a vast area.

Councillor Cathcart said efforts were being hampered by inaction and inertia on the part of the Justice Minister in resourcing the police and giving them the additional powers they had been calling for. The Minister was well aware that the legislation needed to change, her own Department having published a consultation on amending antisocial behaviour legislation in which 97% of respondents felt more needed to be done.

That consultation had closed two and a half years previously, and the Minister's current position was that it remained her intention to bring forward legislation in the next Assembly mandate, which was kicking the can down the road despite there having been two bills to which such powers could have been attached during this mandate.

He highlighted two additional powers which would assist the PSNI. The first was the seizure of alcohol. Those engaging in antisocial behaviour often travelled by train and were fuelled by alcohol, and while it was welcome that Police had provided a presence on trains over the summer, seizing alcohol and preventing entry with alcohol was not as simple as many people thought.

There were no general powers to seize alcohol from anyone drinking in public, and alcohol could be seized from those under 18 only if it was on clear display, with no power to search bags on suspicion or to seize where the alcohol had been decanted into another bottle.

The Department of Justice had itself stated in that consultation that the legislative framework needed updating to ensure it was fit for purpose, and 98% of respondents had agreed there should be a power to seize and dispose of alcohol. The lack of powers had been intended to be addressed in the Criminal Justice Order 2008 but had never been brought into force because of legal issues identified after the legislation passed, and as the Alliance Party had held the justice portfolio for many years since 2010 it could not look elsewhere for someone to blame.

The second power was that required to disperse large crowds, as antisocial behaviour often resulted from such gatherings and English police forces had benefited from powers to break them up and de-escalate situations.

When questioned on the matter by his colleague Peter Martin MLA, the Justice Minister had replied that dispersal powers had been considered during a lengthy cross-departmental and multi-agency review, that a decision had been taken not to pursue them, but that given the passage of time she would re-engage with the PSNI, with the new Assembly mandate the earliest opportunity to bring forward changes.

He had shared that response with police officers, who were frankly in disbelief at it. Councillor Cathcart said there were simply not enough officers on the streets to address the seafront during the busy summer period.

When trouble had occurred at Crawfordsburn Country Park earlier in the summer, officers had been deployed from other areas along with drones and dogs and the trouble had fizzled out quickly, which showed what could be achieved with that level of support.

Officer numbers were not helped by arrests requiring officers to drive out of the Borough to process detainees, with local officers describing trips to Craigavon and as far as Londonderry because of capacity issues at custody suites, which removed officers for an entire shift. Officers had told him privately that the reopening of Bangor custody suite was required to allow them to do their jobs in a timely and efficient manner.

He recalled that when the motion was drafted in June the appalling attack on Ryan Gray and his dog Max of K9 Search and Rescue was fresh in everyone's minds, and he continued to wish them well. The assault had shocked the community and had brought home that allowing antisocial behaviour and large gatherings could lead to serious consequences.

The case highlighted serious concerns about the proposal in the Justice Bill to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14, which would have seen one of those charged escape prosecution. Those who carried out the attack knew what they were doing and it was right that they faced consequences, and a justice system was needed which punished perpetrators and supported victims.

Public perception of the justice system was already low and any move allowing perpetrators to avoid justice would damage it further. The Council for its part needed to press on with expanding and enhancing its CCTV coverage and working on a multi-agency basis, as the consequences of antisocial behaviour were serious and lasting and caused economic and societal harm as well as harm to victims.

In closing, Councillor Cathcart stated that it was clear stronger powers should have been in place and that the community had been let down. Now Council needed resources and new powers to tackle the problem.

The seconder, Councillor Gilmour recalled that when she had been a councillor in the Holywood area Helen's Bay and Seapark had been regular areas where residents had long-suffering issues.

What had been witnessed earlier in the year in Bangor and along the North Down coast was deeply concerning, and the social media videos circulating of some of the events had been horrific.

She noted that the motion had been submitted before the summer and was being heard in September because of the absence of committees. People should be able to enjoy their town and city centres, parks, beaches and public spaces without being subjected to intimidation, disorder or behaviour which made them feel unsafe in their own community.

Councillor Gilmour was clear that the motion was not about blaming young people generally, as the vast majority of young people in Ards and North Down were respectable members of the community, but where serious antisocial behaviour occurred the police and other agencies needed the powers and resources to deal with it.

She put on record her appreciation of local PSNI officers, who were dealing with significant pressures and could not be everywhere at once, which was why the Council had a responsibility to make its voice heard and why she had proposed at Council in April that it write to the Chief Constable seeking more officers for North Down to assist the District Commander, following the attack on Ryan Gray and his search and rescue dog Max.

Additional police resources were needed so that officers could respond properly rather than being tied up transporting people to custody suites across the country, and the reopening of Bangor custody suite was a practical measure deserving serious consideration, as decisions about the Borough should take account of the particular challenges faced by a busy coastal city such as Bangor.

She added that the problem could not be solved by policing alone and commended the multi-agency approach taken by the Council, the PSNI and local community groups, with prevention and early intervention a positive.

Where attacks and incidents did occur, however, those responsible needed to be held to account, and she strongly opposed any proposal to increase the age of criminal responsibility, as victims needed to see justice done when someone ended up in hospital at the hands of a 13 year old.

Residents wanted to feel safe in their communities and to enjoy Bangor, its beaches and its coastline, and to see their children and families use public spaces without fear. The Council could not solve every aspect of the problem itself but could use its collective voice to demand the resources, legislation and support the community needed from the Minister who could effect change.

Councillor Moore said that the Minister had ruled out only bringing forward the relevant legislation in this mandate, including measures such as the seizure of alcohol, and that this was not unique to the Department of Justice but was reflected across the entire Executive in trying to prioritise legislation.

There remained a question as to who would enforce any new powers, particularly as not all councils supported taking on that responsibility. On police numbers, the Minister and the Chief Constable had developed a plan to increase them which had been agreed by the Executive, but the additional funding required had not yet been approved.

As the reopening of Bangor custody suite and police officer numbers were operational policing matters, she suggested writing to the Chief Constable in addition to writing to the Minister.

Councillor Moore said the age of criminal responsibility was a particularly uncomfortable matter. Responsible elected representatives repeatedly called for expert and evidence led legislation but rejected it when it was politically inconvenient.

The best way to protect victims was to prevent victims, and the evidence showed that early intervention and holistic support was better at interrupting offending behaviour than early criminalisation and entry into the justice system.

Raising the age of criminal responsibility would support the prevention of offending behaviour and retaining it at 10 simply perpetuated it, so it would come as no surprise that she would not support that element. Her party had no issue with writing to the Minister, which was absolutely the Council's right, but she felt the points raised were better addressed locally.

Councillor W Irvine thanked both Members for bringing the motion forward. The position in Bangor in early summer had been of grave concern to residents and elected representatives, particularly the persistent attacks on local businesses and the disruption caused to their work, and thankfully matters had improved as the summer progressed.

It was regrettable that the additional powers had not been given, particularly given the large crowds of young people which gathered on occasion at Ballyholme, Bangor seafront and elsewhere in the Borough.

Officers were held up when arrests were made and the loss of the custody suite had been a particular blow, taking officers out of the area. He also referred to the case for strengthening the Council's own community safety team, which had been brought before the Committee previously and was another tool in its armoury, and thanked the volunteers who assisted the emergency services at weekends, particularly the Street Pastors and their work in the towns and city centre. He commended the local PSNI commander for the efforts he and his team had made to address the issues over those months.

(Councillor Kerr left the meeting – 9.59pm)

Councillor Cochrane said that every meeting he had attended with the police about antisocial behaviour had raised the same two matters, officer numbers and additional powers. The police were crying out for help and the media had recently highlighted the pressures on policing, yet the Justice Minister had not acted. There had been plenty of time in the mandate to increase police powers and she had failed in that responsibility.

The scenes witnessed that summer in Bangor had been nothing short of a disgrace and he hoped they would never be repeated. Reopening Bangor custody suite would be a significant psychological boost, as people considered not only numbers but whether they felt a police presence, and without a custody suite there was a lack of presence in Bangor.

Having seen antisocial behaviour in his own District Electoral Area at Linear Park and Cremellán Wood, he considered any attempt to increase the age of criminal responsibility incredibly dangerous and something he could never support, as it would create a loophole which older children or criminal gangs could use to exploit younger children. He asked for a recorded vote.

Councillor Chambers noted a number of different parts to it, covering the Council reviewing its own resources, antisocial behaviour legislation, additional police officers, the reopening of Bangor custody suite and the age of criminal responsibility.

Normally with a motion containing so many elements he found himself unable to support them all and would consider an amendment, but on this occasion he was largely supportive of everything it asked for. As a parent of three sons, the eldest of whom was 14 and at an age where he wanted to go out with friends to Ward Park, Linear Park, Aurora and Bangor town centre, antisocial behaviour was something he and his wife worried about a great deal.

He fretted every time his son asked to go to those places, which was shaped by the incidents seen in the local news not only over the summer but at weekends, and it was not fair that he had to consider denying his children the ability to go out because of those fears.

Councillor Chambers said Members would be aware how under-resourced the PSNI were in the Borough and he doubted anyone would disagree that more officers were needed. The lack of police visibility was a real problem, which was not an attack on the PSNI, who did a fantastic job with what they had when called upon, but more support was badly needed.

The lack of a custody suite covering the whole Borough was shameful and he would like to see Bangor custody suite reopened as a routine provision rather than the contingency it currently was. When an arrest was made, two officers were taken off duty to transport the offender to Musgrave or, if Musgrave was full, to Antrim, which put extra pressure on already stretched local resources.

While he supported the proposals he did not hold out much hope of additional resources or the custody suite being reopened soon, and as Councillor Moore had said that was an operational matter for the Chief Constable, so the proposers might consider writing to him in that regard.

On the age of criminal responsibility, which had been well debated at Stormont, his concern was that younger people would become a target for criminal gangs seeking to recruit them, and that where young people committed crimes and were unable to go through the justice system those gangs might administer their own form of punishment.

In summing up, Councillor Cathcart addressed the suggestion that he had been electioneering. Having been in the Council for 10 years he was not very political, and his party colleagues would probably prefer him to mention his party affiliation more often.

He had brought the motion forward because police officers had highlighted to him that the powers were needed if the issue was to be tackled, and it was right that the Council as a corporate body highlighted a major issue in the Borough to the Minister responsible.

There was also real vulnerability associated with the drinking referred to, and he recalled young people, and young girls in particular, collapsing after drinking far too much and placing themselves in very vulnerable situations. In terms of reputational damage, Councillor Chambers had been right about perceptions, and he recalled a person who was not from the area asking his colleague Lord Weir of Ballyholme why he would name himself after a place where children were beaten up, which was a completely false impression of a very lovely place but showed the harm being done.

He had expected the Alliance Party to reject the motion because it was critical of their Minister, but he believed they knew the issue should have been tackled a good deal earlier so that the PSNI had the powers to deal with it.

A recorded vote had been requested.

On being put to the meeting with 10 voting FOR, 1 AGAINST, 0 ABSTENTIONS and 5 ABSENT, the Notice of Motion was declared CARRIED.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (10)	AGAINST (1)	ABSTAINED (0)	ABSENT (5)
Alderman	Councillor		Alderman
Cummings	Boyle		Brooks
Councillor			Councillor
Chambers			Ashe
Cochrane			Hollywood
Douglas			Kerr
Irvine, S			McKee
Irvine, W			
McBurney			
McClellan			
Moore			
Quinn			

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor Gilmour, that the Notice of Motion, as amended, be adopted.

(Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Gilmour left the meeting – 10.11pm)

18.2 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.

The Chair noted that Alderman McRandal had been unable to attend the meeting and had been made aware of a request to defer it for hearing at the next Committee meeting.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor McBurney, that the Notice of Motion be deferred to the October meeting of the Active and Healthy Communities Committee.

19. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

20. BANGOR AND NEWTOWNARDS MARKETS (FILE REF: CW75)

****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 at its meeting in February 2026, Council had agreed for officers to carry out a pre-market engagement exercise in relation to Bangor and Newtownards market provision, and to engage with both the existing market traders and Ards and North Down Business Forum.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees to proceed with a procurement exercise for Newtownards and Bangor Markets, as detailed in the report.

Councillor Boyle proposed, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

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

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 10.16pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Audit Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards, on Monday, 21 September 2026 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT: -

In the Chair: Councillor Morgan

Aldermen: McAlpine

Councillors: Harbinson Newman
Hollywood Thompson
McKee Wray

Independent Member: Stephen Ballentine-Kearns

In Attendance: Mr Tomas Wilkinson (NIAO)
Ms Camille McDermott (Deloitte)
Ms Prachi Jain (Deloitte)

Officers: Chief Executive (S McCullough), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Head of Finance (S Grieve), and Democratic Services Officer (J Alexander)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Alderman Graham.

NOTED.

2. CHAIR’S REMARKS

The Chair welcomed the auditor representatives from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (Tomas Wilkinson), and from Deloitte (Camille McDermott and Prachi Jain). She also welcomed the Committee's new Independent Member, Stephen Ballentine-Kearns.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair sought Declarations of Interest at this stage.

No Declarations of Interest were declared. Members were reminded that they could declare throughout the meeting.

NOTED.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

a) **Committee Minutes from 18 May 2026**

No matters arising.

b) **Committee Minutes from 22 June 2026**

Councillor Newman advised that she attended the June 2026 meeting in person rather than remotely as noted in the Minutes. The Chair instructed that the June 2026 Minutes be amended accordingly.

c) **Follow-up Actions**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that in line with good practice, a register of actions was maintained to ensure that requests from previous meetings of the Committee were followed up on.

Item	Title	Action	Officer	Status
Dec 2023 6b	Audit and Assessment Report	Drafting of formal consultation strategy	Head of Comms and Marketing	Proposed for Committee March 2027
Dec 2025 4b	Follow-up actions	Review ToR to reduce change in membership	Head of Finance	Item 9 & Annual Meeting June 2026
May 2026 5c	Raising Concerns in the NI Public Sector	Review of Whistleblowing Policy	Head of Human Resources	To be considered when policy due for review
9	Review of Terms of Reference	Private meeting with auditors to be once per annum	Head of Finance	December agenda

RECOMMENDED that the Council note the Matters Arising and the Follow-up Actions Report.

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

5. EXTERNAL AUDIT

a) Draft Report to those Charged with Governance

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Copy of the above Draft Report.

RECOMMENDED that Council Approves the External Audit Draft Report to those Charged with Governance.

The Chair advised that this item was for Approval rather than to Note. She invited Tomas Wilkinson, from the Northern Ireland Audit Office, to present the report.

Mr Wilkinson advised that the report summarised the key issues that had arisen from the NIAO audit of the Council's Financial Statements. That audit had been ongoing for 6-7 weeks. He confirmed that the 2025-26 Financial Statements would be published with an unqualified audit opinion without any modifications, and that the Local Government Auditor.

In relation to adjusted misstatements, he advised that the net effect of adjustments from the audit was nil. There was an uncorrected misstatement of £99K which was not, in NIAO's opinion, a material amount.

In terms of proper arrangements, the NIAO was satisfied that the Council had proper arrangements in place for securing economic efficiency and effectiveness.

Page 2 of the report stated the status of the audit as substantially complete. A small amount of work was required on property, plant, equipment and some expenditure but he did not anticipate any issues arising.

Once the audit was complete, the Chief Financial Officer could sign the Statement of Accounts and the NIAO's Letter of Representation. He recognised that it had been a challenging year for Council staff with the migration to a new financial management system after year-end, together with the loss of some key staff. That had resulted in the audit taking longer than originally anticipated.

Page 3 of the report pertained to the management of information and personal data, and he confirmed that auditors were unaware of any data handling incidents during the year. He assured the Committee that any personal data that auditors had access to, was destroyed on completion of the audit, in line with NIAO policies and procedures.

Mr Wilkinson advised that performance improvement would be reported separately in October 2026.

Turning to page 5 of the report, he advised that when the NIAO audit plan and audit strategy were completed, there was one significant audit risk which was the presumed significant risk of material misstatement. That risk appeared in all sets of accounts because management were in a unique position to override controls. Therefore, auditors completed tests around journals, accounting estimates and any significant transactions. He confirmed that no particular issues were found.

Page 6 of the report referenced the new financial management system that was put in place on 01 April 2026, one day after year-end, and he noted that Council staff had heavy involvement in migrating data and preparing draft accounts which caused some delays. Mr Wilkinson noted that the Council had robust processes in place for the production of accounts and that it continued to produce good quality working papers. Therefore, no change was required to accounting policies. The audit included a review of accounting estimates, and the auditors were broadly satisfied.

Page 8 of the report referred to other audited areas in relation to the going concern, the narrative report, the remuneration report, and the governance statement, and he confirmed that there were no issues with how those had been prepared.

Page 9 of the report referred to internal controls, and he confirmed that no significant deficiencies were noted.

Mr Wilkinson advised that from page 11 onward, the report noted the findings identified during the audit.

Finding 1 (Priority 2) related to issues identified within provisions.

For Public and Employer's Liability cases, the process was that the Council's Risk Management Team provided an estimate of the likely liability to the Finance Team, and an adjustment was carried out based on the average settlement figures of the last four years. The adjustment process was incorrect and should have been based on the expected outturn of individual cases. This had not had a material impact on the accounts in this instance, but the adjustment must be carried out differently moving forward.

In addition, legal cases from the previous year had not been reviewed during the year.

A further issue was noted in relation classification of provisions as either current or long-term, as there was no evidence to support the split of those figures. That was a disclosure issue in the accounts rather than a substantive issue.

Recommendations were made for the Council to review its methodology and how it calculated the Public and Employer's Liability provisions; to review all ongoing cases at year-end so as to provide an accurate reflection of circumstances at year-end; and to provide evidence to support all disclosures in the accounts.

He confirmed that management had accepted those recommendations.

Finding 2 (Priority 2) related to outstanding internal audit recommendations.

At year-end, there were 38 outstanding recommendations, 18 of which had not been started.

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A recommendation was made that the volume and ageing of those actions could present a risk to the Council; and that the Council needed to consider the impact of the outstanding recommendations on the effectiveness of its control environment.

Mr Wilkinson confirmed that management had accepted the recommendation and had undertaken to work towards resolving the issue.

Finding 3 (Priority 3) was in relation to IT and Information vulnerabilities.

Mr Wilkinson advised that the Council had identified Information Asset Owners for each key line of business. However, those Information Asset Owners had not completed formal risk assessments to ensure the proper protection and management of information.

In addition, he advised that the Council did not undertake an independent assessment of all IT systems and cyber security controls, known as an IT Health Check.

Recommendations were made for the Council's Information Asset Owners to complete formal risk assessments and for the Council to undertake independent IT health checks.

He confirmed that management had accepted those recommendations.

Finding 4 (Priority 3) related to areas for improvement regarding Proper Arrangements.

In particular, Mr Wilkinson noted the work that was needed to address two legacy policies: the Staff Travel Policy and the Employee Expenses and Benefits Policy, both of which needed to be updated.

A recommendation was made that the Council ensured that all policies were up to date and approved as soon as practicable.

He confirmed that management had accepted that recommendation.

Mr Wilkinson advised that, during the preparation of the accounts, some changes had to be made but that those changes did not have any net effect on Income and Expenditure. Details were set out on page 15 of the report.

Page 17 of the report referred to the previously mentioned understatement of £99K. This was an understatement of provision for tribunal cases which had not been adjusted and had been understated by the Council. Mr Wilkinson advised that NIAO did not consider this material. However, the auditors would require Committee approval that the understatement would not be changed by NIAO auditors or by the Council.

He concluded by directing the Committee's attention to the Letter of Representation at the end of the report.

Councillor Hollywood asked if the understatement of £99K would be corrected and why it had not yet been corrected. He recognised that making the correction would involve additional work. Mr Wilkinson advised that it was below the NIAO Auditors' level of materiality. They would not insist on a correction being made and it was Council's decision if the change should be made.

The Head of Finance advised that £90K was not material in a set of accounts where the Council was dealing with in excess of £80M. He confirmed that the Council would review how it addressed that issue in the future, and that it was content that there was no serious misstatement in the Financial Statements.

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

6. INTERNAL AUDIT

a) Progress Report

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Copy of the above Progress Report.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the Internal Audit Progress Report.

Camille McDermott of Deloitte advised that one report was currently before the Committee, but that planning had commenced for a further four reviews, some of which would be brought to the next Audit Committee meeting. She assured the Committee that there were no concerns around completing all reviews within the internal audit year.

b) Performance Improvement Audit

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Copy of the above Performance Improvement Audit.

The 2026/27 Annual Internal Audit Plan included provision for an assurance review of the Council's statutory Performance Improvement Process and the controls in place to support effective performance improvement management.

RECOMMENDED that Council note the Internal Audit Performance Improvement Audit.

Prachi Jain of Deloitte advised that, for the Performance Improvement review, auditors had looked at Council's statutory performance improvement process and the controls in place to support effective performance improvement management.

A satisfactory level of assurance had been given for the Performance Improvement Process review.

One Priority 2 finding and two Priority 3 findings had been identified.

The Priority 2 finding was in relation to the Performance Management Handbook which did not accurately reflect the H1 report review and approval process.

A recommendation was made that the Council should update the handbook to reflect the actual process.

She confirmed that management had accepted the recommendation and had updated the process.

The first of the Priority 3 findings was that one of the objective measures stated a higher investment target in the Performance Improvement Plan, compared with the final approved Parks and Cemeteries Service Plan.

A recommendation was made that the Council should ensure that PIP figures were cross-checked after all Service Plans had been approved and finalised.

She confirmed that management had accepted the recommendation.

The second Priority 3 finding was that the Performance Management Framework had not been reviewed since it was developed in September 2018. In addition, the Performance Management Handbook had been updated periodically to reflect changes in practice, but it did not include an approval log documenting the date of review and approval.

A recommendation was made that the Council should establish a review cycle for the Performance Management Framework aligned with the Corporate Plan review, every four years or when significant changes occur.

A recommendation was also made that the Council should include a version control log on both the Framework and Handbook documents, including the date of the last review, the approver and the date of the next review.

She confirmed that management had accepted both recommendations.

Ms Jain noted that, at the last Audit Committee meeting, there were 38 open issues and that 3 further issues had been added to the issue tracker. As part of the follow-up exercise, management had implemented recommendations around 10 actions, which were noted as closed. In addition to the 10 closed actions, management proposed 6 open items for risk acceptance, where the implementation of the recommendation was either dependent on other related actions, or where further action was outside the Council's control. Therefore, there were now 25 open actions: No Priority 1; 16 Priority 2; and 9 Priority 3 recommendations.

Councillor Wray referred to the Draft Report to those charged with Governance, the Internal Audit Progress Report and 38 outstanding issues previously discussed. He noted that the Progress Report referred to HR, recruitment and the Workforce Plan which was due to go before the Corporate Services Committee. He noted that the Workforce Plan had been to the last Corporate Services Committee meeting and asked if any of the officers wanted to comment.

He added that he had attended the recent Budgeting Workshop where mention was made of the Council's struggle to recruit staff with the right skills for some jobs. He

believed that this difficulty was due to competitiveness with other sectors and asked what practical actions Council could take to recruit the right people for those jobs, perhaps in terms of pay scales or other offerings in the workplace.

The Director of Corporate Services responded that the Council's first ever Workforce Plan had been endorsed by the Corporate Services Committee earlier in September 2026 and that Ards and North Down Borough Council was the first council in Northern Ireland to have a workforce plan approved. That was a step on the road to trying to address some of those issues.

He advised that there was a series of factors which impacted the Council and that the challenges were different in different areas. At times, the Council had struggled to recruit in areas such as Digital Services, Procurement or Leisure Services. For example, if another council gave an upgrade in a particular area, then that council would look more appealing, and we would likely lose staff.

There were a number of actions that could be taken, such as looking at the competitiveness of the Council's pay grading for roles that were particularly difficult to fill. More broadly, the Council could review its offerings that made it unique or different from competitor organisations. He advised that, as officers worked through the Workforce Plan, they were considering all these factors including contributions to health and wellbeing such as volunteer work and apprenticeship schemes and to try to attract people from a younger demographic.

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

7. AUDIT FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Copy of the Audit Financial Statements.

RECOMMENDED that Council Approves the Audit Financial Statements.

The Head of Finance advised that, although the Committee had discussed the Statements at its June 2026 meeting, it was important to note that a number of changes had been made to the Income and Expenditure Statement or, in private sector language, to the Profit and Loss account. One of the legal provisions, which was increased by a significant portion, had affected the year-end surplus and reduced it from £258K to approximately £58K. To mitigate that effect, money had been released from some of the contingency earmarked funds, which is exactly what those funds are for.

In addition, the Head of Finance, noted an instance where the Council had treated a capital grant element correctly but not the revenue element. That had been corrected in the Financial Statements. He confirmed that it did not have any net effect because the Council produced financial statements on an accounting basis, so it was comparable to private sector financial statements, and maintained its reserves on a rates basis. There were items such as depreciation, and early grant recognition that would need to be mitigated and removed. Again, there was no net effect, but this had changed the income levels in the report. There was still some work to be completed

on presentation and minor errors prior to the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Audit Committee signing the Financial Statements, after which they would be submitted to the auditor for his certification and then published before Wednesday, 23 September 2026.

Councillor Wray remarked that it was good to see that the general fund was above the minimum settled in the Reserves Policy and noted that the earmarked fund was heavily focused on the strategic objectives. He asked if the £148M projected borrowing by 2033 was a worst-case scenario and, if it did reach that level of borrowing, would it be manageable.

The Head of Finance advised that the Council was under a statutory obligation to ensure that its plans were affordable, sustainable and prudent. That was part of the rationale for including 1.45% of the rate increase each year allocated to capital and allowed the Council to build resilience in a consistent way. That would be addressed through the budget strategy again this year. It was also part of the reason why the Council was trying to undertake a capital review. He recognised that it was easy to get a project onto the capital project list but considerably more challenging to remove a project. Therefore, after the election, when the Council was in the new mandate, the Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance would liaise with colleagues and members about undertaking a review. It would not include every possible project. There were a number of projects that were not formally in the capital list but would need to be considered. That would also form part of the review.

Councillor Wray agreed on the timing of the review, after the election, and asked what lessons could be learned to prevent a project from getting on to the capital list, and should there be a limit as to how much was enough in terms of projects.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that balance was the key. The projects that the Council had on its capital projects list over the next ten years did not reflect everything that members had discussed over the years. Those capital projects were not solely about spending money; they were about delivering outcomes that the Council wanted to achieve. Therefore, a balance had to be struck between the Council's level of financial risk in taking on that level of debt versus the risk of not taking some of those projects forward; for example, where the Council was seeking a health and wellbeing outcome or an economic prosperity outcome to grow the rate base which was the Council's priority key objective.

He confirmed that there was no scenario where a Council capital investment would be completely risk-free. The Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance continued to highlight the need for the Council to be mindful of the risks in relation to debt when it was making decisions. More debt would be fine to a certain extent provided it was manageable. However, there would come a point when the risk associated with, for example, interest rate increases would become too much risk. It was a balancing act.

Councillor Harbinson confirmed that he was content to second the recommendation in relation to the Financial Statements. He expressed his concern around the capital spend but looked forward to the review in the next mandate.

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

8. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

9. SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS UPDATE

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

An update on Single Tender Actions brought to the attention of the Procurement Service Unit was provided.

The recommendation that Council note the report.

The recommendation was acceded to.

10. ADVISORY REVIEW – PROCUREMENT OF SYNTHETIC PITCHES

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

A Preliminary Review report into the procurement and payment of a leisure contract was provided.

The recommendation was that Council note the report.

The recommendation was acceded to.

11. FRAUD, WHISTLEBLOWING AND DATA-PROTECTION MATTERS

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

An update on fraud, whistleblowing and data protection matters was provided.

The recommendation was that Council note the verbal report.

The recommendation was acceded to.

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

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

Committee members met with representatives of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Internal Audit Services.

The recommendation was that Council note the meeting.

The recommendation was acceded to.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.32pm.

Unclassified

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ITEM 8.1**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	30 September 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	03 September 2026
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes ☒ No ☐ Other ☐ If other, please add comment below:
Subject	NILGA Conference 2026
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Letter dated 24 July 2026

Background

Correspondence has been from NILGA providing details of the 2026 Local Government Conference taking place on Thursday 8 October at Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn.

The conference theme is “ The Politics of Delivery: Leading Through Uncertainty” and NILGA would encourage Councillors and officers from all 11 Councils to attend this flagship event.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council consider correspondence.



The Politics of Delivery: Leading Through Uncertainty

8 October 2026
Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn



Councillor Craig Blaney
Mayor
Ards and North Down Borough Council
Town Hall
The Castle
BANGOR
BT20 4BT

24 July 2026

Dear Councillor Blaney,

The 2026 Local Government Conference will take place on Thursday, 8 October at Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn.

The conference theme, “**The Politics of Delivery: Leading Through Uncertainty**”, will explore how councils can deliver meaningful outcomes in the face of global political and financial pressures, fragile public trust, and rising expectations.

It will also highlight the role of courageous, values-driven leadership and community-focused innovation in building trust and resilience. More information on the conference is available [here](#).

As NILGA’s only conference during this mandate, it provides a valuable opportunity for councillors and officers to learn from one another and help shape the future direction of local government. We have confirmed a strong line-up of expert speakers who will share insights on how councils can respond effectively to the challenges and uncertainties ahead.

NILGA encourages councillors and officers from all 11 councils to attend this flagship event in the 2026 local government calendar. To support elected members attending, NILGA will cover the cost associated with attendance of those on the NILGA Executive. Where an Executive member is unable to attend, the relevant party office bearer will nominate an alternative councillor.

As many councillors and officers are encouraged to attend and a 50% discount will apply, reducing the delegate fee to £25 (+VAT) per person. This discounted rate is intended to encourage wider attendance from elected members and officers across member councils. We would be grateful if you could ensure that this letter is considered by members at the full council meeting.

Council places can be booked using the following [booking form](#).

We look forward to welcoming you to what promises to be an excellent event.

Yours sincerely

Alderman Hazel Legge
President, NILGA

Alison Allen
Chief Executive, NILGA

Unclassified

ITEM 9

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	30 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Regional Balance Bill – Call for Evidence Response
Attachments	Appendix 1: Regional Balance Bill as Introduced Appendix 2: Regional Balance Bill – Explanatory and Financial Memorandum
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 1: Economic 3. A thriving and sustainable economy If multiple:

Background

The Regional Balance Bill was introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 8 June 2026. The Private Member's Bill seeks to improve the Executive's response to regional imbalances in economic performance and living standards by placing a statutory duty on the Executive to develop and implement a Strategic Regional Balance Framework.

The Committee for the Economy issued a Call for Evidence inviting stakeholders to provide views on the provisions of the Bill. The responses received will inform the Committee's consideration of the Bill and the development of any necessary amendments.

The deadline for responses was 22 September 2026. As this preceded the September meeting of the Council, the response set out below was submitted in advance of the deadline on the basis that it was subject to formal ratification by the Council on 30 September 2026. The Committee was advised that any further comments or amendments agreed by the Council would be submitted under separate cover following the meeting.

The Bill as introduced and the accompanying Explanatory and Financial Memorandum are attached in Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

ANDBC Response to the Call for Evidence

The Council's response to Questions 6 to 30 of the Call for Evidence is set out below. The reasons have been included to assist Members' consideration of the proposed responses. As the online questionnaire did not provide an opportunity to include supporting reasons for the yes/no answers, these did not form part of the response submitted to the Committee for the Economy.

Clause 1: Strategic Regional Balance Framework

6. Do regional economic and related disparities need legislation in order for them to be addressed appropriately?

Response: Yes

Reason: A legislative framework is considered more likely to improve long-term coordination, accountability and delivery across departments and help build confidence that regional funding decisions are made fairly.

7. Should the obligation to develop a Strategic Regional Balance Framework sit with the Executive?

Response: Yes

8. Does the Bill correctly set out what should be included in the Strategic Regional Balance Framework, including the roles of departments; mechanisms to address disparity; criteria and methodology for assessing regional disparities; targets and milestones; use of cross-border data; and identification of a baseline year?

Response: Yes

Reason: The Bill clearly sets out the key elements to be included within the Strategic Regional Balance Framework.

9. Does the Bill correctly set out the consultation process for the development of the Strategic Regional Balance Framework, its publication and revision?

Response: Yes

Reason: District councils are specifically identified as consultees and should therefore have an opportunity to contribute to the development and review of the Framework.

10. Do you have any other comments on Clause 1 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments

Clause 2: Reporting, Review and Support Functions

11. Is it reasonable and sufficient to require all departments, when developing, adopting, implementing or revising any policy, strategy or plan, to have due regard to the need to reduce regional disparity and to the Strategic Regional Balance Framework?

Response: Yes

Reason: A consistent and coordinated approach across departments is more likely to be successful in addressing regional disparities.

12. Is it reasonable and sufficient to require all departments to exercise their functions, so far as is reasonably practicable, in a manner calculated to contribute to the outcomes and targets set in the Strategic Regional Balance Framework?

Response: Yes

13. Do you have any other comments on Clause 2 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments

Clause 3: Annual Reporting

14. Do you agree that all departments should be required to report annually on how they have reduced regional disparities in the preceding 12-month period?

Response: Yes

Reason: Annual reporting will help assess progress, support corrective action where required and provide greater transparency on the regional distribution and impact of public investment.

15. Do you have any other comments on Clause 3 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments

Clause 4: Annual Reporting

16. Do you agree that the Department for the Economy should be required to report annually, and that the Minister should make a related statement, on how all departments have reduced regional disparities in the preceding 12-month period?

Response: Yes

Reason: Annual reporting and Ministerial oversight will help assess whether the Framework is achieving its intended outcomes and provide greater transparency on progress in addressing regional disparities.

17. Do you have any other comments on Clause 4 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments

Clause 5: Reviewing the Framework

18. Do you agree that the operation and effectiveness of the Framework should be reviewed by the Executive every five years?

Response: Yes

Reason: Regular review will help assess the effectiveness of the Framework and identify any changes required to improve delivery.

19. Do you have any other comments on Clause 5 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments.

Clause 6: Guidance and Research

20. Do you agree that the Department for the Economy should provide guidance and information and undertake, commission or support research on regional disparities?

Response: Yes

Reason: Guidance and research will support informed and evidence based decision making.

21. Do you have any other comments on Clause 6 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments

Clause 7: Defining Regional Disparity and Regions

22. Do you agree with how regional disparity may be defined by the Bill?

Response: Yes

Reason: The definition in Clause 7 includes the principal economic and social indicators commonly used to assess regional disparities and provides a robust basis for assessment. The Council supports the use of these indicators, recognising that their application and weighting will be important in ensuring a fair and balanced assessment of regional disparity.

23. Should regional disparity indices be specified in the Bill?

Response: Yes

Reason: The inclusion of core indices supports consistency and transparency in the assessment of regional disparities.

24. What other indices should be used to define regional disparity?

Response: No additional indices proposed at this stage

Reason: The indicators set out in Clause 7 provide a broad range of economic and social measures commonly used to assess regional disparity. The Council considers that the methodology, weighting and application of these indicators are likely to be of greater significance in determining outcomes than the introduction of additional indices.

25. Do you agree with how the Bill may define a region within Northern Ireland?

Response: Yes

Reason: The Bill provides flexibility by recognising Local Government Districts and other statistical geographies designated by NISRA as appropriate units for assessing regional disparity.

26. Do you have any other comments on Clause 7 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments

Clause 8: Commencement and Short Title

27. Do you agree that the provisions of the legislation should come into operation immediately after Royal Assent?

Response: Yes

28. Do you have any other comments on Clause 8 or suggested amendments to this clause?

Response: No additional comments

Proposed Additions and Amendments

29. Please provide information on any other potential amendments that you consider would enhance the Bill and the rationale for those amendments.

Response: No additional comments

30. Please provide any additional comments on the Bill that you consider should be taken into account.

Response: No additional comments

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council **Approves** the response to the Committee for the Economy's Call for Evidence on the Regional Balance Bill and forwards any further comments the Council may have.

Regional Balance Bill

[AS INTRODUCED]

LEGISLATIVE COMPETENCE

At Introduction the Member in charge of the Bill, Ms Sinéad McLaughlin, had made the following statement under Standing Order 30:

“In my view the Regional Balance Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

SECRETARY OF STATE'S CONSENT

The following statement is for the purpose of section 10(3)(b) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998:

The Secretary of State has consented to the Assembly considering this Bill.

Regional Balance Bill

[AS INTRODUCED]

CONTENTS

PART 1

REGIONAL BALANCE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- 1. Duty to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework
- 2. Duty of Northern Ireland departments to have due regard to the Framework

PART 2

REPORTING, REVIEW AND SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

- 3. Departmental duty to compile and provide information
- 4. Annual report by the Department
- 5. Review of the operation of the Framework
- 6. Guidance and research

PART 3

FURTHER PROVISIONS

- 7. Interpretation
- 8. Commencement and short title

A

BILL

TO

Make provision for a statutory framework to improve regional balance in Northern Ireland; to impose a duty on the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a framework setting out how disparities in regional economic performance and living standards are to be addressed across government; to confer functions on the Department for the Economy in relation to the preparation of the framework, its reporting to the Assembly and providing guidance and research; and for connected purposes.

BE IT ENACTED by being passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and assented to by His Majesty as follows:

PART 1

REGIONAL BALANCE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Duty to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework

- 5
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- 15
- 1.**—(1) The Executive must develop, adopt, maintain and implement a strategic framework to be known as the Regional Balance Strategic Framework.

(2) The Framework must set out how the Executive proposes to reduce regional disparities in Northern Ireland.

(3) The Framework must in particular—

(a) state the outcomes which the Executive intends should be achieved and the period within which it is intended that the outcomes should be achieved;

(b) identify the roles of Northern Ireland departments in developing, adopting, implementing and revising policies, strategies and plans so as to reduce regional disparities;

(c) identify mechanisms to reduce regional disparities, including cross-departmental actions and funding plans;

- (d) set out the criteria and methodology for assessing regional disparities;
- (e) include provisions requiring Northern Ireland departments to recognise and consider cross-border economic data in policies, strategies and plans so as to reduce regional disparities; and
- 5 (f) include measurable targets to be achieved by specific dates (and any associated milestones) for reducing regional disparities, including—
 - (i) identification of a baseline year against which progress in reducing regional disparities is to be measured; and
 - 10 (ii) targets and associated investments that will allow for greater convergence towards the Northern Ireland average.
- (4) Before adopting the Framework, the Executive must consult—
 - (a) Northern Ireland departments;
 - (b) district councils;
 - 15 (c) such bodies as the Executive considers representative of business, workers, the community and voluntary sector; and
 - (d) such other persons as the Executive considers appropriate.
- (5) The Executive must lay the Framework, and any revision or replacement of it, before the Assembly and publish it in such manner as the Executive considers appropriate.
- 20 (6) The first Framework made under this section must be laid before the Assembly within 12 months from the day on which this section comes into operation.
- (7) The Executive may revise or replace the Framework, but subsections (2) to (4) apply to a material revision or replacement.

25 **Duty of Northern Ireland departments to have due regard to the Framework**

- 2.—(1) A Northern Ireland department, in developing, adopting, implementing or revising any policy, strategy or plan, must have due regard to the need to reduce regional disparity and to the Framework.
- 30 (2) A Northern Ireland department must, so far as is reasonably practicable, exercise its functions in a manner calculated to contribute to the outcomes and targets set in the Framework.
- (3) This section comes into operation at the end of the period of 12 months after the date this Act receives Royal Assent.

PART 2

35 **REPORTING, REVIEW AND SUPPORT FUNCTIONS**

Departmental duty to compile and provide information

- 3.—(1) The Northern Ireland departments must—
 - (a) compile and retain information on the exercise of the duty in section 2;
 - and

- (b) evaluate progress made in contributing to the criteria set out in the Framework, in so far as they relate to each department’s areas of responsibility,

to inform the annual report of the Department under section 4.

- 5 (2) Each Northern Ireland department must provide the Department with information for the annual report to include, but not be limited to—

- (a) actions taken in accordance with the exercise of the duty to have due regard to reducing regional disparities in the preceding 12 month period;
- 10 (b) an evaluation of the impact of the discharge of the duty on the outcome of policy programmes, to the extent that data is available; and
- (c) such other assistance as the Department requires in the preparation of the annual report.

- (3) The Department may issue guidance to Northern Ireland departments about the form, content and timing of information to be provided under this section.

15 **Annual report by the Department**

4.—(1) The Department must, for each reporting year, prepare and publish a report on—

- (a) the implementation of the provisions of this Act,
- (b) the operation of the Framework, and
- 20 (c) progress made by the Executive in reducing regional disparities in accordance with the outcomes and any targets set in the Framework.

(2) The Department must lay a copy of the report before the Assembly as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the reporting year.

25 (3) The Minister must make a statement to the Assembly as soon as practicable following the laying of the report.

(4) The first report must be published before the end of the period of 18 months beginning with the day on which the Framework is adopted by the Executive in accordance with section 1(1) of this Act.

30 (5) In this section “reporting year” means a period of 12 months ending on a date specified by the Department in the first report.

(6) The Department, following consultation with the Executive, may vary a reporting year.

Review of the operation of the Framework

35 **5.—**(1) The Executive must review the operation and effectiveness of the Framework within five years of the day on which the Framework is laid before the Assembly in accordance with section 1, and at least once every five years thereafter.

(2) The Department may make recommendations to the Executive about—

- (a) the outcomes and any targets set in the Framework;
- 40 (b) actions to be taken by Northern Ireland departments to reduce regional disparity; and

(c) any revision of the Framework.

(3) The Department must publish any recommendations made under subsection (2) and lay a copy before the Assembly.

Guidance and research

5 **6.**—(1) The Department may—

(a) provide guidance, advice and information about matters connected with addressing regional disparities and the operation of the Framework;

(b) undertake, commission or support (by financial means or otherwise) research into any matter relating to regional disparities; and

10 (c) promote awareness, engagement and best practice among Northern Ireland departments and other public bodies in relation to addressing regional disparities.

(2) The Department may from time to time revise any guidance issued under this section.

15 (3) The Department must publish any guidance issued or revised under this section.

PART 3

FURTHER PROVISIONS

Interpretation

20 **7.** In this Act—

“cross-border economic data” means data concerning economic activity, labour markets, or service provisions that operate across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland;

25 “the Department” means the Department for the Economy or any successor department;

“the Executive” means the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly or any successor committee;

“the Framework” means the Regional Balance Strategic Framework developed in accordance with section 1 of this Act;

30 “the Minister” means the minister with responsibility for the Department;

“regional disparities” means disparities in economic performance and living standards between regions and sub-regions within Northern Ireland, having regard (amongst other things) to—

(a) gross domestic product per head of population;

35 (b) average and median disposable household income per head of population;

(c) unemployment rates, employment rates and economic inactivity rates;

(d) productivity, including gross value added per employee;

- (e) health data, including average life expectancy;
- (f) education data, including attainment rates;
- (g) indices of deprivation;
- (h) affordable housing;
- 5 (i) access to airports; and
- (j) the regional distribution of public capital expenditure;

10 “regions” are to be defined by reference to statistical geographies within Northern Ireland designated by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (including, but not limited to, Local Government Districts), as specified in the Framework, as well as other relevant data catchments, and other relevant functional areas which may cross administrative or jurisdictional boundaries; and

“sub-regions” means any division of a region.

Commencement and short title

- 15 **8.**—(1) This Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent.
- (2) This Act may be cited as the Regional Balance Act (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Regional Balance Bill

[AS INTRODUCED]

A Bill to make provision for a statutory framework to improve regional balance in Northern Ireland; to impose a duty on the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a framework setting out how disparities in regional economic performance and living standards are to be addressed across government; to confer functions on the Department for the Economy in relation to the preparation of the framework, its reporting to the Assembly and providing guidance and research; and for connected purposes.

Introduced by: Ms Sinéad McLaughlin

On: 08 June 2026

Bill Type: Non-Executive Bill

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS

**An Explanatory and Financial Memorandum is printed separately as
NIA Bill 35/22-27 EFM.**



Northern Ireland Assembly

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This Memorandum refers to the Regional Balance Bill as introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 8 June 2026, (Bill 35/22-27)

REGIONAL BALANCE BILL

EXPLANATORY AND FINANCIAL MEMORANDUM

INTRODUCTION

1. This Explanatory and Financial Memorandum has been prepared by Sinéad McLaughlin MLA (the Bill Sponsor) in order to assist the reader of the Bill and to help inform debate on it. It does not form part of the Bill and has not been endorsed by the Assembly.
2. The Memorandum needs to be read in conjunction with the Bill. It is not, and is not meant to be, a comprehensive description of the Bill. So, where a clause or part of a clause does not seem to require an explanation or comment, none is given.

BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

3. The Bill seeks to improve the Northern Ireland Executive's response to regional imbalances in economic performance and living standards by creating a statutory duty on the Executive to deliver and renew a strategic framework to address these imbalances. There are five main arguments which form the case for this legislation.
4. Firstly, that such regional imbalances are currently only addressed through non-binding strategies and policy, which has proven an ineffective approach. As far back as 2012, the Regional Development Strategy¹ committed to balanced regional growth and tackling regional imbalance. Yet despite the inclusion of regional balance in some strategies, policies and plans, not enough has been achieved in practice. The Bill Sponsor is clear the lack of a statutory duty creates too much scope for piecemeal and ad hoc approaches. The Bill is intended to provide ongoing focus on practical measures to address this issue.
5. It is argued that binding obligations on delivering a framework and reporting is needed, given the relatively limited success of strategies so far. A statutory framework will increase transparency and focus on the factors which impact regional imbalances, allowing for a sustained approach across government and increased parliamentary scrutiny of outcomes. In taking this legislation forward, the Bill Sponsor is seeking to balance the benefit of an appropriate duty to address regional balance, with an acceptance that Departments also need flexibility to deliver this.
6. Secondly, the Bill recognises that addressing regional balance is the responsibility of the whole of government and requires a long-term approach. However, it is currently only understood by many as the purview of the Department for the Economy ('the Department'), with no legislative guarantee that other Ministers take any action or co-operate on strategy. For example, existing deficits in infrastructure provision and imbalances of healthcare provision suggest that it is only through a whole of government approach that regional imbalances can be alleviated. Although the previous Economy

¹ <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/regional-development-strategy-2035>

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Minister made regional balance a priority in his Economic Vision, he has also noted that no Minister can achieve this priority in one department alone.

7. Thirdly, existing efforts by the UK Government to address such imbalances have proven unsuccessful. For example, the ‘levelling up’ agenda driven by the previous UK Government, and particularly articulated through the 2022 White Paper *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*², failed to fully deliver in practice. Although the principles that underpinned ‘levelling up’ were appropriate, the UK government’s approach in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 was unfocused and overly centralised. Northern Ireland requires a specific approach, driven by our Executive with a broad view of what constitutes regional balance. The current UK Government is pursuing an approach of regional growth and the targeting of capital investment outside the South-East of England. While this could help to stimulate economic activity in left-behind places, it does not represent a strategic approach to narrowing the gaps between places to give equality of opportunity between places and ensure anyone can go as far as their talents can take them, regardless of background.
8. Fourthly, the economic development agency Invest Northern Ireland (INI) has failed to equitably target the distribution of jobs and opportunity throughout Northern Ireland. The recent Independent Review³ of INI commissioned by the previous Minister ultimately proved scathing, including on this point, where it emphasised the need for a much more effective sub-regional performance. In order to keep the focus of this Bill proportionate, it has been decided not to amend the statutory framework governing Invest NI as part of this legislation. Instead, the intention is to focus on the implementation of a regional balance strategy and associated reporting obligations. This does not preclude instruction to INI which aligns with the Strategic Framework in a flexible and targeted manner.
9. The current legislation requires INI to advise the Minister but also allows the Department to issue directions to INI on its functions. Overall, the focus of this Bill is to direct minds towards the role of regional balance in wider development strategy. However, the failures of Invest NI remain relevant within the wider policy context. The Bill Sponsor believes that a greater focus within government on regional balance (i.e. the difference in economic performance and living standards between geographic regions), will complement and bolster the work of the economic development agency- including by improving economic policy on those areas which might lie directly outside the agency’s competences (for example, on skills policy).
10. Fifthly, in order to change the existing approach, legislation is needed to adopt a duty-based approach and ensure regional balance is a ‘golden thread’ that runs through departmental decision making. As noted previously, a growing political consensus accepts that no-one’s life chances should be limited by the geography of their birth. Yet these nods to regional balance in each strategy have not amounted to significant policy changes in Executive Departments. Binding obligations will drive a focus on areas that have been left behind and ensure robust collation of data that can inform public policy outcomes. The legislation is intended to complement existing initiatives to address

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

³ <https://www.investnireview.org.uk/>

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regional inequalities by creating a legal framework that can facilitate the success of this long-term mission.

11. The Bill therefore gives statutory recognition to regional balance (i.e. the difference in economic performance and living standards between geographic regions) as an Executive-wide priority, requires the Executive to adopt and maintain a Regional Balance Strategic Framework, imposes a duty on departments to pay due regard to the Framework when developing policies, strategies and plans, and requires annual reporting to, and scrutiny by, the Assembly. The Department for the Economy is given a lead role in monitoring, reporting, issuing guidance and conducting research to support delivery.
12. This latter point is important, as the Bill is seeking to balance recognition that departments need to work together in the context of an overall, strategic framework with the expertise and lead responsibility resting with the Department for the Economy. This means that the Framework will have a clear owner in terms of reporting and recommending improvements, whilst ensuring the Executive drives it across the board. This balance is clear throughout the Bill, for example the recognition that different departments will have differing levels of input into the Framework, which is catered for by the flexible duty in clause 2.

CONSULTATION

13. The Bill Sponsor conducted a 12-week online public consultation on the legislative proposal between November 2024 and February 2025. A total of 115 responses were received including from individuals, NGOs, academics, and lobby organisations.
14. Almost universal support was expressed for certain provisions of the Bill:
 - 95.4% of respondents said that they believed that the NI Executive should take greater action to reduce the difference in economic performance and living standards between geographic regions.
 - 94.4% of respondents agreed with the definition that regional economic imbalance in Northern Ireland is the difference in economic performance and living standards between geographic regions.
15. Substantial support was also expressed for other provisions in the Bill:
 - 86% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to mandate all departments to have due regard to regional balance when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and designing and delivering public services.
 - 86.9% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to mandate the Department for the Economy to publish a statement at the start of an Assembly mandate outlining the Department's approach to improve regional economic imbalance.

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- 86.2% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal to mandate Invest NI to develop and publish sub-regional economic targets on an annual basis and report to the Department on these targets.
- 16. The main opposition in the e-consultation to the proposal raised concerns about the impact on Belfast as an economic driver and the possible neglect of the region's capital city, should government become more focused on 'left-behind' places. This is a point the Bill Sponsor is alive to, but notes that the legislation is seeking to drive greater regional balance and lift opportunity and standards of living overall, giving the Executive appropriate discretion to make policy choices on that and justify them accordingly. It is the Bill Sponsor's firm belief that regional balance will result in an improved settlement for left-behind areas, whether within the capital city which contains an extensive share of more deprived wards, especially in North and West Belfast, or more peripheral areas such as the North-West.
- 17. The e-consultation added to the already comprehensive consultation engaged by the Bill Sponsor through in-person and online engagements with key stakeholders in the area of regional balance. For example, the Bill Sponsor undertook specific engagements on the Bill with the Centre for Cross Border Studies (which convened a wide cross-section of its stakeholders), the leading trade union body NIC-ICTU, the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce, Queen's University Belfast as well as other organisations such as the Resolution Foundation and other stakeholders such as Foyle Port. Moreover, the Bill Sponsor has raised the issue of the legislation as an agenda item for discussion in meetings with a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses. Written responses to the consultation were also received from the Open University, the NI Tourism Alliance and the Rural Community Network.
- 18. The Open University supported the Bill's ambition to establish regional balance, emphasising the importance of access to part-time and flexible higher education options and recommending that this is factored into the Bill's mandates for departments. While this would be a useful addition to the Bill's provisions, in the context of a refined and narrow Bill, it is not being considered for inclusion by the Bill Sponsor. The Bill Sponsor is conscious that a Member's Bill should be tightly focused and wants to avoid being overly prescriptive in new areas. This will ensure Assembly scrutiny can be focused on the core objectives of the Bill.
- 19. However, it is the Bill Sponsor's belief that such recommendations should be considered by the Minister. For example, the Executive may consider incorporating the recommendation to assess the accessibility and inclusivity of skills strategies within a regional balance lens. It may also be addressed in the context of guidance issued by the Department for the Economy under the Framework. The Bill Sponsor also supports the suggestion that lifelong learning participation could be used as one possible measurement of living standards between different regions, as well as the recommendation to assess the strength of partnerships between education providers, industry bodies and employers when region-specific skills programmes are designed. Given the breadth of measurements, space for flexibility is wise.
- 20. Queen's University Belfast also affirmed its support for the principle of Executive departments working together in the development and implementation of policy, encouraging a broad conversation around HE sectoral funding and sustainability. The

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Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance similarly expressed appreciation for the commitment to addressing regional disparities and welcomed the Bill Sponsor's recognition that a more coordinated and strategic approach is required to promote a fair distribution of economic opportunities.

21. The Bill Sponsor also engaged with the Mayors of Manchester and Liverpool in relation to their proposal for similar legislation in England and reflected on the salience of the issue across the two islands. The Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) broadly welcomed the initiative to bring forward legislation to address regional economic imbalance in a more systematic way. It encouraged the Bill Sponsor to carefully define how it approaches the concept of economic imbalance between geographic regions within Northern Ireland.
22. This is an important reflection and one the Bill Sponsor fully explored with Bill drafters. In particular, the Bill Sponsor considered whether a definition of regional balance was helpful. Ultimately, the Bill Sponsor concluded that providing an inclusive list of indicators which can help to define "regional disparities" was the best approach. This allows some guidelines for the Executive whilst recognising it is impossible to be completely exhaustive in one definition. The legislative framework must contain sufficient flexibility to evolve, and a singular definition risked taking an unduly narrow and constrained approach. Careful thought was given to identifying appropriate indicators for reporting which target information on key metrics whilst being flexible. The CCBS also raised important considerations and concerns in relation to the possibility of unambitious targets, insufficiently meaningful reporting by departments or independent assessment. These are legitimate considerations and underline the importance between achieving clarity in the scope of the statutory responsibilities under the Bill whilst reflecting it is the duty of the Assembly to scrutinise delivery against the Bill's ambitions.
23. In addition, the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs also responded to a request to the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise for comment on the Bill. The Minister advised that regional economic statistics are limited, and any reliance will need to take account of the fact that small regions mean statistics are distorted by the fact many people live in one region and work in another, while a business may be based in one region but employ people from throughout NI or further afield. The Bill Sponsor considers that these are important contributions which should be addressed by the Department through more effective data collation and improved monitoring. In fulfilling their responsibilities under the Bill, Departments can set out their operating assumptions and approach to any targets they have been assigned.
24. Where stakeholders expressed suggestions for alternatives to legislation, it was suggested that regional economic imbalances could be alleviated through policy change alone, without the need for legislative provisions. However, as detailed above, the Bill Sponsor believes that there is a compelling case for legislation. This is because statutory duties span different Ministers and different administrations. This provides a clear focus and signal that regional balance is a long-term, systemic objective. While appropriate interventions can help to assist regional inequalities, they are limited in scope and lack the legislative weight of a duty-based approach.

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OPTIONS CONSIDERED

25. **Option One:** Continue with the status quo and take no legislative action.
26. **Option Two:** Introduce and enact legislation to improve regional balance.
27. The Bill Sponsor is of the view that the status quo has failed to embed a sufficiently strategic approach to the improvement of regional balance, and believes legislation is needed to correct this. Non-legislative approaches to addressing regional imbalance, namely strategies and guidance, have not secured sustained cross-government prioritisation or transparency sought by the Bill Sponsor in proposing this Bill.
28. Following consultation and deliberation, the Bill Sponsor concludes that introducing and enacting primary legislation is the most appropriate and proportionate approach. She proposes placing core duties and reporting requirements in primary legislation while leaving detailed targets and methodologies to the Executive's Framework, which is considered to balance accountability with flexibility.

OVERVIEW

29. The Bill has 8 Clauses and no Schedules. It is structured in three Parts. Part 1 requires the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework and imposes a due regard duty on departments, supported by departmental information gathering. Part 2 provides for annual reporting to the Assembly, Departmental review and recommendations, and guidance and research functions. Part 3 contains ancillary, interpretation, commencement and short title provisions.
30. A commentary on each of the Clauses follows below. However, where a Clause or part of a Clause does not seem to require an explanation or comment, none is given.

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSES

Clause 1: This places a duty on the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement the Framework. The Framework must set outcomes, the lifetime of the Framework, departmental roles, identify mechanisms and methodology, include provisions requiring departments to recognise and consider cross-border economic data, and enable measurable, time-bound targets. It must be consulted upon, laid before the Assembly and published within 12 months of Clause 1 coming into operation.

The Framework may be revised or replaced following a similar process. This mirrors established structures in Northern Ireland (e.g. the Children's Services Co-operation Act model) and comparable regimes in other jurisdictions (e.g. Finland's approach to national targets in the Regional Development Act 2002; Wales' approach to objectives in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015). The Department for the Economy is the lead Department in the compilation of the Framework and its reporting.

The Framework's requirement for measurable, time-bound targets is intended to be supported by baseline measurements. The Executive is expected, when developing the

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Framework, to establish a baseline year against which progress in reducing regional disparities can be measured. This approach reflects international practice, including the Croatian Regional Development Index which classifies regions relative to national averages and is reviewed periodically. The absence of a prescribed baseline interval on the face of the Bill allows flexibility for the Executive to determine the most appropriate methodology, while ensuring that targets are included that will allow for greater convergence towards the NI average. The aspiration in this regard is to grow local government districts below the NI average at a faster level than local government districts above the NI average, in line with OECD research. It is expected that the Framework should include provisions to utilise the economic potential of cross-border agglomeration economies and cross-border cooperation, in line with OECD research.

Clause 2: This requires departments, when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, to have due regard to the need to reduce disparity and to the Framework, and (so far as is reasonably practicable), exercise their functions in a manner calculated to contribute to the outcomes and any targets set in the Framework. This calibrates a justiciable, yet proportionate duty focused on process and explanation of specific departmental contributions, similar to section 49A of The Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 in equality/disability contexts. This avoids hard-edged obligations which are overly prescriptive and too unwieldy within legislation whilst creating a focus for scrutiny of the choices made by the Executive in the design of the Framework and departments when complying with their responsibilities under it. The duty applies after 12 months following Royal Assent.

Clause 3: This requires departments to compile, retain and provide information to the Department to support annual reporting, including actions taken and evaluations of impact, with a power for the Department to issue guidance on format and timing. Furthermore, each Northern Ireland department is required to evaluate progress made in contributing to the criteria set out in the Framework, so far as these relate to each department's areas of responsibility. This ensures a consistent evidence base across government, reflecting practice in other Northern Ireland statutes with cross-cutting strategies.

Clause 4: This requires the Department to prepare, publish and lay before the Assembly an annual report on implementation of the Act, operation of the Framework and progress in reducing regional imbalances in line with outcomes and any targets. It also requires the Minister to make a relevant statement on the report as soon as practicable following its publication. The first report is due within 18 months of the first framework being adopted by the Executive, permitting initial establishment and baseline work; subsequent reports are annual. A flexible definition of “reporting year” enables alignment of the publication with data cycles and creates conditions for stronger scrutiny of performance under the Framework.

Clause 5: This requires the Executive to review the Framework's operation and effectiveness within five years of the first Framework being laid before the Assembly, and then at least once every five years thereafter. This enables (and, where appropriate, requires) the Department for the Economy to make and publish recommendations to the Executive, which must be laid before the Assembly. This supports iterative improvement

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while respecting the Executive's ownership of outcomes and targets. This creates accountability where compliance with best practice and local conditions can be assessed.

Clause 6: This confers ancillary functions on the Department to provide guidance and information, and to undertake, commission or support research on regional disparities. It also enables promotion of awareness, engagement and best practice. Publication of guidance is required.

Research prepared by the Northern Ireland Assembly, Research and Information Service noted a theme, (for example from OECD), that poor government effectiveness at the subnational level severely limits the prospects of regions. Key remedies include investment in strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. Comparator legislation in Victoria, Australia (Regional Development Victoria Act 2002) and Croatia (The Act on Regional Development of the Republic of Croatia 2014) established dedicated statutory agencies. While this legislation does not establish any statutory agencies, it provides the Department for the Economy with capacity-building responsibilities.

Clause 7: This defines terms used in the Bill. "Regional disparities" is defined by reference to the disparities in economic performance and living standards between regions and subregions (as defined) within Northern Ireland, having regard to statistical geographies designated by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (including, but not limited to, Local Government Districts as well as other relevant data catchments and functional areas which may cross administrative or jurisdictional boundaries). It is defined with reference to a non-exhaustive list of indicators drawn from international and UK practice. These include GDP per head, average and median disposable household income per head, unemployment/employment/inactivity rates, productivity (i.e. GVA per employee), health data, including average life expectancy, education data including attainment rates, deprivation indices, affordable housing, access to airports and the regional distribution of public capital expenditure. The list is placed on the face of the Bill to ensure transparency, while allowing methodological evolution through the Executive's Framework. Departments are free to have regard to considerations beyond this list as appropriate. The clause also defines "cross-border economic data" as data concerning economic activity, labour markets, or service provisions that operate across the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The list of indices of "regional disparities" has been informed by research the Northern Ireland Assembly's Research and Information Service found, itself citing publications from the OECD, European Commission and UK Government. This research demonstrates that regional performance should be measured across both economic and non-economic dimensions. The indicators on the face of the Bill align with international best practice by including measures of well-being (healthy life expectancy), human capital (educational attainment), and institutional effectiveness (deprivation indices), while allowing the Executive's Framework to develop further metrics.

Clause 8: This sets out the Bill's commencement and short title.

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FINANCIAL EFFECTS OF THE BILL

31. The Bill requires the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework and imposes a due regard duty on departments, supported by departmental information gathering. It also provides for annual reporting to the Assembly, Departmental review and recommendations, and guidance and research functions. There will be administrative costs to the Executive, the Department for the Economy and other departments associated with preparing the Framework, compiling information, conducting analysis, reporting and consultation.
32. Framework development and cross-departmental implementation are likely to generate administrative and analytical costs, even if largely absorbed within existing departmental baselines. The scale of these costs will depend on how ambitious, prescriptive and resource-intensive the Framework ultimately becomes.
33. Ongoing data collection, collation and reporting requirements may require additional capacity, especially if new indicators, software systems or analytical processes are needed to implement the Bill provisions, evidencing progress against regional balance objectives.
34. The Department for the Economy already undertakes substantial activity related to regional balance, including a dedicated Regional Balance Unit and significant programme expenditure through initiatives such as the Regional Balance Fund and Invest Northern Ireland regional programmes. This existing infrastructure could limit the need for entirely new structures. However, the Department could face increased workload through the broader focus on regional balance.
35. For example, the ancillary functions on the Department for the Economy to provide guidance and information, and to undertake, commission or support research on regional disparities could require additional expenditure.
36. The Bill does not itself create new spending or grant programmes or impose direct costs on public bodies. The financial implications of the Bill are indirect and fall mainly in departmental resources. Any financial impact would be determined by what is required to fulfil the objectives of the Bill and whether those requirements could be absorbed into existing resources. Of course, downstream decision making on regional balance may incur direct expenditure, but that will flow from Executive agreement of the Framework and its ambition.
37. It is expected that Departments will incur financial costs as a result of the Bill through the allocation of Departmental staff resource in the Bill's implementation and in its reporting. The Bill Sponsor believes this is justified in order to address the challenge of regional economic inequalities and inequalities in living standards. If effective in addressing regional balance over time, the Bill Sponsor feels the Bill could even have a net positive impact on the public purse.
38. An assumed consequence of addressing regional imbalance is improving the economic performance of currently under-performing regions. A logical consequence of improving the economic performance of underperforming regions is increased economic activity in those regions, potentially resulting in increased corporate tax revenue. Furthermore,

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increased economic activity could lead to job creation, which could in turn lead to a decrease in expenditure on unemployment and inactivity, and increased personal tax revenue from greater employment. Whilst these are long-term objectives and will depend on the details of implementation and other factors, they represent the potential if the policy intent of the Bill is delivered well.

39. Assuming that the draft Bill would result in new economic activity and jobs, rather than displacing economic activity and jobs from better performing regions, that could lead to an increase in Northern Ireland's overall tax revenue through increased corporate, personal taxes and rates revenue, and a decrease in Northern Ireland's overall expenditure on unemployment and economic inactivity. Again, this will be dependent on a range of factors around implementation and broader economic conditions. This Bill is about creating the conditions to focus on improving regional balance and commit to continuous improvement in doing so.
40. A significant element of this hypothetical potential tax revenue increase – corporate and personal taxes – would of course be received by HM Treasury and could be returned to Northern Ireland through its Block Grant. An increase in rates revenue, however, would be more directly beneficial to the Executive's Budget. Decreased expenditure on departmental unemployment and inactivity programmes could also have a more direct impact on Northern Ireland budgets, as money formerly spent on programmes to address these could be redirected elsewhere.

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

41. The Bill imposes duties on public authorities and does not interfere with Convention rights. The provisions of the Bill are considered to be compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights and with Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

42. An Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken. Engagement between the Bill Sponsor and the Equality Commission on the outline proposal did not raise any potential adverse effects on initial reading and the Bill Sponsor is happy to engage on this further. Indeed, if the Bill contributes to achieving its policy objectives it may positively affect some groups subject to disadvantage. By promoting action to reduce geographic disparities, the Bill is expected to have positive equality impacts. Transparent reporting and a duty to pay due regard to the Framework support compliance with existing equality obligations.
43. The Bill Sponsor is therefore satisfied that the Bill will not have an adverse effect on any of the groups identified in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
44. The duties imposed by the Bill will be subject to obligations under Section 75.

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LEGISLATIVE COMPETENCE

At Introduction, Sinéad McLaughlin MLA made the following statement under Standing Order 30:

“In my view the Regional Balance Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly.”



Northern Ireland Assembly

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Unclassified

ITEM 10

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	30 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Place and Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Economic Growth
Report title	Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability Consultation Response
Attachments	Appendix 1: Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability Consultation Document
File Reference (if applicable)	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Resource Implications	None Narrative: Consultation
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

The Department of Finance issued a consultation on proposals relating to the Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability.

The consultation seeks views on proposals intended to encourage business growth, investment and occupation of commercial premises, whilst also considering changes to the treatment of vacant non-domestic properties.

The consultation provides an opportunity for local government, businesses and other stakeholders to comment on the potential economic and financial implications of the proposals.

The deadline for responses was 23 September 2026. As this preceded consideration by Council, the response set out in Section 2 was submitted in advance of the deadline on the basis that it was subject to Council approval. Any amendments arising from Council's consideration will be submitted to the Department of Finance under separate cover.

The consultation document is attached at Appendix 1.

ANDBC Response to Consultation

The Council's response to Questions 7 to 34 of the consultation is set out below. The reasons have been included to assist Members' consideration of the proposed responses. Where the consultation questionnaire did not provide an opportunity to include supporting reasons, only the responses themselves formed part of the submission.

Proposal 1: Business Growth Accelerator

7. Do you support a Business Growth Accelerator?

Response: Yes

8. Does the current system discourage investment?

Response: Yes

9. Would this policy incentivise new activity, or mainly defer valuation increases that would already be occurring?

Response: Yes – likely to encourage investment by reducing upfront costs and supporting business growth.

10. What is the appropriate grace period that could be adopted?

Response: More than 12 months.

11. Should enhanced support apply where vacant property units are brought back into use?

Response: Yes

12. How should "qualifying improvements" be defined?

Response: Qualifying improvements should include significant capital investment, expansion, redevelopment or substantial refurbishment that materially improves the functionality, capacity or economic use of a property. Routine maintenance, repairs and minor cosmetic enhancements should not qualify.

13. Should minimum or maximum thresholds apply within the policy?

Response: Yes – A minimum threshold should apply to avoid relatively minor improvements qualifying for relief. Support should focus on significant capital investment capable of delivering business growth, regeneration or wider economic benefit.

14. Are any property types best excluded?

Response: No – Eligibility should be determined by the nature and impact of the investment rather than the property type.

15. How can administrative burden be minimised?

Response: Clear guidance and eligibility criteria should be published by the Department. The application process should be simple, straightforward and proportionate, with unnecessary administrative requirements avoided wherever possible.

16. Should advance notification be required from an applicant before any extension or improvement works commence?

Response: No

Reason: Advance notification could create an unnecessary administrative burden and potential barrier to investment. Eligibility should be capable of being demonstrated through appropriate evidence following completion of the works.

17. How should the policy align with the completion notice process?

Response: The completion notice process should be used as the trigger point for the grace period, avoiding the need for additional administrative processes.

18. What economic benefit would result from this policy proposal?

Response: The proposal could encourage business investment, expansion and property improvement by reducing the immediate impact of increased rates liability. This may support business growth, improve investor confidence, create employment opportunities, enhance commercial premises and contribute to longer-term growth in the rates base once the grace period expires.

19. Are there more effective alternatives to achieve the same policy goals?

Response: No more effective alternative has been identified. However, complementary measures such as grant schemes supporting property improvement, vacancy reduction and regeneration could further enhance the impact of the proposal.

20. Additional comments on the Business Growth Accelerator

Response: No additional comments.

Proposal 2: Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability

21. Do you support increasing NDVR liability to 75% and 100%?

Response: Yes

22. Should current NDVR exclusions remain?

Response: No

Reason: Existing exclusions should be reviewed and retained only where clearly justified. Exclusions should not undermine the objectives of reducing vacancy, encouraging occupation and bringing properties back into productive use. Any exclusions should be designed to minimise opportunities for avoidance and support the effective operation of the policy.

23. What is the appropriate timing for introducing any increased NDVR liability locally?

Response: 18 months

Reason: This provides a fair opportunity to market and reoccupy vacant premises while maintaining an appropriate incentive to address vacancy, support regeneration and encourage productive use of property.

24. Are alternative approaches available aside from increasing rating liability?

Response: Yes – Alternative approaches could include vacancy and dereliction grant schemes, streamlined planning or change-of-use processes, and town centre living initiatives. These may be most effective when used alongside, rather than instead of, changes to NDVR liability.

25. How should this change align with the wider rates and valuation system?

Response: The change should align with the wider rating system in a way that minimises opportunities for avoidance and ensures consistent treatment across property types. It should complement wider measures aimed at reducing vacancy, increasing occupation and supporting regeneration, while recognising differing market conditions.

26. What complementary measures are needed to promote occupancy?

Response: Further financial support for the regeneration and reoccupation of vacant and derelict properties, alongside measures that support mixed-use development, including living above shops. Streamlined delivery processes, while maintaining appropriate governance, may also help accelerate investment and occupancy.

27. What do you see as the behavioural impacts associated with the policy proposal?

Response: The proposal may encourage owners to let, improve, redevelop or dispose of vacant properties. However, it may also increase the risk of non-payment in some cases, potentially resulting in additional enforcement and debt recovery activity.

28. Are additional anti-avoidance measures required prior to implementation?

Response: Yes – Measures should be considered to minimise opportunities for artificial or short-term occupation arrangements and ensure the policy encourages genuine reoccupation and productive use of vacant premises.

29. Should treatment vary by sector or property type?

Response: Treatment should generally remain consistent across sectors and property types; however, if any variation is introduced, it should be evidence-based and targeted at supporting the reoccupation and regeneration of vacant high-street properties, where the impacts of vacancy are often most acute. Any differential treatment should be clearly defined, transparent and support town centre and high street revitalisation.

30. How can collection be maximised upon introduction of the policy?

Response: The policy should be integrated within existing rates billing and collection arrangements, supported by clear communication and accessible payment options.

31. Should mitigation measures apply in cases of market failure?

Response: Any mitigation measures should be clearly defined, evidence-based and supported by a transparent rationale. Criteria should be applied consistently and be capable of withstanding challenge.

32. Should increases depend on duration of vacancy?

Response: Yes – A phased approach based on the duration of vacancy provides a reasonable opportunity to secure a tenant or bring a property back into productive use, while encouraging different behaviours where properties remain vacant for prolonged periods, including letting, sale, redevelopment or reinvestment.

33. What wider impacts do you foresee as a result of this proposal?

Response: The proposal may encourage the reoccupation of vacant properties, supporting increased business activity and growth in the non-domestic rates base. Wider impacts may include improved vibrancy and footfall in town and city centres, enhanced placemaking, increased investor confidence and support for longer-term regeneration and revitalisation.

34. Additional comments on Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability

Response: In relation to Q22, existing exclusions should be reviewed and retained only where clearly justified. Exclusions should not undermine the objectives of reducing vacancy, encouraging occupation and bringing properties back into productive use. Any exclusions should be designed to minimise opportunities for avoidance and support the effective operation of the policy.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council **Approves** the response to the Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability Consultation and forwards any further comments the Council may have.



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Consultation Paper

Business Growth Accelerator / Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability

July 2026



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Foreword

Minister of Finance

In my time as Finance Minister, I have progressed a sustained programme of reform to deliver a more responsive and progressive rating system. This consultation document represents the next step in that process.

The paper seeks views on two policy initiatives designed to complement existing measures such as the Back in Business scheme and Small Business Rate Relief to continue to support business activity and the vitality of our town and city centres.

The proposals have two core objectives:

- to support business growth by reducing barriers to investment and expansion; and
- to help address the persistent issue of vacant commercial property.

These policies are intended to work together and alongside wider interventions both within the rating system and across central and local government. If implemented effectively, they can stimulate investment, increase occupancy, support regeneration, and grow rating revenue sustainably over the medium to long term.

Both proposals arise from the Strategic Reviews of Small Business Rate Relief and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating conducted in 2025–26. In November 2025, I set out my intention to bring these policies forward in my statement to the Assembly.

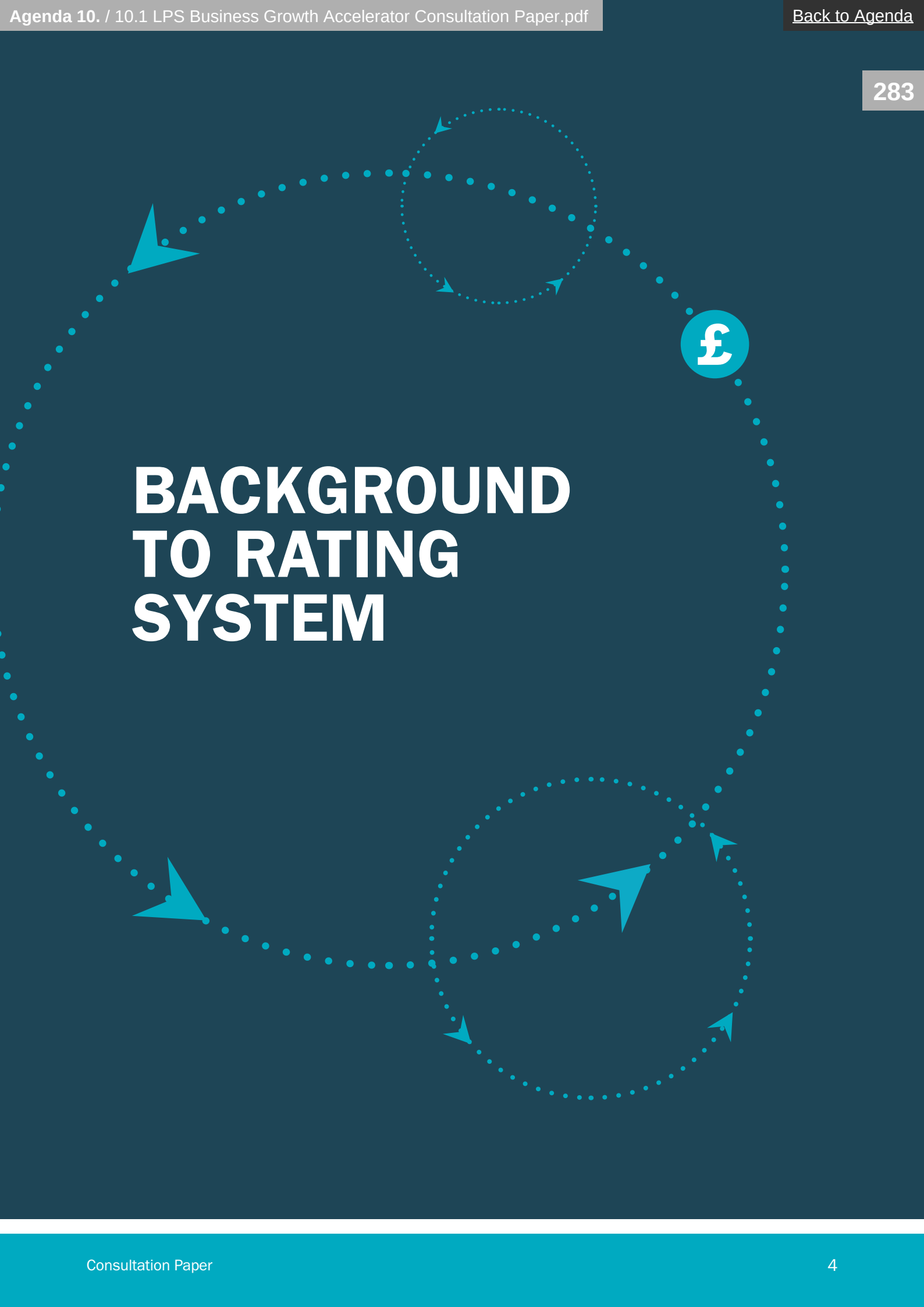
The first proposal is a Business Growth Accelerator, similar to the model in Scotland. This would delay increases in rates liability following property improvements or expansion, helping remove a barrier to investment.

The second proposal is the phased increase in Non-Domestic Vacant Rating liability. At present, vacant properties are liable for up to 50% of occupied rates. This consultation proposes increasing that liability to encourage re-use of vacant space.

I encourage all interested parties to engage fully with this consultation. Delivery will depend on partnership across the Executive, the Assembly and local government.

These proposals build on existing measures and respond to local challenges with practical, locally developed solutions. I welcome your views.

John O'Dowd
Finance Minister



BACKGROUND TO RATING SYSTEM

Background to the Rating System

The rating system is a devolved tax with two elements: domestic rates (largely residential) and non-domestic rates (largely commercial).

It currently raises over £1.7 billion annually, with just under 55% raised from non-domestic properties. This revenue funds key services including education, health, roads and local council provision. Regional rates alone account for around 4% of the Executive’s spending power.

Land & Property Services administers the rating and valuation systems within a statutory framework, guided by caselaw.

Reliefs and exemptions are a core feature, allowing the system to support economic, social and environmental policy. However, all rate supports carry a cost either reduced revenue or a higher burden on other ratepayers. Every pound foregone reduces funding available for local public services.



Strategic Review Process

In November 2025, the Finance Minister updated the Assembly on the Strategic Review of the Rating Supports and set out the next steps for reform.

Four policy reviews have been completed under that process, with all remaining supports to be reviewed by 2027–28. Priority areas are being taken forward sooner.

The Minister’s focus is to:

- deliver progressive reform;
- increase revenue sustainably; and
- incentivise behaviours that grow the tax base.

Two priority policy areas for consultation identified during the 2025/26 Strategic Reviews were:

- the introduction of a **Business Growth Accelerator**; and
- increased **Non-Domestic Vacant Rating liability**.

Building on Existing Measures

These proposals build on existing interventions, particularly the Back in Business scheme¹, which incentivises occupation of long-term vacant premises through reduced rates in early years.

The Business Growth Accelerator extends this approach by supporting investment in existing occupied properties, while vacant rating reforms aim to increase re-use of empty space. Together, these measures are designed to:

- promote better use of commercial property;
- support business activity; and
- expand the non-domestic tax base.

¹For further information on the Back in Business scheme see <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/business-support/back-business-scheme>



ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

Who can respond

This consultation is open to all individuals, businesses, organisations and representative bodies.

Purpose

The proposals will directly affect businesses and property owners. This consultation seeks views to inform final policy design.

Duration

The consultation will run for **12 weeks**, closing on **23 September 2026**.

How to respond

Responses can be submitted:

- online via Citizen Space (preferred); or
- by email to: ratingpolicy@finance-ni.gov.uk

Respondents should indicate whether they are replying as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

Key principles

Our key consultation principles as a Department are:

- consultation at a formative stage;
- clear explanation of proposals;
- sufficient time for response; and
- timely publication of outcomes.

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PROPOSAL 1: BUSINESS GROWTH ACCELERATOR

Overview

This part of the consultation proposes introducing a **Business Growth Accelerator** to delay immediate increases in rates following property improvements.

Stakeholders have identified the immediate increase in rates after expansion as a barrier to investment. This proposal aims to address that issue.

How it works

Currently:

- improvements increase rateable value immediately; and
- rates liability rises as soon as works are completed.

Under these proposals:

- increases would be delayed for a defined **grace period** (e.g. 12 months); and
- businesses would continue to pay rates based on the pre-improvement valuation during that period.

Example:

- Pre-improvement rateable value: £50,000.
- Post-improvement rateable value: £75,000.
- Higher liability applies only after the prescribed grace period expires.

Rationale

This would be a temporary intervention designed to:

- reduce upfront financial pressure on businesses making investment in property;
- allow businesses to recoup investment costs; and
- encourage development that might otherwise not proceed.

Full liability would apply after the grace period, maintaining fairness while supporting investment. The policy thus secures medium to long term revenue streams.

Scope

Qualifying improvements under consideration within the scope of the policy may include:

- extensions or enlargements;
- refurbishment;
- works that increase rateable value; and
- improvements to capacity or productivity.

The policy focuses on existing properties, not new builds.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS - BUSINESS GROWTH ACCELERATOR

General principles

- Do you support a Business Growth Accelerator?
- Does the current system discourage investment?
- Would this policy incentivise new activity, or mainly defer valuation increases that would already be occurring?
- What is the appropriate grace period that could be adopted?
- Should enhanced support apply where vacant property units are brought back into use? (e.g. as part of any extension or improvement work)

Scope and eligibility

- How should “qualifying improvements” be defined?
- Should minimum or maximum thresholds apply within the policy?
- Are any property types best excluded? (e.g. publicly owned property, utilities, etc)

Delivery and administration

- How can administrative burden be minimised?
(This question refers to the impact on the applicant, however views can also be submitted on how the proposal can best align with the current rating and valuation system).
- Should advance notification be required from an applicant before any extension or improvement works commence?
- How should the policy align with the completion notice process that applies within the rating and valuation system?
- What economic benefit (if any) would result from this policy proposal?
- Are there more effective alternatives to achieve the same policy goals?

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PROPOSAL 2: NON-DOMESTIC VACANT RATING

Overview

This part of the consultation proposes introducing a phased increase in liability for vacant commercial property, replacing the current 50% rate.

Proposed approach

- **Stage 1:** increase liability to 75%.
- **Stage 2:** increase to 100%.

The following would remain unchanged:

- the initial three-month exemption; and
- existing exclusions (e.g. insolvency, listed buildings).¹

Rationale

The current 50% rate, lower than that which applies in other jurisdictions, is perceived as reducing incentives to bring property back into use.

The proposed change aims to:

- encourage occupation;
- reduce long-term vacancy;
- align more closely with other jurisdictions; and
- increase revenue (estimated up to £20 million annually).

Implementation

A phased approach would allow:

- monitoring of behavioural responses;
- assessment of avoidance risks; and
- alignment with wider interventions.

¹For a full list of exclusions see:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/non-domestic-vacant-rating>

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS - NON DOMESTIC VACANT RATING LIABILITY

- Do you support increasing non-domestic vacant rating (NDVR) liability to 75% and 100%?
- Should current NDVR exclusions remain?
- What is the appropriate timing for introducing any increased NDVR liability locally?
- Are alternative approaches preferable aside from increasing rating liability?
- How should this change align with the rating and valuation system?
- What complementary measures are needed to promote occupancy?
- What do you see as the behavioural impacts associated with the policy proposal?
- Are additional anti-avoidance measures required prior to implementation?
- Should treatment vary by sector or property type?
- How can collection be maximised upon introduction of the policy?
- Should mitigation measures apply in cases of market failure?
- Should increases depend on duration of vacancy?
- What wider impacts do you foresee as a result of this proposal?
(Impacts may include social, economic, rural, environmental, s75 etc.) wider impacts

A decorative graphic consisting of a dotted line that forms a large, stylized 'S' or 'Z' shape. The line starts from the top left, curves down and to the right, then loops back up and to the left, and finally curves down and to the right again. Several solid blue arrows are placed along the dotted line, indicating a direction of flow. A blue circle containing a white pound symbol (£) is positioned on the right side of the line, near the top. The word 'SUMMARY' is centered in the middle of the page.

SUMMARY

Summary

This consultation brings forward two targeted reforms:

- A **Business Growth Accelerator** to support investment and expansion
- Increased **Non-Domestic Vacant Rating liability** to encourage use of commercial property

Together, they aim to:

- remove barriers to growth;
- reduce vacancy;
- support regeneration; and
- strengthen the revenue base.

Your views will directly inform final policy design.



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ITEM 11

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	30 September 2026
Responsible Director	Director of Environmental Services
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Waste and Cleansing Services
Report title	SIB Waste Specialist - Contract Extension
Attachments	Appendix 1: Draft Operational Partnership Agreement 2026-2028
File Reference (if applicable)	43002
Legislation	Other Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
Resource Implications	Budget
	Narrative: Included in existing budget
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 decision not required
Link to Corporate Plan Priority and Outcome	Priority 2: Environmental 2. An environmentally sustainable and resilient Council and Borough meeting our net zero carbon targets If multiple:

Background

In October 2024 Solace approved the recruitment of a Waste Specialist, employed by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), for a period of two years to support the 11 District Councils in relation to:

- Extended Producer Responsibility on packaging (pEPR);
- Deposit Return Schemes (DRS);
- Common Collection systems.

Andrew Cassells was appointed to the role and currently provides 2.5 days per week in support of councils.

This arrangement is regulated by the Operational Partnership Agreement, which was signed between the Strategic Investment Board, The Council Waste Forum (on behalf of the 11 Councils and SOLACE) and NILGA. In addition, there is an agreed Work Plan with quarterly reports to Solace and the establishment of a Project Board to oversee the post.

The OPA has been reviewed and a new draft copy proposed (attached) with councils’ financial as follows:

	Cost per Council
Year 1 – 2026/27	£5,211
Year 2 - 2027/28	£5,367

Note – costs in line with current financial commitment by councils and based on a 3% uplift on SIB salaries.

The current agreement was discussed at a meeting of the Council Waste Forum and based on the achievements listed below, the CWF proposed the extension of the current agreement.

Achievements in the last 2 years:

- Provided councils with regular updates on the implementation of pEPR;
- Helped secure circa £3m paid directly to Ards and North Down Borough Council annually for investment in the collection and processing of packaging Waste
- Assisted in discussions with DAERA regarding use of pEPR payments;
- Source of knowledge regarding further legislative changes;
- Provides a “Northern Ireland council” voice at national meetings;
- Assisting in consultation responses.

As stated, the Waste Specialist provided a regional response during the development of the estimated pEPR payments and the table below shows the initial amount predicted for Northern Ireland beside the amount payments for the last two years with an additional £12M of pEPR funds diverted to Northern Ireland.

	2025-26 (initial estimate Dec 2024)	2025-26 (Actual July 2025)	2026-27
Total for Northern Ireland	£38,949,000	£50,893,272	£52,165,794

The ability of the SIB Waste Specialist to relay the views of Northern Ireland councils has been very beneficial both on a national and local stage and on this basis, it is proposed to retrospectively extend the OPA agreement with effect from 9 September 2026 to ensure that there is no break in service for the SIB employee. The agreement would be for a further two years and cover the period of DRS implementation.

SOLACE, at its meeting on 4 September 2026, agreed to recommend an extension of the SIB Waste Specialist role. The extension was agreed subject to agreement from the 11 NI councils.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council **Approves** the extension of the revised Operational Partnership Agreement between the Strategic Investment Board, Council Waste Forum (on behalf of the 11 Councils) and NILGA from 9 September 2026 for 2 years at a cost of approximately £10,580.

Operational Partnership Agreement (OPA) between: -

Northern Ireland Local Government
Association (NILGA); Council Waste
Forum (on behalf of SoLACE)
&
Strategic Investment Board (SIB)

Author: Alan McVicker
Status: Draft Version
Date: 8 July 2026

The
**Strategic
Investment
Board**

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Introduction

1. SIB and the 11 local councils in Northern Ireland (working through the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, (NILGA) and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives Northern Ireland (SoLACE NI)) wish to establish a professional working relationship based on partnering and teamwork. This Operational Partnership Agreement (OPA) sets out the terms on which the partnership will operate.
2. This agreement is not intended to create legally enforceable rights or obligations, and the parties shall not seek to enforce its terms in the courts.

The Agreement

3. The partners to this agreement are:
 - a. Strategic Investment Board Ltd (SIB); and
 - b. Council Waste Forum (CWF) on behalf of SoLACE NI; NILGA; “the Partners”.
4. The OPA will come into force on 9th September 2026.
5. The OPA shall remain in force until 8th September 2028 unless terminated by the agreement of both parties. The OPA may be amended at any time with the consent of both parties.
6. Amendments to the OPA may be made and agreed by letter or email: in which case, the letter or email confirming the agreed change will be filed in Content Manager as a supplementary record to this original OPA. The original OPA and the supplementary record will together constitute the revised OPA.

SIB Engagement

7. SIB’s engagement is carried out in accordance with and for the purposes described in The Strategic Investment and Regeneration of Sites (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 – namely the exercise of strategic investment functions in relation to the Executive and bodies carrying out major investment projects.
8. In relation to bodies carrying out major investment projects, ‘strategic investment functions’ means:
 - a. Advising those bodies in relation to the carrying out of such projects.
 - b. Assisting those bodies in relation to the carrying out of such projects, including providing research, consultancy, advisory and other services and general assistance; and
 - c. Participating, by agreement with those bodies, in the carrying out of such projects.
9. The scope of SIB’s support to the Partner comprises the services described in Schedule A to this agreement.
10. SIB will recoup the costs of its support to the Partner according to the arrangements set out in Schedule B to this agreement.

Operation of the Agreement

General

11. SIB and the Partners shall each nominate a person authorised to conduct all communications relating to this OPA. The representative for SIB will be Alan McVicker, Strategic Adviser. The representatives for the Partners will be Alison Allen, CEO, NILGA and Michael Laverty, Chair of the Council Waste Forum.
12. The representatives named above shall meet on a regular basis to review the operation of the OPA.
13. The parties will use their best endeavours to resolve any disputes that may arise amicably between themselves.

Representation on Oversight Bodies

14. The Partner agrees to SIB joining the following governance or management bodies:
 PackUK Scheme Administrator Steering Group and any related Technical Committees; any ad-hoc Local Authority/four nation representative groups established for the pursuance of the implementation and management of pEPR, DRS and Common Collections both regionally and nationally.

Procurement

15. The Partner and SIB agree to abide by relevant procurement policy and with current public sector procurement legislation.

Gateway Reviews™

16. The Partner (where appropriate and if deemed necessary) recognises its obligation to carry out Gateway Reviews™ of the projects covered by this agreement. The Partners will share these reports with SIB on request. SIB undertakes not to pass on such reports to any third party without the agreement of the Partners.
17. Should a Gateway Review™ identify shortcomings in the management, resourcing or other aspects of projects, the Partner undertakes to address these in a timely manner. SIB reserves the right to withdraw from projects which have an AMBER/RED or RED assessment of delivery success, where these proceed without the issues raised in a Gateway report being adequately addressed.

Equality Impact Assessments

18. Where appropriate, the Partner acknowledges its responsibility to carry out any Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) required in the course of the projects covered by this agreement.

Communications and Publicity

19. Where appropriate, SIB and the Partner will embed communications activity into plans as a defined work-stream. The SIB Communications Director will provide communications input to this work-stream and agree with the Partner the extent

of SIB's Communications involvement. This will be detailed in an agreed proposal and, where appropriate, be costed accordingly.

20. As SIB staff will be working on behalf of the Partner, any reports or other documents they produce will be owned by the Partner and SIB's logo will not appear without prior mutual agreement.

Records

21. The Partner will be responsible for the maintenance of the official record of all relevant activities (the prime records), which it will own. SIB will, where appropriate, keep copies of correspondence and papers that it produces; but the responsibility for maintaining a complete and auditable file containing the master copy of all requisite records falls to the Partner. Records relating to contracts (including the procurement of advisers) will be held by the awarding authority. SIB will keep the official record of the business case for procurements which it funds or part-funds.
22. The Partner recognises the requirement to provide access to relevant records to SIB's auditors or any other oversight body with a legitimate requirement to inspect them in the course of its duties.
23. The Partner and SIB recognise their obligations under the Freedom of Information Act. They note, however, that some information provided by one party to the other may be exempt from release and therefore undertake to consult before releasing any information provided by one party to the other. All information exchanged under the OPA shall be treated by the recipients as 'Commercial in Confidence'.

Lessons Learned Reports

24. SIB and the Partners agree to produce jointly a 'lessons learned' report at the conclusion of projects, or at other appropriate times.

Liability

25. SIB undertakes to use its best efforts to complete the work detailed in Schedule A to the highest professional standards. However, it is unable to accept any liability arising from the Partner following its advice or recommended courses of action and any liability arising out of this agreement by way of tort, negligence or breach of contract is, for the avoidance of doubt, excluded.

Grievances

26. SIB agrees that, in the event of a grievance being raised against a SIB employee by a member of the Partner's staff, any investigation into such a grievance may be conducted under the Partner's procedures. Any disciplinary action resulting from such an investigation will be carried out under the terms set out in SIB's Staff Handbook.

Substitutions

27. Should any SIB staff deployed in the delivery of this OPA be unable – through resignation, extended illness or other incapacity – to continue in their assigned role, SIB will provide substitute resources that enable the completion of the work scheduled in Appendix A. In the case where a staff member has been exclusively recruited for a customer, without prior mutual agreement not to do so, any additional costs arising from the substitution will be recharged to the Partners.

Temporary Appointments to the Partner

28. SIB staff deployed in support of or embedded with the Partners remain at all times employed by SIB and subject to the SIB Code of Conduct and employment terms and conditions.

Feedback and Assessment

29. The Partner undertakes to provide feedback on the performance of SIB staff to Alan McVicker, Strategic Advisor, on request.
30. Should any issue arise concerning the performance of SIB staff, the Partner will raise this immediately with Alan McVicker, Strategic Advisor.

Billing

31. SIB is recovering the costs of staff working in support of the Partners. SIB will invoice each of the 11 Councils annually for 1/11th of the costs for this role (as described in Schedule B to this agreement). The partners will settle invoices within 10 working days.

Signatures

.....
JENNIFER MORGAN
Chief Delivery Officer, SIB

.....
ALISON ALLEN
Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Local Government Association

.....
MICHAEL LAVERTY
Chair
Council Waste Forum (on behalf of SoLACE)

Schedule A: SIB Support

Amendments to this schedule may be made and agreed by all parties to the agreement by letter or email in accordance with the section on “Operation of the Agreement” above.

SIB’s support to the Partners may, at SIB’s discretion, include provision of small pieces of advice, consultation or other work as agreed between the parties and requested by the Partners. Small is defined as less than two full-time equivalent days on any specific topic. Where larger pieces of work are required, this will be requested by way of amendment to the OPA as outlined above.

SIB will provide a suitably qualified and experienced Waste Specialist to support the 11 Councils, (through NILGA, CWF on behalf of SoLACE NI) to provide strategic input into the UKG/NI Executive proposals relating to new policy development for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), Deposit Return Schemes and Common Collections. This support will be based on an average of 2.5 days/week. Amendments to this schedule may be made and agreed by both parties to the agreement by letter or email in accordance with the section on “Operation of the Agreement” above.

Background and Context

‘Producer responsibility’ is a concept used widely within the waste regulation sector aimed at ensuring that businesses that manufacture, import and sell products into the open market are responsible for their end-of-life environmental impact. New regulations will shortly require businesses to minimise waste arising from their products and promote their reuse. Currently, the burden of handling much of this packaging waste resides with Councils.

The Northern Ireland Council Waste Forum (CWF) has engaged with the Society of Local Authorities Chief Executives (SoLACE NI) and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) to ensure that Northern Ireland is represented in all discussions at the National Task Group level that has been established by the UK Government to progress the new waste regulations.

In order to ensure that councils from NI are represented in future discussions, the CWF, SoLACE NI and NILGA have agreed to appoint a dedicated Waste Specialist. The Waste Specialist will enable the eleven Councils in Northern Ireland to provide strategic input into the UKG/NI Executive proposals relating to policy developments for EPR, DRS and Common Collections and agree arrangements between and within the local stakeholder organisations. SIB has been requested to provide this resource to support local councils.

Waste Reform Programme (Packaging Regulations and Policy Development)

Work is continuing on the mechanisms surrounding the Government’s forthcoming programme of waste reforms which includes packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR), a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) and Common Collections guidance. This programme is intended to bring about major changes to how waste is

collected and paid for. The introduction of these schemes, as outlined below, will have a material impact on local councils in Northern Ireland, with the potential to set in place a new long term revenue stream.

Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR); The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packaging Waste) Regulations 2024

The EPR for packaging scheme will require companies that produce or sell packaged products in the UK to cover the effective and efficient costs of collecting and sorting household packaging waste for recycling. It is estimated that these companies will pay around £1.5 billion a year. The government plans to introduce variable fees, depending on the recyclability of the materials used.

Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) Deposit Scheme for Drinks Containers (England and Northern Ireland) Regulations 2024

The DRS which will be implemented across the UK in October 2027, including Northern Ireland, will place a redeemable deposit on all single use plastic and metal drinks containers up to three litres in volume.

Common Collections

The Common Collections scheme or 'simpler recycling' project will require local authorities, businesses and organisations such as schools and hospitals to collect food waste and dry recyclable materials (paper, card, metal, plastics and glass) separately where possible. Local councils will also need to provide a separate garden waste collection for households.

Aims & Objectives of The Regulations

- Producers pay the full net costs of managing and recycling the packaging waste they produce through a system of modulated fees.
- Reduce 'excessive' packaging.
- Increase in packaging recyclability and reusability.
- Increase packaging recycling rates.
- Increased quality of material for recycling.
- Reduce drinks containers that are littered and/or ends up in street bins.

The eleven local Councils in Northern Ireland have started to receive payments from the packaging sector through PackUK in consideration of their role in providing waste collection services and ensuring that packaging waste is collected for recycling and by

default diverted from landfill. Given that the Regulations have significant implications for Councils including receiving payments for providing waste collection services, it is imperative that Local Government within Northern Ireland is represented at discussions on the same basis as the other devolved nations.

Terms of Reference for Waste Specialist role:

- Support development of key work streams to be taken forward and report to a dedicated Project Board.
- Ensure appropriate governance arrangements are in place for the management and performance of the Project and effective operation of the Project Board.
- Represent District Councils, the Council Waste Forum (CWF) and NILGA on national Forums with regard to policy development for EPR, DRS and Common Collections.
- Provide input into strategic projects/working groups/policy development as appropriate, including work to develop the infrastructure necessary to support the development of UKG/NI Executive proposals relating to Extended Producer Responsibility, Deposit Return Schemes and Common Collections.
- Undertake liaison and relationship building at a senior level with local authority Elected Members and officers, SoLACE, NILGA, DAERA, GWWG, CWF and the NIEA on EPR, DRS, Common Collections, and the Biodegradable Waste to Landfill Working Group.
- Liaise with other nations' Local Government Associations, partner organisations and other key stakeholders on waste, Circular Economy and Climate Goals in so far as they relate to EPR, DRS and Common Collections matters across the UK and Republic of Ireland.
- Prepare responses to related consultations and provide regular update reports to SoLACE, the Council Waste Forum, District Councils and NILGA.
- Help respond to media enquiries relating to waste matters, working with NILGA's and its member Councils' Communications and Media teams.

The Waste Specialist will represent and assist District Councils and NILGA on national forums with regard to policy development for pEPR, DRS and Common Collections Guidance in consideration of meeting waste, circular economy and climate goals. On a day-to-day basis, the Waste Specialist will report to a Project Board, comprised of the key stakeholders. As a SIB employee the post holder will report to SIB's Head of Council Support Unit.

Schedule B: Cost Recovery

Having completed a recruitment competition for a Waste Specialist, in August 2024, Andrew Cassells will continue in the role from 9th September 2026. SIB will provide support to the Partners on a 2.5 days per week basis for a fixed term period of 2 years, as agreed with the 11 Councils, NILGA and SoLACE in January 2024, as updated in August 2026. SIB will re-charge the 11 local councils on the following basis:

Year 1 (2026-27) assuming NICS pay award of 3%

- £81,885 + 40% on-costs = £114,639 FTE per annum for this support, pro rata for 2.5 days per week equates to £57,320 per annum or £5,211 per Council per annum.

Year 2 (2027-28) assuming NICS pay award of 3%

- £84,342 + 40% on-costs = £118,078 FTE per annum for this support, pro rata for 2.5 days per week equates to £59,039 per annum or £5,367 per Council per annum.

SIB will invoice the 11 councils individually for their annual contribution which will be **£5,211 per Council per annum for Year 1 and £5,367 per Council per annum for Year 2**. Invoices will be issued at the end of the first full month of this OPA, which will be at end October 2026 and October 2027. VAT will be charged at the prevailing rate and reasonably incurred travel, and subsistence costs will also be recharged. The standard HMRC mileage rate of 0.45p per mile will be applied. The salary will increase annually in line with the NICS pay remit process and the annual, payments may be adjusted to reflect the actual pay awards.

The Waste Specialist role will be for a further 2-year fixed term contract on a part time basis (2.5 days per week). The 2.5 days will generally be worked across Tues – Thurs, however the Waste Specialist will be available to attend occasional meetings on other weekdays as required. The role may be extended beyond 2 years by mutual agreement.

Unclassified

ITEM 12

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	30 September 2026
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	Chief Executive
Report title	NI Veterans Awards
Attachments	Appendix 1 - NI Veterans Awards Invite
File Reference (if applicable)	N/A
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:

As a proud signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant, the Council have been invited to attend the Northern Irish Veterans Awards 2026. This is an initiative that recognises the outstanding achievements of our veterans, reservists, and cadets who are making a real difference in civilian life.

Now in its 5th year, the NI Veterans Awards is more than just a celebration – it's a brilliant opportunity to engage, connect and network with the wider Armed Forces community across Northern Ireland. For more information, please visit www.veteransawardsireland.com.

The event takes place on Thursday 22 October 2026 at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Belfast. The evening brings together veterans, service leavers, reservists, cadet force adult volunteers, and Forces-friendly employers to share inspiring stories and celebrate success. The cost to attend the event is £90 + VAT per delegate.

It is recommended that Alderman Trevor Cummings attends the event on behalf of the Council in his role as Veteran Champion.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council approves that Alderman Trevor Cummings attends this event in his role as Veterans Champion.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Sophia Hughes <Sophia@weirevents.co.uk>

Date: 21 September 2026 at 13:00:01 BST

To: "Cummings, Trevor" <trevor.cummings@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk>

Subject: Northern Ireland Veterans Awards 2026

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Good Afternoon,

I hope you're keeping well.

I wanted to get in touch to make you aware of this year's **Northern Ireland Veterans Awards**, taking place on **Thursday, 22nd October 2026 at the Crowne Plaza Belfast**.

As a Veterans Champion, we would be delighted to have you represented on the evening and to join us in recognising the veterans, reservists, charities, organisations, businesses and community champions making such a positive contribution across Northern Ireland.

This year is particularly special as we celebrate the **5th anniversary of the Awards**. We're also delighted that this year we have been able to provide **every shortlisted finalist with a complimentary ticket**, ensuring those being recognised can be there to enjoy the evening.

Guests will arrive from **6.45pm**, followed by a **black-tie dinner and Awards ceremony**, with the formalities expected to conclude at approximately **11.00pm–11.30pm**.

Tickets are currently available at:

Individual Ticket: £90 + VAT

Table of 10: £900 + VAT

We also have a **Corporate Support Package at £1,500 + VAT**, which includes sponsorship of **six places for veterans to attend the Awards**.

If you would like to attend, reserve places or find out a little more about the evening, just let me know and I'd be very happy to help.

We would love to have you with us as we mark five years of the Northern Ireland Veterans Awards and celebrate the wider veteran community.

Best wishes,
Sophia

The contents of this email are private, confidential and intended solely for the designated recipient(s). The information disclosed within, via copy and/or attachments, cannot be shared with any third party without prior authorisation.

Unclassified

ITEM 15

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
	If multiple:
Meeting	Council
Date of Meeting	30 September 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. Recruitment ongoing. Update to November 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 August 2026 - Advice now recieved, 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 to be brought to November 2026 EC 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. August 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	July 2026 update - Conditions of transfer now received and consultation in progress. August 2026 update - Further report in September 2026	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance)	
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 November 2026 A&HC Committee	Arlene Barton (Head of Community and Culture)	

619	Environment	29.05.24	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Thompson	That this Council notes with concern the temporary closure of Groomsport Tennis Courts due to issues around the safety of the playing surface. Further to this Council tasks officers to bring back a report on Tennis Court maintenance throughout the Borough and will commit to ensuring all our Tennis Court facilities are properly maintained and are fully accessible to all. Council will also promote the use of Tennis facilities in the Borough as we approach the spring/summer season.	Council May 2024 Community & Wellbeing January 2025 Environment Committee January 2026	Report to be brought to October 2026 EC Parks and Regeneration have met to discuss - alternative funding streams being investigated. Report back when further information is available. 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. 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. Assigned to January 2025 C&W Agenda. Moved to EC due to restructure.	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
624	Corporate Services	20.05.24	Councillor Kendall, Alderman McRandal and Alderman Graham	This Council notes that, subsequent to submission of a Notice of Motion in 2017, Council agreed to provide funding to assist in the building of a new war memorial in Conlig village; and to liaise with, and assist, the Conlig War Memorial Project Group in their efforts to build a monument to the seventeen men who are known to have lost their lives in World War I.	Council - May 2024 Corporate Services Committee June	July 2026: Update report at July Council meeting August 2026: Progressing	Alison Curtis (Head of Corporate Governance) & Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	

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 Environment Committee October 2024 Environment Committee May 2025 Environment Committee December 2025 Environment Committee April 2026 Environment Committee September 2026	Agreed at September 2026 to defer to November EC in order to reconsider data from the 2025 Pedestrian Access Trial Agreed at April 2026 EC - based on Option 1: 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 Hollywood 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. 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 Hollywood and Donaghadee HRCs Agreed at April 2025 Environment Committee to proceed with Option 3 for a pilot scheme in Hollywood and Donaghadee HRCs in order to obtain a proper evidence basis for demand; and that consideration of pedestrian access is included in the work around the future of the HRC estate as outlined in Option 1. Further report to follow. Agreed at Environment Committee 2 October 2024	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	
638	Place & Prosperity	22.10.2024	Councillors Harbinson & McCracken	That this Council should: 1. Prepare a visual map for all public sector land in Bangor City Centre and Ards Town Centre and colour code holdings that are potentially connected with future developments (even if not yet fully agreed), including Bangor Waterfront, Queen's Parade, Newtownards Citizen's Hub and the Council's Car Park Strategy. This includes public land belonging to the Council and NI Executive Departments. 2. To further identify public sector land that is currently unproductive and outside the scope of wider strategies, which could be made available for future private sector development. This includes land that is either vacant, contains empty or derelict buildings, or contains buildings that are under-utilised or dated to the point that redevelopment is required. The map should also include land that is facilitating meanwhile use. 3. Prepare a summary report to highlight how unproductive public sector land could be re-purposed and how such a process could be progressed within the bounds of current planning considerations and Council/Executive disposal policies.	Place & Prosperity Committee November 2024 (Item 14.2) Council October 2024 (Item 23.5)	Report brought to 7 May P&P Committee 2026 and ratified by May Council - report and move to Stage 2 agreed. Follow-up report to future Cttee and consideration of a public Council-managed list of long-term vacant/derelict properties list to support public input/expressions of interest. 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 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	Director of Place and Prosperity	

640		05.11.2024	Councillor Cochrane and Alderman Adair	That this Council condemns the failure by the UK Government to prioritise farming families and the rural economy as part of the Autumn Budget; notes with deep concern the decisions to introduce new thresholds for Inheritance Tax and Agricultural Property Relief, which will jeopardise succession planning on farms and discourage investment in many farm businesses. Further to this, Council calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals to mitigate the impact of these damaging policies on local farms, as well as avoid significant increases in food prices; 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.	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 February 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 Sept P&P - subject to ratification by Sept Council Update 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	

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 2025 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. Report to September A&HC Committee.	Gareth Kinnear Head of Environmental Health & Regulatory Services	
672	Place & Prosperity	20.05.25	Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson	Amendment to Notice of Motion 672 submitted by Councillor McCracken and Councillor Harbinson "This Council welcomes the update on Marine Gardens provided by Bangor Marine on 13 August 2025 and agrees that: 1. Council officers should work alongside Bangor Marine to support public communication around this project. This includes inviting Bangor Marine to the next meeting of the Bangor CAG to update stakeholders, supporting the proposed public consultation hub led by Bangor Marine, and by holding regular meetings with Bangor Marine to ensure accurate and complementary messaging on respective websites, newsletters and social media. 2. Council should also work with Bangor Marine to support a commercial marketing plan with the aim of attracting investment for the further phases of Queen's Parade along with complementary investment that will support the ambitions of the wider City Deal. An initial outline should be brought to Committee in Q1 2026 with a view to approve draft marketing collateral that can be used at future property investment conferences in the UK and abroad."	P&P 4.9.25 Council 25.06.25	Report to be brought to future Committee 1. BM to be invited to next CAG (soon to be relaunched as LAG, likely Jan/Feb 2026 whilst the C/TAG to LAG process is formalised 2. Re: commercial marketing plan, update report to P&P in first quarter of 2026. Agreed to adopt NOM at Sept 2025 P&P - ratified at Sept 2025 Council	Director of Place and Prosperity	
673	Environment	21.05.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Cochrane	That this Council notes the popularity of public spaces such as beaches during the summer months. Further to this Council will task officers to bring back a report to explore options for the extension of public toilet opening hours during the summer months to 9pm near beaches and other busy areas. Council Officers will further bring back a report on expanding baby changing facilities within our Borough at public toilets.	Council June 2025 Environment Committee September 2025 Environment Committee December 2025 Environment Committee February 2026	Update report to be brought in 2027 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 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. Agreed to adopt NOM at September EC Assigned to September 2025 EC Agenda	Keith Patterson (Head of Waste and Cleansing)	

680	Active & Healthy Communities	05.09.25	Councillor Cochrane and Councillor Edmund	That this Council recognises the importance of every child having the opportunity to learn to swim - a vital life skill that supports physical health, mental wellbeing, and water safety. Swimming is not only one of the most effective forms of exercise, but also a key activity for building confidence and resilience in young people. Further to this Council agrees to- 1. An Audit of current indoor swimming lesson provision and also open water safety awareness programmes across the Borough against local demand; and 2. The development of a strategy to ensure that no child is denied access to swimming lessons or safety awareness programmes due to cost or capacity.	Council 24.09.25 - October Active and Healthy Communities Committee	Leisure Officers to progress. Report to October Committee.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
681	Corporate Services	09.09.25	Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Cathcart	That this Council expresses its deep disappointment at the correspondence sent to each councillor in Northern Ireland by NAC NI dated 2 September 2025 recommending that councillors take "industrial" action and considers the balloting of members to take any form of strike action is inappropriate, ill-judged and unlawful. Notes that the eleven Councils in Northern Ireland pay a corporate rate to fund the NAC NI in Northern Ireland and that individual councillors are by default members of NAC NI rather than by choice. Is further of the view that if the NAC NI wishes to act like a union then it should be governed by the same laws as any other union and that membership should be voluntary and a matter for individual councillors rather than funded by the ratepayer. As such, this Council agrees to withdraw its corporate funding from the NAC NI, writes to inform the NAC NI of this decision and calls on the executive members of the NAC NI to resign their positions given the gross over-reach of this correspondence and how it has brought the role of hard-working councillors into disrepute.	Council 24.09.25 - October Corporate Services Committee	Added to the agenda for CS 14/10, 14/11 letter sent to NAC NI by CEX. NAC NI have confirmed that this will be discussed at the meeting of their Executive Committee in December and that they will respond after this. NAC attended March Council for Deputation. Remove from tracker after ratification by April Council.	CEX Office	
682	Corporate Services	17.09.25	Alderman Graham and Councillor Gilmour	Council recognising the importance of Holywood as a Garrison town, seeks in conjunction with the Craigavad and Helen's Bay Branch of the Royal British Legion, to bring a military event to Holywood.	Council 24.09.25. Corporate Services Committee	December update : Meeting to take place in Jan 2026 to work up proposal. Once there is a proposal a report will be presented to Committee. January 2026 update : Meeting has taken place, draft plan proposed, facilitator to confirm with relevant parties . Further meeting to confirm arrangements in March and report will be brought back then. July 2026 update: Report will be brought to Committee as soon as possible. August 2026 update: Event likely to be in Autumn 2027	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 October 2025 Environment Committee November 2025	Report to be brought to October 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 S 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. 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. 3. Promote public awareness of the connection between domestic abuse, coercive control and animal abuse, in collaboration with statutory agencies and animal welfare organisations. 4. 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. Re point 3. Arlene to engage with the EVAWG Working Group.	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. Update to December 2026 A&HC Committee.	Arlene Barton (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 PCSP 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 PCSP Committee (ND to action). On agenda for October PCSP. Update to Noember A&HC Committee.	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, Craigavad in recent years and that this Council recognises that Station Road, Craigavad 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 August 2026 update - Investigations ongoing	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	This work is still being undertaken
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. Letter sent 21 May 2026. Response to September A&HC Committee.	Arlene Barton (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: • 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. Report to November 2026 A&HC Committee.	Arlene Barton (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 February 2026 Environment Committee September 2026	Agreed at September 2026 EC to note progress Assigned to February 2026 EC Agenda	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	To be removed following September Council meeting
705	Place & Prosperity	06.02.2026	Alderman Adair & Cllr Edmund	That Council recognises the huge benefits to the Ards Peninsula and wider Borough of greater connectivity in terms of tackling isolation, boosting local business and enhancing tourism. Furthermore, that Council is concerned about the increased traffic travelling along Ards Peninsula roads which could be better served by a fixed crossing between Portaferry and Strangford village and which may help in addressing congestion in other parts of the Borough and assist in improving road safety in roads within the Peninsula. Council, therefore, agrees to write to The Minister Department for Infrastructure to request that she prioritises funding for a feasibility study into a bridge across Strangford Lough from Portaferry to Strangford village.	P&P Oct 2026 P&P March 2026 Council February 2026	Response to be reported to P&P 8 Oct 2026 Response received from DfI Minister - 6.7.26 CEx issued letter - 15.4.26 Agreed at March P&P 2026 that Council writes to DfI Minister	Brian Dorrian Director of Place and Prosperity	
706	Environment		Councillor Douglas and Alderman Cummings	To task officers to investigate and engage with other statutory agencies to work together to safely remove the fallen trees over the Enler River, Comber, which has been there since Storm Eowyn.	Council February 2026 Environment Committee March 2026 Environment Committee September 2026	Agreed at September 2026 EC to note the update report NOM agreed at March 2026 EC Referred to EC at February 2026 Council	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	To be removed following September Council meeting

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 March 2026	Report to be brought to November 2026 EC 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	Report update heard at June Corporate Committee. Remove from tracker after July Council	Head of Finance	To be removed following July Council meeting
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 Council agenda for July meeting.	Director of Corporate Services	
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	Update report to October P&P 2026 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	Officers working with SEFF to identify a suitable date and location for mounting the quilt.
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 2026 A&HC Committee.	Anton Cozzo Head of Leisure	
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 April 2026 Environment Committee September 2026	Agreed at September 2026 EC that officers develop an outline proposal and business case for consideration of a memorial for all victims of road traffic collisions as part of the annual budget and rate-setting process. NOM agreed at April 2026 EC Agreed to refer NOM to April 2026 EC	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	To be removed following September Council meeting
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 Environment Committee May 2026 Environment Committee September 2026	Agreed at September 2026 EC to note the response from Translink 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 Holywood screen industries innovation hub has the potential to remove an important community asset from Holywood. Council therefore resolves to undertake an exercise to assess the need for community space in Holywood, with a report assessing need to be brought back to the relevant Committee.	Council April 2026 - Referred to Active & Healthy Communities Committee May 2026	Report to November 2026 A&HC Committee.	Arlene Barton (Head of Community and Culture)	
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 Environment Committee May 2026	Update report to be brought to October 2026 EC 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	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. 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. Council agrees: •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.	August Planning Committee 2026 May Planning Committee 2026 Council April 2026 - Referred to Planning Committee May 2026	Follow-up report to August Planning Committee agreed that Council writes back to the Minister objecting to the lack of infrastructure investment in the 2028–33 price control period. Council to ask Minister to review how granted but unbuilt planning permissions are considered, including differences between Councils. Council to seek confirmation that infrastructure investment will be prioritised to protect the future viability of town and urban centres. Amendment ratified by August Council. Report went to May Planning re invite to meet with DfI Minister. Agreed and ratified by May Council.	Director of Place and Prosperity	
718	Corporate Services	14.04.2026	Councillor Morgan and Alderman McAlpine	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.	Council April 2026 - Referred to Corporate Services Committee May 2026			

719	Active & Healthy Communities	21.04.2026	Councillor McClean and Councillor Cathcart	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. 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.	Council April 2026 - Referred to Active & Healthy Communities Committee May 2026	Report to November 2026 A&HC Committee.	Gareth Kinnear (Head of Environmental Health and Regulatory Services)	
720	Environment	24.04.2026	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.	Council May 2026 Environment Committee June 2026	Update report to be brought to future EC TBC Agreed at June 2026 EC Referred to EC at May 2026 Council	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	
721	Environment	14.05.2026	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 Clandeboyne 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.	Council May 2026 Environment Committee June 2026	Update report to be brought to future EC TBC Agreed at June 2026 EC Referred to EC at May 2026 Council	Stephen Daye (Head of Parks and Cemeteries)	
722	Corporate Services	17.05.2026	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.	Council May 2026 - Referred to Corporate Services Committee June 2026	Agreed at June 2026 CS		
723	Active & Healthy Communities	18.05.2026	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.	Council May 2026 - Referred to Active & Healthy Communities Committee June 2026	Agreed at June 2026 AHC. Letters sent 10 September 2026.		

724	Active & Healthy Communities		Councillors Cathcart and 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.	Council - June 2026 Referred to the Active and Healthy Communities Committee			
725	Environment		Councillor Cochrane and Bangor East and Donaghadee EM	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 to 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 funding 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 NI 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.	Council June 2026 Environment Committee September 2026	Agreed at September 2026 EC Referred to EC at June 2026 Council	Peter Caldwell (Head of Estates)	

- Corporate Services
- Community & Wellbeing
- Environment
- Place & Prosperity
- Planning