

December 19th, 2023

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 20th December 2023** at **7:00 pm** in **Hybrid - City Hall, Bangor & via Zoom**.

Agenda

Virtual Meeting Guidance

📄 *Guidance for virtual Council meetings.pdf*

Not included

Agenda

📄 *C 20.12.2023 Agenda.pdf*

Page 1

1. Prayer

2. Apologies

3. Declarations of Interest

4 Mayor's Business

5 Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month (Copy attached)

📄 *Mayoral Engagements December 2023.pdf*

Page 4

6 Minutes of Council Meeting held on 29 November 2023 (Copy attached)

📄 *C 29.11.23 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

📄 *C 29.11.2023 MinutesPM.pdf*

Page 6

7 Minutes of Committees

7.1 Planning Committee dated 5 December 2023 (Copy attached)

📄 *PC.05.12.23 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

📄 *PC.05.12.23 Minutes PM.pdf*

Page 29

7.2 Environment Committee dated 6 December 2023 (Copy attached)

📄 *EC 06.12.23 Minutes.pdf*

Not included

📄 *EC 06.12.23 MinutesPM.pdf*

Page 66

7.3 Place and Prosperity Committee dated 7 December 2023

Copy attached

[PP 07.12.2023 Minutes.pdf](#) *Not included*

[PP 07.12.2023 Minutes PM.pdf](#) *Page 90*

7.4 Corporate Services Committee dated 12 December 2023 (Copy attached)

[CS.12.12.23 Minutes.pdf](#) *Not included*

[CS 12.12.23 Minutes PM.pdf](#) *Page 121*

7.5 Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 13 December 2023 (Copy attached)

[CWB 13-12-23 Minutes.pdf](#) *Not included*

[CWB 13-12-23 MinutesPM.pdf](#) *Page 143*

8. Courses and Conferences

8.1. NAC – Environment/Positive Action Conference –12-14 January 2024

Report attached

[8.1 Report - NAC Conference.pdf](#) *Page 195*

[8.1. Appendix NAC.pdf](#) *Page 197*

9. Peace Plus Partnership

Report attached

[9. Peace Plus Partnership delgated authority.pdf](#) *Page 198*

10. Changes to Conducting Committee and Council Meetings and Changes to the Standing Orders

Report attached

[10. Changes to the Standing Orders - Committee and Council meetings.pdf](#) *Page 200*

11. Sealing Documents

12. Transfer of Rights of Burial

13. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)

📎 *13. NoM Status Report.pdf*

Page 203

📎 *13. NOM TRACKER LIVE.pdf*

Page 204

14. Notices of Motion

14.1. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McLaren & Councillor Hollywood

That this Council recognises the growing concerns and impact of single use vapes on young people, schools, and our local environment. Calls on Council Officers to undertake a full review of options available to address these concerns and strengthen enforcement. This Council also calls on a ban on the important of illicit vapes and calls on Stormont, at the earliest opportunity, to bring forward legislation to enforce regulations that will combat illicit importations.

14.2. Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Adair & Councillor MacArthur

That this Council notes the continuing issue of dead seals washed up on our beaches and coastline and the negative impact that this has on the use of beaches when the carcasses are not picked up in a timely manner. It therefore tasks officers to bring forward a report to ensure seal carcasses are prioritised for removal as soon as possible after reporting to ensure that our beaches continue to be a clean, safe, and well-managed coastal environment to be enjoyed by everyone.

14.3. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Boyle & Councillor Wray

That this Council writes to the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) objecting to the significant proposed percentage increases to charges involving the structures along with pedestrian and various vehicle usage, availing of the Strangford Ferry Services.

Circulated for Information

a) Institute of Public Health (IPH) and Tobacco Free Research Institute (TFRI) hosted a webinar to launch the findings of a new report, "Children and gambling - evidence to inform regulation and responses in

Ireland". (Correspondence attached)

b) Independent Reporting Commission - Sixth Report www.ircommission.org/publications
(Correspondence attached)

📄 *a) Institue of Public Health.pdf* **Page 213**

📄 *b) Independent Reporting Commission.pdf* **Page 215**

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

15. Request for a Wayleave at Kiltonga, Belfast Road, Newtownards

Report attached

📄 *15 - Request for a Wayleave.pdf* **Not included**

📄 *15. Appendix 1-Wayleave map - request for a wayleave at Kiltonga.pdf* **Not included**

📄 *15. Appendix 2 - photographs - request for a wayleave at Kiltonga.pdf* **Not included**

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

13 December 2023

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, 20 December 2023 at 7.00pm.**

Yours faithfully

Stephen Reid
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 December 2023 (Copy attached)
6. Minutes of Council meeting dated 29 November 2023 (Copy attached)
7. Minutes of Committees
 - 7.1 Minutes of Planning Committee dated 5 December 2023 (Copy attached)
 - 7.2 Minutes of Environment Committee dated 6 December 2023 (Copy attached)
 - 7.3 Minutes of Place and Prosperity Committee dated 7 December 2023 (Copy attached)
 - 7.4 Minutes of Corporate Services Committee dated 12 December 2023 (Copy to follow)
 - 7.5 Minutes of Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 13 December 2023 (Copy attached)

8. Courses and Conferences
 - 8.1. NAC – Environment/Positive Action Conference –12-14 January 2024 (Report attached)
9. Peace Plus Partnership (Report attached)
10. Changes to conducting Committee and Council meetings and changes to the Standing Orders (Report attached)
11. Sealing Documents
12. Transfer of Rights of Burial
13. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)
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[gambling - evidence to inform regulation and responses in Ireland".](#)

(Correspondence attached)

b) Independent Reporting Commission - Sixth Report

www.ircommission.org/publications (Correspondence attached)

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

15. Request for a Wayleave at Kiltonga, Belfast Road Newtownards (Report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Alderman Adair	Councillor Hollywood
Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor S Irvine
Alderman Brooks	Councillor W Irvine
Alderman Cummings	Councillor Irwin (Deputy Mayor)
Alderman Graham	Councillor Kennedy
Alderman McAlpine	Councillor Kendall
Alderman McDowell	Councillor Kerr
Alderman McIlveen	Councillor MacArthur
Alderman Smith	Councillor Martin
Councillor Ashe	Councillor McCollum
Councillor Blaney	Councillor McCracken
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McKee
Councillor Cathcart	Councillor McKimm
Councillor Chambers	Councillor McLaren
Councillor Creighton	Councillor McRandal
Councillor Cochrane	Councillor Moore
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Rossiter
Councillor Gilmour (Mayor)	Councillor Smart
Councillor Harbinson	Councillor Wray

**LIST OF MAYOR'S/DEPUTY MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS
FOR DECEMBER 2023**

Friday 1st December 2023

- 18:00 Santa Arrival, The Harbour, Donaghadee
19:00 Xmas Light Switch-on, Groomsport Parish Church

Saturday 2nd December 2023

- 11:00 Glenlola Collegiate Craft Fair, Glenlola Collegiate School
16:45 Xmas Light Switch-on, Church Grounds, Conlig

Sunday 3rd December 2023

- 15:30 Steiner Advent Fair Hollywood Steiner School, Hollywood
18:30 Donaghadee Dee Xmas Carol and Light Switch-on, 1st
Presbyterian Church, High St, Donaghadee

Monday 4th December 2023

- 19:00 Rathmore Primary Carol Service Bangor Methodist Church

Tuesday 5th December 2023

- 19:00 Kircubbin & District Xmas Light-Up Outside Credit Union Bank,
Main St, Kircubbin

Wednesday 6th December 2023

- 12:00 It Takes All Sorts - Danlos Syndrome/Disability Bangor Castle
15:30 St Anne Trust Carolfest St Philip & St James Parish Church,
Holywood
19:00 Cloughey Xmas Light-Up Main Road, Cloughey

Thursday 7th December 2023

- 11:00 Action Mental Health Pantomime, 6 Enterprise Road, Bangor
19:00 Launch of the High Profile Arts Council Exhibition, Ards Arts
Centre

Friday 8th December 2023

- 10:30 FASTER PR Londonderry Park, Newtownards
11:30 FASTER PR, Aurora Leisure Centre, Bangor

18:30 The Amici Choir - The Sound of Christmas Queens Hall,
Newtownards

Saturday 9th December 2023

10:30 Xmas Tree Festival, Westwinds Primary School/Community
Church, Westwind Primary School

15:00 Portaferry Twilight Market Portaferry

Sunday 10th December 2023

16:00 Christmas Celebrations held by Polish Association, Co Down St
Comgall's Parish Centre, Bangor

Monday 11th December 2023

19:00 Lord Weir Of Ballyhome & Residents Reception, Bangor Castle

Wednesday 13th December 2023

10:30 Meeting with Investors

12:00 Clandeboye Community Café, Old Ebenezer, Bangor

Thursday 14th December 2023

10:00 Event at the Court House, Bangor

Saturday 16th December 2023

10:00 Charity Bucket Collection, Bloomfields Shopping Centre

Tuesday 19th December 2023

18:00 Bangor Chamber of Commerce Networking Event, Tine Nines,
Bangor

Thursday 21st December 2023

12:00 Charity Aqua Class, Ards Blair Mayne, Newtownards

19:00 Sound Around Ards Recording, Ards Hospital

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting of the Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor and via Zoom, on 29 November commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair:	The Mayor (Councillor Gilmour)	
Aldermen:	Adair	McDowell (zoom)
	Armstrong-Cotter (zoom, 8.01 pm)	McIlveen
	Cummings (7.10 pm)	Smith
	McAlpine (zoom)	
Councillors:	Ashe	MacArthur
	Blaney	Martin
	Boyle (7.07 pm)	McCollum
	Cathcart	McCracken
	Chambers	McKee
	Creighton	McLaren (zoom)
	Cochrane	McRandal
	Douglas	Moore
	Edmund	Morgan
	Harbinson (zoom, 7.33 pm)	Rossiter
	Hollywood	Smart
	Irvine, S	Wray
	Irvine, W	
	Irwin	
	Kennedy	
	Kendall	
	Kerr (7.08 pm)	

Officers: Chief Executive (S Reid), Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Director of Place (S McCullough), Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Director of Environment (D Lindsay), Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Communications and Marketing (C Jackson), Democratic Services Manager (J Wilson) and Democratic Services Officer (J Glasgow)

1. PRAYER

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

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies at this stage.

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An apology for inability to attend was received from Alderman Brooks. Apologies for lateness were received from Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, Alderman Cummings and Councillor Harbinson.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor asked for any Declarations of Interest.

Councillor Chambers declared an interest in Item 10 - Nomination to Trustees on Northern Community Leisure Trust.

NOTED.

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

The Mayor extended a welcoming return to Councillor Lauren Kendall who had filled the vacancy in the Holywood & Clandeboye DEA, arising from the resignation of Rachel Woods.

The Mayor also mentioned the passing of Dr Bill Woods OBE, a Christian Missionary who dedicated his life's work to helping those who suffer with leprosy and other tropical disease and who lived in Bangor in his later years. The Mayor offered her condolences on his passing.

The Mayor advised that her Charities had organised a Christmas Concert featuring the Amici Choir on Friday 8th December at 7 pm in the Queen's Hall, Newtownards. Tickets were priced at £10 and could be purchased from Democratic Services.

NOTED.

5. MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR ENGAGEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 2023

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the month of November 2023.

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor for her assistance during the month. She had enjoyed being out and about throughout the Borough seeing the start of the Christmas festivities.

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor Martin, that the information be noted.

(Councillor Boyle entered the meeting – 7.07 pm)

6. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING DATED 25 OCTOBER 2023

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

7. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

7.1 Minutes of Planning Committee dated 7 November 2023

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

(Councillor Kerr entered the meeting – 7.08 pm)

7.2 Minutes of Environment Committee dated 8 November 2023

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Morgan, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the minutes be adopted.

(Alderman Cummings entered the meeting – 7.10 pm)

7.3 Minutes of Place and Prosperity Committee dated 9 November 2023

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Proposed by Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the minutes be adopted.

In respect of Item 4 - Rural Advisory Group and Review of Village Plans; Councillor Boyle cautiously welcomed the report. He expressed concerns that the staff and resources were not available within the Regeneration Department to carry out the amount of work needed.

(Councillor McLaren withdrew from the meeting (via zoom) – 7.12 pm)

Councillor Boyle further expressed concern that the Rural Advisory Group would cross over the work done by groups that were already working well. The new grouping proposed would consist of 30-35 members, and he was concerned that group would become another talking shop and would have no decision-making powers. He highlighted the successes that had been delivered previously by the Rural Partnership. Councillor Boyle recognised that there was further work to done but wished his concerns to be noted.

Councillor Wray expressed concern regarding the lack of community engagement and consultation that had occurred in respect of the grouping. He advised that he had met with the village partnership that week and some of those representatives who he imagined would be representatives on the Rural Advisory Group had only learnt of its formation in the local media. Councillor Wray questioned why the Council had not engaged with the Ards Peninsula Village Partnership who would invite the Director of Place and/or Head of Regeneration to engage with them and he would encourage for that to occur.

The Director of Place stated that there were 18 village groups some were working well others were not as engaged. As referred to by Councillor Boyle, the LAG group had worked well and she also highlighted the good work of the rural covid group. There was a need to look at all current structures and stated that to go around all of the 18 village groups could be quite challenging. The Group created a structure that brought the villages collectively together from across the Borough. The terms of reference would be discussed with the various groups and brought back to Council for approval.

Alderman Adair expressed his disappointment with the comments from Councillor Boyle and Councillor Wray. The new grouping followed on from the rural recovery groups that had been formed during the pandemic. He believed the formation of the group sent out a positive message that rural issues mattered to the Council and the rural people mattered to the Borough. Alderman Adair highlighted the good work that the rural groups delivered and the effectiveness of that during the pandemic. In response to the concern expressed by Councillor Wray, he noted that the Ards Peninsula Village Partnership had a seat on the Rural Advisory Group and worked well with the rest of the Members. Alderman Adair highlighted the need to rebuild and focus on the villages and he believed the formation of the group was the way forward by working together as a community.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Smart, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the minutes be adopted.

7.4 Minutes of Corporate Services Committee dated 14 November 2023

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

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

7.5 Minutes of Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 15 November 2023

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

Proposed by Councillor Martin, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the minutes be adopted.

In respect of Item 6; Social Supermarket; Councillor Cathcart welcomed the additional funding and highlighted value of the social supermarkets particularly at the

current time with the cost of living crisis. In terms of the funding, he recalled that when the Council agreed to the social supermarkets that if additional funding was to become available that would be directed to the Bangor Supermarket, yet the decision had been taken to split the funding between Newtownards and Bangor. Councillor Cathcart questioned the reasoning for that decision.

The Director of Community and Wellbeing explained the reasoning for the recommendation. The request for the pilot scheme was in the region of £80k to allow the supermarket to continue for a further year and DfC had offered £18k in excess of that amount. Officers had looked at the additional amount and made the recommendation that funding should be split between the two supermarkets in terms of fairness. He noted that it was a matter for the Council to decide what they would like to do and then Officers would have to ask DfC if that was acceptable.

Although he respected the decision of the Committee, Councillor Cathcart said that he disagreed. There was concern that the referrals received in the Newtownards supermarket for the Bangor area did not match the numbers expected as per the population. Councillor Cathcart sought an update on the review of social supermarkets.

The Director stated that detail was contained within the report. The current pilot finished on 31st March 2024 and the Head of Community and Culture was intending to review both supermarkets along with the food bank offering, with a proposal intended to come before Council in the next 3 months.

In respect of Item 8 - Multi annual arts grants 2024-2026; Councillor Cathcart noted that a decision had been taken by the panel to exclude Kilcooley Women's Centre as it was not Arts focused. Councillor Cathcart noted the broad work carried out by the Centre and questioned if that decision was solely taken by the Panel.

The Director stated that the Panel made the recommendation to the Committee that Kilcooley Women's Centre would be excluded from the grant scoring on the basis that the organisation did not have Arts as its core purpose. There was an appeals process that could be availed of and Officers were in receipt of documentation in that regard.

Councillor Cathcart questioned if that was made clear to the organisations applying and how the Arts element had been judged. The Director noted that the multi annual arts grants programme had been running for a number of years. The panel looked at the criteria that was put out with the call for applications, the organisation's constitution along with its objectives and aims and made a judgement call on that basis.

Councillor Cathcart expressed concern regarding that judging and felt that applicants should have been judged on their ability to deliver.

Councillor W Irvine was of the understanding that the appeal was underway and he asked if the outcome of that would be brought back to the Committee. The Director advised that normally if the appeals panel decided differently then that would be

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brought back to the Committee. Given the level of interest, the Director was content to bring a report back to Committee detailing the outcome.

In relation to the social supermarkets, the Mayor noted that as detailed by the Director a review would take place and brought to Committee and she asked about the format of that review.

(Councillor Boye withdrew from the meeting – 7.29 pm)

(Councillor Wray withdrew from the meeting – 7.29 pm)

The Director was of the understanding that engagement would occur with those organisations involved who provide the support services.

The Mayor shared the concerns in relation to the arts grant's application submitted by Kilcooley Women's Centre. She noted that Panel had agreed at the start of their meeting that the definition of an arts organisation should be their core function and purpose should be solely arts related however she did not believe such information had been set out in the guidance.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Martin, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that the minutes be adopted.

(Councillor Wray re-entered the meeting – 7.31 pm)

8. COURSES AND CONFERENCES

8.1 National Association of Councillors NI Leadership Series 2023/24 – Developing a New Economy Workshop (Appendices II, III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching correspondence and programme. The report detailed that the Council had received an invitation from the National Association of Councillors and Ulster University inviting Members and Council Officers to one of two workshops, entitled "Developing a New Economy".

Those workshops would be held on Friday 19 January 2024, Ulster University, Belfast and Friday 26 January 2024, Ulster University, Londonderry. The event was aimed at Councillors and Council Officers who had the passion to improve their understanding and delivery of new, transformative local enterprise, jobs and sustainable growth.

Information on the event was included in the correspondence which was attached to the report. The workshops were free of charge to attend.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers whether it wishes to nominate a Member(s) to attend one of the workshops.

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Proposed by Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor Moore, that Councillor McCollum be nominated to attend.

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Councillor Hollywood, that Councillor Smart, be nominated to attend.

RESOLVED, that Councillor McCollum and Councillor Smart attend the workshop in Belfast.

8.2 National Council meeting and Non-Executive Director training in Cardiff

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching full course information. The report detailed that Alderman McDowell had been elected as APSE's Northern Ireland Vice Chair for 2023/24 and 2024/25. He had been invited to attend the next National Council meeting and an APSE training session in Cardiff on 30 November & 1 December 2023. APSE would cover the training costs of £850 and subsistence for the duration. APSE had indicated that the representative parent Council would ordinarily meet the cost of travel and accommodation. Alderman McDowell had requested that Council considered covering the cost of his travel and accommodation at a cost of approximately £210.00.

RECOMMENDED that Council considers covering the cost of travel and accommodation for Alderman McDowell to allow him to participate in the APSE training session in Cardiff on 30 November and 1 December 2023.

The Mayor advised that Alderman McDowell was now unable to travel and the report was therefore withdrawn.

NOTED.

9. REQUESTS FOR DEPUTATION

9.1 Deputation Request from War Years Remembered (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive attaching deputation request form. The report detailed that a deputation request had been received from War Years Remembered to present to the Council regarding their request for emergency funding and aid to the relocation and renovation of the new premises of the War Years Remembered Museum to Newtownards.

RECOMMENDED that Council accepts the request for a deputation from War Years Remembered and refers it to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Having previously declared an interest in the undernoted item, Councillor Chambers withdrew from the meeting)

(Councillor Harbinson entered the meeting via zoom – 7.33 pm)

10. NOMINATION TO TRUSTEES ON NORTHERN COMMUNITY LEISURE TRUST

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Chief Executive detailing that this report was considered at the October meeting of the Council and it was agreed to defer to the next meeting.

Places on working groups and most outside bodies were filled through nomination at the Council's Annual Meeting and were thus held by individual Members rather than Parties. When a position becomes vacant, it reverted back to Council to nominate a Member to fill the place rather than Party Nominating Officers.

Following the resignation of Councillor Woods from the Northern Community Leisure Trust, a place had now become available. The Council was represented by two Trustees, the other Trustee was Councillor W Irvine.

A nomination was sought from the Council to fill the above vacancy for the remainder of the four-year term.

RECOMMENDED that Council nominate a Member as a Trustee on Northern Community Leisure Trust for the remainder of the term.

Proposed by Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that Councillor McCracken, be nominated as a Trustee on Northern Community Leisure Trust for the remainder of the term.

Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Adair, that Councillor Martin, be nominated as a Trustee on Northern Community Leisure Trust for the remainder of the term.

(Councillor Boyle re-entered the meeting – 7.34 pm)

As there were two nominations for one place, a vote by a show of hands was undertaken. 12 Members voted for Councillor McCracken and 15 Members voted for Councillor Martin.

RESOLVED, that Councillor Martin be nominated as a Trustee on Northern Community Leisure Trust for the remainder of the term.

(Councillor Chambers re-entered the meeting)

11. UPDATE REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF HRC ACCESS BOOKING SYSTEM

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that Members would recall that at the Council meeting in September 2023 the

following was agreed in relation to an update report brought on the implementation of new HRC access booking arrangements:

1. Progress with the implementation of the new HRC access booking system be noted.
2. Officers continue to review the new HRC access booking system and onsite operational management arrangements, to identify potential for further improvement.
3. Waste statistics following the introduction of the new HRC management regime be reviewed as part of a report to the Environment Committee on Q3 Northern Ireland Local Authority Municipal Waste Management Statistics and Update on Recycling Progress, scheduled for March 2024.
4. That a further report to be brought to the November Council meeting to include:
 - details and an assessment of reports of fly-tipping in the Borough since implementation of the booking system compared to previously.
 - an assessment of whether the implementation of the booking system had an impact on the total amount of waste deposited at each of the Borough's HRCs.
 - an assessment as to whether there had been an increase in the misuse of grey bins as a result of the implementation of the booking system such as whether there had been an increase in the detection of misuse and the issuing of letters regarding such misuse or sampling of waste from grey bins against baseline figures.
 - proposals to provide additional booking slots or additional means to address the traditionally busy festive period.
 - a report on the handling of our constituents' data in line with GDPR obligations in particular those who have served or continue to serve in security sensitive roles.

This report set out the additional update information requested, for the months of September and October.

1. Fly Tipping Statistics

Complaints about fly tipping vary in number throughout the year every year, and the table below provides statistics on the number of separate alleged incidents reported by month for the past 4 years.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2020	37	31	52	59	71	60	44	51	40	38	43	32
2021	37	58	51	55	39	53	27	38	31	33	30	28
2022	38	37	41	50	19	31	36	42	36	22	27	23
2023	53	47	40	21	32	34	36	40	56	47	21*	

*figure to 15th Nov (full month figure not possible due to cut-off for report preparation)

The statistics above indicated that reported fly-tipping incidents vary significantly from month to month throughout the year, and there was no identifiable pattern. The number of reported incidents for September and October this year are lower than previous maximum monthly totals. This information supports the reported experience elsewhere in the UK, that there was no proof to show a link between HRC booking systems and prevalence of fly-tipping.

2. HRC Waste

The following statistics show the tonnage of total HRC waste, and landfill HRC waste received during September and October 2023 following the implementation of the HRC accessing booking system, compared with the same period last year. Those tonnages were provisional and had not yet been verified by NIEA through the WasteDataFlow reporting system that the Council must comply with; they were however unlikely to vary by a significant margin through the official verification process.

	Sept 2022	Sept 2023	% Change	Oct 2022	Oct 2023	% Change
Total HRC Waste (Tons)	2221	1495	-33%	1803	1426	-21%
HRC Waste Collected for Recycling (Tons)	1324	1056	-20%	1093	991	-9%
HRC Waste Collected for Landfill (Tons)	897	439	-61%	710	435	-39%

The summary **2-month impact** of the HRC access booking system and associated impact on landfill disposal and recycling costs, was illustrated in the table below.

	Sept – Oct 2022 (Tons)	Sept – Oct 2023 (Tons)	Change (%)	Change (Tons)	Waste Disposal/Recycling Cost Change
Total HRC Waste	4024	2921	-27%	-1103	£102,086 Saving
HRC Waste Collected for Landfill @ £127.42 per ton	1607	874	-46%	-733	£93,399 Saving
HRC Waste Collected for Recycling (main recyclable waste streams – wood, rubble, scrap metal, cardboard and green waste)	2417	2047	-15%	-370	£8,687 Saving

It was difficult to be precise about the 12-month financial saving that would accrue were this level of improvement in HRC waste management to be sustained on an ongoing basis. However, applying the above percentage reduction in landfill to the 12-month HRC landfill figure for 2022-23, would see a financial saving in landfill costs of £534K at the current landfill gate fee and tax rate (£127.42/ton). Any savings in recycling costs accrued from a nett reduction in the overall amount of recyclable waste streams received into HRCs, would add further to the total reduction in HRC waste disposal costs.

3. Use of Grey Bins

The following table provided statistics in relation to our monitoring and enforcement of grey bin misuse for the year to date.

	Total Number of Alert Stickers Applied for Misuse of Grey Bins
January 2023	433
February 2023	404
March 2023	309
April 2023	484
May 2023	720
June 2023	407
July 2023	428
August 2023	403
September 2023	449
October 2023	433

Those statistics did not suggest a rise in the detected level of grey bin misuse associated with the HRC access booking system, and the peak level of detection this year pre-dates the introduction in the new system in September.

4. Proposals for Additional Booking Slots over the Christmas and New Year Period

As things stood, the HRC's were currently running with an average spare capacity rate of 65%, indicating that there was still headspace in the booking system for extra utilisation without provision of extra opening hours/booking slots over the festive period. However, it was certainly acknowledged that there was routinely a spike in demand at that time of the year – and in that context it may be prudent to take a precautionary approach to preparedness and extend opening hours of sites for several days/provide extra bookable slots.

Should Members wish to extend access opportunities over the Christmas period, on the basis of experience, officers would suggest that this would be most effectively done on Wednesday 27th, Thursday 28th December and Tuesday 2nd January. Extension of opening hours at all nine HRC sites on those dates to say 8pm, would provide an extra 6,120 bookable slots. The cost in overtime would be around £4,500. Extending opening hours at say five sites rather than all nine (suggested Balloo, Newtownards, Holywood, Comber and Portaferry) would provide an extra 4,176 bookable slots, with an overtime cost of £3,200.

Implementation of any extra HRC opening hours over the festive period would be dependent upon securing agreement of enough suitable staff to work additional hours (to be confirmed, should a decision be taken to provide extra opening).

5. Handling of Constituents' Data in Line With GDPR

The only personal data that was held on the system was a site user's address, car registration number and email address, and **not** the resident's name. Following consultation with Members prior to finalisation of the booking system, the initially proposed requirement for a resident to enter their name when booking a HRC visit was removed, as a consequence of concerns raised about security. The data was immediately encrypted upon entering the system by 24-bit encryption in line with ISO standards and uploaded to Pentagull Servers in England. It was anonymised after three months with the address and car registration being automatically removed. After thirteen months all data was automatically deleted. The data was used for statistical/reporting purposes, to allow scrutiny of site use to identify potential abuse for trade/business use and by those from outside the Borough, and to investigate any complaints received regarding sites etc.

6. Petitions

On 26 September 2023 a petition organised by Alex Easton MLA and Alderman Wesley Irvine was received, "objecting to the Council's decision to operate an online booking system across all recycling centres across North Down and Strangford, and call on Ards and North Down Council to immediately withdraw this disastrous online booking system decision and reopen all recycle centres to the way they were before". Whilst the petition listed 4066 signatories, examination of the list showed that 41% of these signatories gave addresses that were not within the Borough, indeed many of those were not NI or even UK addresses.

On 16 October 2023, a petition against the new HRC booking system was received from Portaferry Women's Institute comprising 23 signatories.

7. Summary

Whilst some level of opposition to the introduction of the new access booking system for HRCs had been received, most notably through the submission of two petitions, the Council had also received many expressions of support and satisfaction with the arrangements. Notwithstanding this, on all levels of objective assessment of the first two months' operation (as indicated by the information contained within this further update report), the new HRC access booking system was delivering upon the target strategic outcomes.

- There was no evidence to link it to a significant change in fly-tipping activity.
- The amount of waste received at our HRCs had decreased by 27% (landfill waste by 46%) as a consequence of preventing access for trade waste disposal and by out of Borough residents.
- The estimated cost to domestic ratepayers of waste disposal had fallen by £102K over the 2-month reporting period, extrapolated to a potential £534K saving over 12 months.
- There was no evidence of additional misuse of grey bins for disposal of recyclable household waste.
- Use of sites was now being managed in a much more efficient way, with utilisation of overall HRC capacity being effectively controlled across all

available opening hours. Where deemed desirable by Members, extra bookable slots could be created over the festive period to cater for any spike in demand.

- All data provided by residents in connection with the booking system was managed by Council in full compliance with its GDPR obligations.

RECOMMENDED that the Council considers making provision for additional bookable slots at HRCs over the Christmas and New Year period, as outlined in Section 4 of this report.

Proposed by Alderman Smith, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the recommendation be adopted including the making of provision for additional bookable slots at HRCs, over the Christmas and New Year period.

Alderman Smith noted there was often uptake in demand on the HRC's during the Christmas period and it was sensible to build in more capacity across the 9 HRC's sites. He commended the Director on the content of the report which he viewed as encouraging. There was a slight increase in fly tipping however viewed that as relatively minimal in the wider trend. The savings were encouraging, monitoring would continue, and the official statistics would be seen in the New Year. Alderman Smith felt the trial had been reasonably successful so far and he commended the staff for the work that they were doing.

Alderman McIlveen welcomed the addition of the Christmas slots highlighting the need to plan in advance. Although there was capacity at the moment there was often huge demand on the HRC's following Christmas. Alderman McIlveen referred to the teething problems in respect of the booking system. He advised that he had been contacted by a gentleman who had been told that he was unable to book online again until January as he had used the HRC too many times. Alderman McIlveen disagreed with that approach and did not feel that was an appropriate use of the system. He was of the understanding that the system would flag an individual who was using an HRC's regularly however that would then be investigated in terms of potential commercial use. Staff on site could check the type of waste that was being disposed of and make an assessment if that was commercial waste. On another issue, Alderman McIlveen referred to GDPR and felt more needed to be done to provide assurance to people that their data was safe particularly those people in the PSNI and security forces who were particularly reluctant about sharing their data. He suggested that it would be useful if Officers liaised with the District Commander of the PSNI to see how those fears could be allayed. The initial figures were encouraging however the process needed to continue to be monitored. In relation to bookings made via the phone Alderman McIlveen noted that he had been made aware of times where it was taking a long time to make a booking. He outlined a situation when a lady had roof tiles to be disposed of, she made an appointment via the phone and was told to take them to her closest HRC which was Comber however when she arrived at the HRC she was told that roof tiles were not accepted at Comber HRC. Such training issues needed to be addressed to ensure the correct information was provided to ensure users were not inconvenienced.

Councillor Morgan noted that the performance report would be presented to the Environment Committee in March and she asked if fly tipping, use of the grey bins,

spare capacity figures across the HRC's and the number of people who had been stopped using the HRC's could be included within that report.

The Director confirmed he was happy to include in the report those figures along with the issues raised.

Councillor W Irvine felt there was still wide spread opposition to the on-line booking system. He noted that he had been made aware of people who had difficulty getting through on the phone and sought assurance that was being managed appropriately. Councillor W Irvine further noted that the recycling figures had decreased. He supported additional slots being made available for Christmas however raised concerns regard the system as a whole and felt public consultation should have occurred prior to the introduction of the system.

In relation to the phone system, the Director stated that there was a very small proportion of the bookings made via the phone. Unfortunately, it was difficult to guarantee that phone calls would be answered in a small number of rings, he apologised to anyone who had experienced these issues and reassured the Members that he would focus staff on providing a good quality of service.

Councillor MacArthur was of the understanding that the rate of the usage of the appointments at Donaghadee HRC had increased from 10% to 15%. She recalled the issue that she had previously raised regarding the issue of hard plastics. Donaghadee or Millisle HRC's did not accept hard plastics and users were diverted to Balloo. Hard plastics were everywhere in homes particularly at this time of the year with the clear out of toys. Councillor MacArthur sought an update from the Director regarding the placement of a skip for hard plastics at the HRC's in Millisle and Donaghadee.

The Director advised that the recycling of hard plastics had recently been expanded to Comber HRC. He was of the understanding that a hard plastic skips were to be placed in Portaferry and Millisle which would provide a good coverage. The Director highlighted that it had been one of the benefits of the new system, as before waste such as hard plastics were being placed in landfill skip rather than being recycled. The system was leading to a much smarter recycling and waste disposal offering for residents. Officers welcomed any learning opportunities to make the system great for the customers, environment and ratepayers' pockets.

Councillor MacArthur asked if there was an indication when those skips would be put in place. The Director undertook to email Members in that regard. Once in place, that would be advertised through the normal channels.

Councillor McKee referred to the misuse of the kerbside collection service and questioned if it would be March before the official tonnage figures would be known in that regard. The Director explained that the tonnage figures were collated and verified through the waste data flow system. Anecdotally, there was not a big issue being seeing at the kerbside and random checks were undertaken. The quarterly reports would provide the official tonnage figures in due course.

Councillor McKee questioned if there had been an increase in visitors to HRC facilities in neighbouring Council areas. The Director advised that through the publication of DAERA report that would provide the official figures in that regard in respect of all Council's. He understood that there had been an increase in traffic to neighbouring Council HRCs. A significant number of people were still presenting themselves who did not live in the Borough at certain HRC's and were being turned away.

Alderman Adair referred to the increased in the use of batteries during Christmas. Batteries could not be placed in the grey bin and he noted that a number of the large supermarkets provided a facility for recycling of batteries. However, he questioned if there was any way the Council could encourage the local shops to participate in the recycling of batteries. The Director advised that could be looked into. He explained that legally if a retailer sold a certain number of batteries, they must provide a take back service. Officers could look at how many of the outlets were providing battery recycling.

Alderman Adair noted that Councillor MacArthur had previously raised an issue regarding the collection of small electrical items from the kerbside and he asked if there was any update in that regard.

The Director encouraged residents to be efficient in their journeys to the HRC's and to accumulate waste rather than making a journey for a single item such as a small electrical item. As Members were aware, Officers were reviewing on an ongoing basis the offering at the kerbside and a plan was in place to extend the offering on the kerbside to include lower grade textiles.

Alderman Smith noted that there were operational improvements to made however strategically movement was being made in the right direction.

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

12. SEALING DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED:- On the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Edmund, **THAT** the Seal of the Council be affixed to the following documents:-

- (a) Grant of Rights of Burial D40208-D40268
- (b) Statutory Receipt in relation to Plot 46 (Comber Bypass vesting)
- (c) Conveyance in relation to plots 32A and 33A (Comber Bypass vesting)
- (d) Tree Planting at Loughview - Deed of Release and Deed of Covenant
- (e) Service Legal Agreement/Legal Agreement - Interreg FASTER Project
- (f) Deed of variation to Planning Agreement regarding Queen's Parade planning approval

13. TRANSFER OF RIGHTS OF BURIAL

The following transfers were received:

Duplicate copy:

Mark Nelson -Loughview cemetery section B grave 420

Elizabeth Porter – Clandeboye cemetery section AP grave 5027

Transfer:

Michael Irwin – Joseph Rice

Clandeboye cemetery

Section SX grave 6884

John Patton – Martin Milliken

Ballyvester cemetery

Section E grave D44 + D45

Georgina Wilson – Graham Wilson

Comber cemetery

Section 26 grave 130

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Kerr, seconded by Alderman Cummings, that the transfers be approved.

(Alderman Armstrong-Cotter entered the meeting – 8.03 pm)

14. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix**)

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

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

In respect of Page 1 - Notice of Motion – environmental damage caused by modern day packaging: Councillor McRandal sought an update on this motion.

The Director of Environment explained the reasoning that a report had not been forthcoming. He recalled that the Council campaigned on this particular subject, had written to all the supermarkets and lobbied government in relation to plastic packaging. He undertook to report back on the motion to the Committee as soon as possible.

In respect of Page 2 – Notice of Motion - humane control of pigeons in Conway Square, Newtownards; Alderman McIlveen noted that complaints were still being received regarding the issue and people were still feeding the pigeons. Signage was

erected however he questioned what progress had been made in respect of the other elements of the motion including deterrents and the introduction of a by-law.

The Director of Environment explained that to create a by-law would need the approval of the Assembly and therefore there was no prospect in that regard until there was a functioning Executive. Furthermore, the usefulness of by-laws was highly questionable and in order to enforce a breach of a by-law that required a summons to bring an individual to court.

Alderman McIlveen felt that progress could be made on the issue in anticipation of the return of an Executive. He asked if any progress had been made in respect of deterring the pigeons.

The Director of Community undertook to seek an update from Environmental Health and report back to Members. There had been at least two occasions previously that the Council had carried out a cull in Conway Square however the current policy of the Council did not allow for that to occur.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor Kerr, that the recommendation be adopted.

15. NOTICES OF MOTION

15.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Creighton and Councillor Irwin

This Council recognises the importance of Bangor Sportsplex for athletics, football and community leisure facilities in the Borough and notes with concern the deteriorating conditions of the site rendering several pitches unusable, and therefore tasks council officers with producing a report regarding the future of Bangor Sportsplex, including addressing maintenance and structural issues and exploring options for the long term provision of track and field athletics facilities in the Borough.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Creighton, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

15.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McCracken and Councillor Blaney

This Council recognises the importance of Bangor's early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council requests that officers bring back a report which evaluates how the physical link between two main sites, Bangor Abbey and the North Down Museum, could be improved, to include the renovation and potential remodelling of Bell's Walk, with consideration for improved wayfinding and lighting. The motion also requests that officers consider how Bangor Castle Gardens and The Walled Garden could be better incorporated into the walking route, and how the overall attraction could be packaged to create a more complete tourism and placemaking experience.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McCracken, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

15.3 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor S Irvine, Councillor W Irvine and Councillor Brooks

That this Council Amends its flag policy to include the flying of the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round.

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

15.4 Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Kennedy

That this Council notes the importance of this Borough as the birthplace of the Ulster-Scots community from 1606 onwards and the role of those settlers in the development of the lands known as the Hamilton-Montgomery Estates which make up the majority of this Borough;

Notes the rich heritage of the Borough in relation to Ulster-Scots language and literature;

Notes that 19,685 people in the Borough registered a level of ability in the Ulster-Scots language in the most recent census, representing 12.4% of the population; Notes the significant potential of Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture as a catalyst for social and cultural development in the Borough;

Notes the thriving interest in the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture within the Borough;

Notes the Council's responsibility under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to take resolute action to promote Ulster-Scots; Notes the recent recognition of the Ulster-Scots community as a National Minority of the United Kingdom under international law:

Notes the weakness of this Council's engagement with Ulster-Scots Language Week this year and in previous years;

And tasks officers to develop a budget to ensure and encourage participation in future Ulster Scots Language Weeks; and to develop an action plan, with advice from the Ulster-Scots Agency, to develop all aspects of the Borough's rich Ulster-Scots heritage.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Kennedy, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community and Committee.

15.5 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Wray and Councillor Smart

This Council is alarmed at proposed 5% cut in funding to arts organisations funded by the Department for Communities through the Arts Council NI.

Notes that Arts Council NI funding has decreased, in real terms, by 30% over the last decade, despite evidence that investment in the arts has a real terms economic benefit for Northern Ireland. With continued cuts our borough will see more initiatives end, more artists forced into seeking new careers, and more companies forced to close.

Recognises that Stormont Permanent Secretaries are being forced to take, without mandate, difficult decisions that should be taken by locally elected Ministers and a devolved Executive and Assembly.

Calls for a reversal in cuts to the arts and agrees to join as a signatory to Equity NI's latest open letter to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities.

Further calls for the restoration of a reformed Executive and Assembly to take decisions which can future-proof the arts sector and protect funding in the future.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Wray, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

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

That this Council continues discussions with the Education Authority concerning the redevelopment of the play area fronting Victoria Primary School, Ballyhalbert (which is a shared facility between the school and public) and tasks officers to source external funding streams to enhance recreation & sports facilities for the village and surrounding area. Further, Council notes the poor condition of Ballyhalbert children's play park and tasks officers to bring forward a report on enhancing and improving the play park to meet the needs of local children.

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

15.7 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cathcart and 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:

- **Accessibility**

- **Simplify application forms**, review all funding applications to ensure that they are simple, clear and don't unnecessarily over burden applicants with information required.

- **Digitisation of community grants, tenders and reporting** to allow those that wish the option for simple and more efficient submissions.

- **Building capacity in the community**, creating a scheme to help the community to write and deliver more successful applications and bring in more external funding to this Borough.

- **Communication Enhancement**

- **Single grants list or 'open grants' page on council website** with uniform advertisement of grants so that everyone receives the same information on available funding with a clear grants timetable, with scoring criteria clearly outlined including ranking and amount available across borough etc.

- **A single point of contact** to direct community and voluntary groups to support and assistance across different Council departments.

- **Showcase & celebrate** the great and valuable activities that the dedicated volunteers are delivering on this section of website.

- **Equity**

- **Make funding available proportional to size of communities/activities being delivered and the type of needs being addressed**, community groups represent different sizes of population and area (areas of deprivation etc), and are doing different work ('essential needs' and 'non-essential') yet often funding is allocated 'per group' rather than area/numbers targeted or type of work being delivered.

- **Funding available to reflect the continued rise in costs.**, e.g., ensure funding available for community events is adequate to actually host events & activities.

- **Up front funding is uniform**, that groups get the same up front funding percentage (eg 80%) across all Council funding to help with delivery.

- **Equality of opportunity**, Ensuring that groups are not pigeon holed into a certain category of funding pots and can apply for all they are eligible for.

- **Removal of 'first come first serve' funding** to ensure level playing field.

- **Efficiency**

- **Creation of reserve lists of funding** to ensure Council can allocate underspend and slippage quickly, easily and equitably to ensure no funds are returned to Departments.

- **'Trusted Supplier Scheme'** to allow emergency and time limited funding to be provided quicker.

- **Logistical planning**, ensuring that all grants are delivered in a timely manner to ensure impact on the ground.

The review will be brought to the Community Grants Working Group to be examined in detail and reviewed on an annual basis."

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

16. EAST BORDER REGION - 4.2: RURAL REGENERATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION – TOURISM THEMATIC GROUP APPLICATION - HERITAGE CROSS TRAILS PROJECT

*****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)

This report contains information on a potential partner application to the Investment Area 4.2 Rural Regeneration and Social Exclusion within the PEACEPLUS programme. The report advises on the lead partner and project scope.

The report recommended that Council approves the project submission once the call opens.

17. TENDERS FOR THE PROVISION OF BITMACING WORK AT ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCATIONS (FILE 77001)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON

A report relating to tenders for the provision of bitmacing work was considered.

It was agreed that the contract for the provision of bitmacing works is awarded to the top scoring company, John McQuillan (Contracts) Ltd.

18. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR OPERATION OF RAPID ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGERS – INTERREG FASTER PROJECT

(Appendix V)

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON

A report relating to a Service Level Agreement between EasyGo and Ards and North Down Borough Council for the installation and operation of Rapid Electric Vehicle Chargers at locations in the Borough, was considered.

It was agreed that the Council approves the Service Level Agreement for the new Rapid EV Chargers installed under the Interreg FASTER project.

19. MINUTES OF SPECIAL CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE DATED 19 OCTOBER 2023

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION. Exemption 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above.

20. MINUTES OF SPECIAL CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE DATED 16 NOVEMBER 2023

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION. Exemption 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above.

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 8.29 pm.

C.29.11.23PM

ITEM 7.1

29

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Planning Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Tuesday 5 December 2023 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman McIlveen

Alderman: Graham
McDowell (7.10pm, Zoom)

Councillors: Creighton
Harbinson
Kerr (8.44pm, Zoom)
Kendall
Martin

McRandal
McKee (Zoom)
McCollum
Morgan

Officers: Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Principal Professional & Technical Officers (C Blair & L Maginn), Senior Professional & Technical Officer (A Todd), and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for inability to attend was received from Alderman Smith, Councillor McLaren, Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Wray.

Apologies for lateness were received from Alderman McDowell and Councillor Kerr.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**3. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF PLANNING COMMITTEE 7 NOVEMBER 2023**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the minutes be noted.

4. PLANNING APPLICATIONS**4.1 LA06/2023/1959/F - Ulster Folk Museum 153 Bangor Road, Holywood
(Appendix I - II)**

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's Report.

DEA: Holywood and Clandeboye

Committee Interest: An application in the major category of development
Proposal: Erection of new arrival and welcome building (Culture Hub), collection & exhibition building (Industry Zone), staff and volunteer hub; extension to existing Ballycultra building for collections storage space and sustainable energy centre; erection of new pavilion building and landscaping within the 'town' area; alterations to existing buildings to form learning facilities and craftwork spaces within the 'town' area of the museum; landscaping improvements across the museum estate including new pedestrian walkways and interpretation signage; the development of new car and bicycle parking areas; and the demolition of the Dungannon Store facility, entrance ticket kiosk, staff portacabins and Carrigan's Sawmill.
Site Location: Ulster Folk Museum 153 Bangor Road, Holywood, BT18 0EU
Recommendation: Approval

The Senior Professional and Technical Officer (A Todd) outlined the case officer's report to the Planning Committee.

She explained that Item 4.1 was an application seeking full planning permission at the Ulster Folk Museum, Holywood, for the detail set out above.

The application had been recommended for approval and had been brought before Planning Committee as it fell within the major category of development.

The site was located within the existing Ulster Folk Museum grounds encompassing the 'town area' of the museum. The area lay within the countryside approximately 120m south of the settlement of Holywood and the main Belfast to Bangor A2 carriageway. A number of Draft BMAP designations applied to the site including the 'Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and Cultra Glen' Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance, the 'Folk Park/Creighton' Local Landscape Policy Area and the Cultra Manor Historic Park, Garden and Demesne.

A further slide showed images of the town area of the Folk Museum which most members were already familiar with. The site comprised areas of woodland along with the existing museum buildings and car parking. An image showed the existing main access into the museum and another image showed the current ticket kiosk at the entrance beside the main car park and then additional images set out examples of the buildings within the town area itself.

The site layout plan showed the various aspects of the development. The proposal represented an extensive redevelopment scheme for the current facility reflecting the transformational brief which the National Museums NI had identified for the Ulster Folk Museum. Currently the Ulster Folk Museum attracted approximately 80,000 visitors per annum, and it was anticipated that the redevelopment of the site could potentially increase that to 243,000 visitors per annum.

The scheme had been developed following an extremely thorough design process engaging stakeholders from the outset including pre-application discussions held with the Planning Department and extensive Pre-Application Community Consultation. The overall scheme had also been reviewed by the Ministerial Advisory Group Design Review Panel which wholeheartedly supported the aims of the project.

Thanks to the efforts of the case officer, Christine Hamilton, and the high-quality submission from the applicant's design team, officers were pleased that they had been able to make a recommendation on the application within the 30-week target for major developments. The officer understood that representatives from both the design team and National Museums were in attendance this evening and available to answer any questions members may have had regarding the background and design ethos of the project but the officer provided a brief overview of the each of the different aspects of the proposal.

Starting at the northern most end of the site, a new woodland walk was proposed within the wooded area to the right of the main access road. That would involve the removal of some large shrubs within the central area to accommodate the path however no significant tree removal was involved and new tree planting within the area was proposed. The path would link through to the main arrival point at the proposed Culture Hub building for those visitors arriving on foot.

A new car park would be located in the north-western corner of the site with the new arrival building located adjacent. While it would be necessary to remove a number of trees to accommodate the car park at that location, those trees were not subject to a Tree Preservation Order and compensatory tree planting would be carried out as part of the detailed landscaping scheme for the site. NIEA was also consulted and was content that impacts on the habitat of the priority woodland and the Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance would be minimal.

The carpark would provide compliant access adjacent to the main entrance and the proposal as a whole had been designed to provide suitable access for all. The woodland walkway would provide a step-free route between the overflow visitor car park and the main site entrance. The proposal would improve the parking arrangements for the museum as a whole. Currently, staff, visitors, and coaches parked in the same car park. However, the redevelopment would provide a separate visitor car park and a separate staff and coach carpark and the overall parking provision would be increased from 185 to 246 spaces with at least 10% of car spaces provided with EV charging points. A Travel Plan and an Events Management Plan had also been submitted which identified the management strategies to be deployed during busy times.

The Committee was shown images of the proposed Culture Hub building from various viewpoints. That would serve as the new arrival building for the Folk Museum introducing the museum and its ethos. The building would be constructed of sustainable natural materials sourced locally. Walls would be formed with straw bale construction and protected with lime harl and the roof would be finished in slate.

Further images displayed a couple of existing views looking towards the proposed site of the building and conceptual images to give an idea of what the interior spaces of the building might look like along with the proposed materials. A further slide showed the proposed Market Garden area which would be located to the front of the Culture Hub building adjacent to Meeting Street. The Market Garden would connect the new Culture Hub and the town leading the visitor towards Tea Lane and the wider existing town buildings. It would incorporate several areas of productive and

ornamental planting, laid in linear agricultural field patterns to create a visual link to the wider rural landscape of the museum.

Opposite the Culture Hub and Market Garden was the site of the proposed Industry and Staff Hub building. That would serve as a showcase for the national Industrial Collection and some images of the proposed building from various viewpoints were shown. A further slide showed the existing view of the proposed site taken from the current car park at the museum along with images of the interior space and the palette of sustainable and locally sourced materials proposed.

At the eastern end of the site was the existing Ballycultra Building which was currently used as a storage facility. That was the large green building at the entrance to the museum. An extension to the existing building was proposed which would incorporate a series of timber clad 'boxes' that stepped in plan along the length of the building to reduce the overall scale of the elevation. The store extension would include a much needed conservation studio and quarantine area together with a dedicated arrival space for collection transfers and deliveries.

Further to the south was the Diamond area opposite the existing Tearooms. To better spatially define the diamond space, a series of lawns were proposed to the front of the Tea Rooms to accommodate informal gatherings and picnics. A generous area of hardstanding was also proposed to the front of the Tea Rooms with additional outdoor seating and a natural stone sett finish, appropriate to the heritage setting would replace the tarmac finish to the existing central area of the diamond. A canopy structure was also proposed within the area to offer day-to-day use as a gathering space and provide shelter in bad weather. It would also offer the opportunity to host events from market stalls to pop-up cafes.

The proposals for the new Learning Courtyard to the south of the Industrial Hub focused on refurbishment to create dedicated Learning Spaces that would provide a balance of flexible and dedicated use spaces within the area.

Across the whole scheme only four buildings were proposed for demolition to accommodate the new development. All of those buildings had been identified in the Built Heritage Appraisal carried out by Hoskins Architects as having either no relative significance or low relative significance. Historic Environment Division had also been consulted on the application and had raised no objections to the demolition of those buildings.

Further slides showed that the project also involved extensive landscaping works across the site. As previously mentioned, a number of existing trees would need to be removed to accommodate the new car park and Culture Hub building. Some trees to the side of the Ballycultra building would also need to be removed to accommodate the new extension. All of the trees proposed for removal were shown in red and orange on the plan with shrubs shown in pink. However, the vast majority of trees on the site as indicated in blue, would be retained. It was not considered that the removal of those small groups of trees would harm the overall character or ecology of the site. Furthermore, extensive new tree planting would be carried out as a compensatory measure. In total 329 new trees would be planted. Images were shown of the new trees proposed for the Woodland Walk area and further slides

displayed the tree planting around the car park, culture hub and Market Garden areas then lastly around the Ballycultra store, Industry Hub and the diamond.

In terms of the planning policy context, while the site was located within the countryside, policy TSM2 of PPS16 which set out the planning policy on tourism, permitted extensions to existing tourist amenities provided the scale and nature did not harm the rural character or landscape quality of the area.

A Landscape Assessment had been carried out and submitted with the application to assess the potential visual impact of the development within its wider landscape context. As the photographs demonstrated, the site was heavily screened by mature bands of woodland with only limited, distant views of the application site and areas of the proposed development from the wider public viewpoints. The proposed buildings themselves had been designed to an exceptionally high standard and their siting would respect the existing topography as they would sit into the landscape at a low level minimising their visual impact with a maximum height of two storeys in all locations.

Seven letters of support had been received for the application from MLAs, the Education Authority and Craft NI. No objections had been received in relation to the application.

All of the statutory consultees had also confirmed that they were content with the proposals including DFI Roads in terms of traffic impact and SES and NIEA in terms of potential impact on European designated sites and priority habitat within the site itself. The Planning Department was awaiting final confirmation from NIEA that it was content with the further information submitted in relation to badgers, however the final decision would be held until the Planning Department had received confirmation from NIEA and in that regard, it would ask the Planning Committee to grant the Planning Department delegated authority to include any conditions relating to any mitigation measures required by NIEA.

In summary, the Officer advised that this was an extremely high-quality scheme which had been very carefully designed to meet the needs of the Museum while respecting the sensitive context of the site. The proposal complied with all the relevant planning policies in relation to tourism development and the scheme would bring much-needed rejuvenation to the Museum to create a leading national tourist attraction within the Borough. On that basis it was recommended that Full Planning Permission be granted.

(Alderman McDowell joined the meeting via Zoom – 7.10pm)

As there were no questions from Members for clarification, the Chair advised that a delegation was in attendance to speak in support of the application. Andrew Heasley (agent), Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive of National Museums NI and Gordon Gibb, Director at Hoskins Architects addressed the Committee as follows:

- Mr Heasley thanked the Planning team for its processing of what was a major planning application and how it had positively facilitated the PAD that preceded it.

- The project sought to increase annual visitor numbers to the museum to 240,000 from an average 120,000 before Covid.
- An independent study had shown that for every £1 invested in National Museums NI, it generated £6 economic and social impact.
- Ms Thomson explained that the Ulster Folk Museum was established almost 60 years ago to preserve and interpret the way of life and traditions of the people of Ulster that were fast disappearing.
- From the outset there was a strong community spirit and the museum sought to play an important role in society, notably through cross community initiatives at a time of increasing conflict and division.
- Driven by more peaceful and prosperous times, the museum had more recently become better known for its great day out experience. Many families and school children were able to fondly recall visits to the sweet shop and the smell of freshly baked soda bread.
- However, changing consumer trends coupled with a lack of investment in the museum, had led to a slow decline which needed to be addressed.
- 2024 marked the 60th anniversary of the museum and brought a really exciting opportunity to re-establish its relevance. That process was being referred to as its 'Reawakening'.
- Now was the time to realign the museum to renew its commitment to exploring shared heritage and cultural diversity for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.
- To use its knowledge of the past to provide lessons for the future at a time of environmental crisis, helping people to learn how we could live more sustainably and in harmony with nature, and to provide new ways to support healthy lives for all at a time of increased isolation, anxiety and disconnection.
- The project would deliver significant benefits not only in terms of economic development through increased tourism for the Ards and North Down area, but also in terms of wider societal outcomes.
- The museum would seek to transform how people perceived the museum from a fondly remembered visitor attraction worth visiting every now and then to an inspirational and dynamic heritage and environmental resource with a multitude of ways to connect with its purpose throughout the year.
- A range of ideas had been piloted over the last few years which had demonstrated significant opportunity of that reawakening. Those included increased opportunities for volunteering including around conservation and through development of a schools' programme providing new opportunities to learn about heritage skills.
- However to sustain that the museum needed clear investment in its facilities to provide a stronger welcome, better ways to access the museum's significant collection and fit for purpose spaces to sustain audience, volunteer and staff engagement.
- Mr Gibb, the architect, explained change of perceptions would be done through balance of preserving what was cherished about the museum while introducing new buildings, new collections and new stories to attract new audiences and investment.
- The Culture Hub, an inspiring new welcome building, would be a place to showcase the Ulster Folk collection to new audiences in new ways and to

introduce the themes and ethos of the museum and to provide a variety of engaging spaces to explore shared heritage and cultural diversity.

- The design of all buildings employed traditional materials, new skills, natural materials that were locally sources where possible in an exciting and contemporary way.
- The buildings would be to high level of sustainability – BREEAM standard of excellent and Passive House certified.
- The industrial collection would be back on display allowing visitors to understand and experience industrialisation in places of work, side by side with home life.
- Landscape interventions would link all of the buildings together improving accessibility and access to rural areas, allowing visitor groups to take part in activities in that area and understand more about sustainability, healthy lives to the benefit of the economy of Ards, North Down and beyond.

The Chair invited questions from Members to the speakers.

Welcoming what was an exciting development, Councillor Morgan spoke of fond memories of the Folk Museum. She asked what the timescale was in terms of completing the development and Ms Thomson advised that there was a desire to open the facility by 2028, subject to successful funding which was hoped to be confirmed in 2024.

Noting that there had been zero objections and seven letters of support, Councillor Martin felt this was a great tribute to the architect given the scale of the proposal. He sought information around the environmental sustainability features of the development and it was advised by Mr Gibb that the proposed welcome centre and culture hub would be BREEAM Excellent standard, which was a recognised UK metric for sustainability. The Industry Zone would be Passive House certified which meant it would contain high levels of insulation, air tightness, low energy and low carbon footprint both embodied and operational. Ms Thomson added that it was the museum's ambition to demonstrate what good sustainable development looked like.

Councillor Martin welcomed the innovation but encouraged the museum not to stop baking its soda bread in this technological age.

The Chair, Alderman McIlveen, welcomed the proposed development and he too recalled fond memories of the Folk Museum, explaining that his wedding had been held in the church there 10 years ago followed by a reception in the Cultra Manor.

There were no further questions to either the speakers or officers and the Chair sought a proposal.

Councillor McRandal proposed, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted and that planning permission be granted.

The proposer, Councillor McRandal commented that the proposal and design was clearly of high quality and sympathetic to the environment in terms of use of materials and sustainability being a high priority. Alderman Graham wished to echo those comments.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McRandal, seconded by Alderman Graham, that the recommendation be adopted and that planning permission be granted.

(Councillor McCollum left the meeting having declared an interest in Item 4.2 – 7.25pm)

4.2 LA06/2021/0080/F - 31 Old Cultra Road, Holywood
(Appendix III - IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's Report.

DEA: Holywood and Clandeboye

Committee Interest: A local development application attracting six or more separate individual objections which are contrary to officers' recommendation.

Proposal: Two storey replacement dwelling with integral garage and erection of a two-storey dwelling with detached garage on lands to the rear to be accessed off existing Cultra Avenue access, landscaping and associated siteworks.

Site Location: 31 Old Cultra Road, Holywood.

Recommendation: Approval

The Principal and Professional Technical Officer (C Blair) outlined the planning application, explaining that LA06/2021/0080/F was for a two-storey replacement dwelling with integral garage and erection of a two-storey dwelling with detached garage on lands to the rear to be accessed off existing Cultra Avenue access, landscaping and associated siteworks, at 31 Old Cultra Road, Holywood.

There were no objections from consultees subject to conditions. Eleven letters of objection had been received from seven separate addresses all of which had been considered in the case officer's report and addendum report.

The site consisted of an existing two storey, pitched roof detached dwelling finished in brick and painted render with a conservatory and sunroom the rear. The topography of the site sloped slightly upward towards the rear boundary.

Vehicular access to the site was currently from Old Cultra Road via a curved gravel driveway which led to a parking area directly in front of the dwelling. A wooden gate between rendered pillars towards the rear corner of the site provided access from Cultra Avenue.

There were garden areas laid out in lawn to the front and the rear and several mature trees, particularly in the front garden. This was a mature site and high conifers were located along the south boundary. The rear boundary was denoted by a stone wall which was approximately 2 metres high and mature vegetation and rendered walls formed the other boundaries. The site was not currently visible from Old Cultra Road. There were gates at the rear of the site along the NE boundary with an access to the existing laneway off Cultra Avenue.

The application was before members as it was a local development application attracting six or more separate individual objections which were contrary to the officers' recommendation.

The North Down and Ards Area Plan 1984-1995 (NDAAP) was the current statutory plan for the area however the draft BMAP Plan 2015 remained a material consideration. The site was located within the settlement limit of Holywood and lay in the Proposed Marino, Cultra and Craigavad Area of Townscape Character as identified in draft BMAP.

The application proposal sought to sub-divide the existing large plot with a proposed replacement dwelling on the position of the existing house, which would retain access onto Old Cultra Road.

The Officer discussed initially, House A, the proposed replacement.

The proposed demolition of the existing dwelling in the proposed ATC did not conflict with this policy. The existing dwelling, which sat back and was screened from views on Cultra Avenue by existing vegetation, had no particular design merits and did not make a material contribution to the distinctive character of the area.

The proposed replacement dwelling, House A, which was to be sited on approximately the same footprint as the existing dwelling, would be Georgian in style and design.

The proposal was situated approx. 3 metres from the SW boundary and between 8 and 10 metres approximately from the NE boundary. The design was subordinate to the existing character of the area and was in line with the design requirements set out in Policy QD1 of PPS 7 'Quality Residential Environments'. House A did not cause any conflict with adjacent land uses and did not result in overlooking, overshadowing and a loss of natural light to neighbouring dwellings.

The proposed House B was situated at the rear of the site and would be accessed via a separate lane from Cultra Avenue to the northeast of the site.

It was stated in the received objections that the proposed dwelling identified as House B was contrary to the North Down and Ards Area Plan, which specifically stated that in this area of Cultra, development should be limited to one house per acre under the Plot Size policy.

Under paragraph 18.9 of the NDAAP it however recognised that there would be developments which were acceptable in planning terms although they were not strictly in accordance with that plot size policy.

Further, it should be noted that the policy was not included in draft BMAP, which remained a material consideration, as it was considered it was not necessary given the proposed ATC.

The Planning Committee was asked to also consider the surrounding context of the existing established residential area. That demonstrated that the proposed site as a

whole had a density of 4 dwellings per hectare yet the surrounding density measured 5.5 dwellings per hectare.

A further slide displayed the area of Cultra measured, which extended from Cultra Avenue to the northeast to Farmhill Road to the Southwest, Clanbrassil Road to the northwest and the railway line to the southeast (07).

An extensive site history search of the surrounding area had also shown 'subdivision' of plots within the established residential area. Of note were approvals at 22 Old Cultra Road and 18 Old Cultra Road where the densities of 6.25 dph and 12 dph respectively were considered to be acceptable.

Extensive mature landscaping in the form of trees within the site and in particular within the front portion (front garden of house A) would soften the visual impact of the proposal. It was considered that the proposed replacement and additional dwelling would sit comfortably within the existing built form, would not detract from the overall character and appearance of the immediate and surrounding area and complied with the policy requirement set out under the Addendum to PPS 7 – 'Safeguarding the Character of Established Residential Areas'.

Concerns had been raised in received objections regarding the use of the existing lane onto Cultra Avenue, which was shown in a further slide. However, DfI Roads offered no objection to the proposal subject to conditions for visibility splays and sightlines to be put in place prior to the commencement of development.

The proposed scale, size and design of House B was in keeping with the surrounding area, which predominantly comprised two-storey dwellings. The proposed finishes and use of materials were acceptable in that urban area location.

The objections received mainly focused on the proposed House B including potential overlooking, overshadowing and loss of natural light to an approved extension at No. 30A Cultra Avenue, which was located to the east and partly adjacent to the proposed dwelling.

A further slide showed a map, which overlay the positioning of the proposed dwelling, House B, with the approved footprint of the extension at No. 30A Cultra Avenue.

It also showed the proposed gable elevation of House B included a single-storey lean-to, which was the nearest part to the approved extension at No. 30A Cultra Avenue. There was also an approximate 2 metre high timber boundary fence between the two properties at that location. The slide also provided the positioning of the proposed house elevation against the approved extension.

In the approved extension for No. 30A Cultra Avenue under LA06/2021/0170/F two storey and single storey extensions had been approved along the boundary. There were three ground floor windows, which were to serve an ensuite, an office and a guest bedroom.

The policy advised that the effect of a development on the daylight to bathrooms would not be considered. As recommended in Annex A to policy EXT 1 of the Addendum to PPS 7 'Residential Extensions & Alterations', 45 degree and 60-degree lines could be applied from the centre of the closest neighbouring window to assess the impact of the single storey and two storey elements of the proposed dwelling on the narrow office window.

The light test was conducted from the ground floor office window on the side of the approved extension. The 60-degree angle was used when assessing the single storey and the 45-degree angle test used when assessing the approved two-storey. Both of those tests had been conducted separately. The 60-degree test from the office window complied with the light test.

However, the 45-degree test from the narrow office window, which was deemed a habitable room under the Addendum to PPS 7 did not meet the guidance by 30 degrees. It was acknowledged that the proposed two-storey elevation of House B was not in line with the guidance under Annex A of the aPPS7.

However, Annex A in the Addendum to PPS 7 outlined that the use of the tests were an assessment tool only and were to be used in conjunction with other relevant factors rather than applying a rigid standard that must be met in every case.

1. One factor to note from Annex A was that the approved extension was already impeded by an existing 2m high party boundary timber fence, which was located 1.1m away from the position of the approved extension elevation and therefore ground floor windows.
2. The ground floor bedroom was annotated on the approved plans as a guest bedroom. It was the fifth bedroom with the main four bedrooms located at first floor level. The proposed window to that bedroom would be affected by some degree by the existing two-metre-high boundary close boarded timber fence, which was 1.1m from the window.
3. A second factor was that although the extension was approved prior to the current application, the proposal before the Committee was submitted before the proposed extension application at No. 30A Cultra Avenue and it was evident from the approved site layout that the applicant was fully aware of the positioning and design of proposed House B, as its proposed siting was annotated on this granted stamped plan.

(LA06/2021/0170/F was made valid on 15/2/2021)

4. A third factor listed to be considered under Annex A was development which was allowable under permitted development. In this case, under Part 1, Class D of The Planning [General Permitted Development] Order [Northern Ireland] 2015 for development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse, the owner of the existing dwelling could erect a detached structure in the proposed location of House B of up to 2.5 metres to eaves height when within two metres of a party boundary and had an overall ridge height of 4m without requiring planning permission. The proposed single-storey lean-to of House B was approximately 2.75m from the party boundary

and had an eaves height of 2.5m. It was therefore considered that that element would not have a significantly greater impact than a structure erected at the same location under permitted development.

The proposed first floor gable windows for House B as also identified on this slide for a store, ensuite and a side window to the master bedroom would be conditioned to be fitted with permanently retained obscure glazing should members approve the application.

Objectors had also raised the removal of trees at the site however the trees removed were not protected by the extant TPO. It was considered that the remaining trees and vegetation along with proposed planting provided adequate screening and landscaping for the proposed development.

Other objections raised had been considered in the case officer's report.

The Planning Department had considered the proposed development acceptable and recommended approval.

The Chair invited questions to the officer for clarification.

Councillor McRandal asked about separation distances and referenced Creating Places guidance, recalling that it had been an issue in previous debates in relation to other applications. The officer explained the separation distance was 2.75m to one side from House B and 1.1metre at the opposite side. The key factor however was that those distances only related to the side boundaries of House B and the Creating Places element did not apply as the frontage exceeded minimum requirements.

There were no further questions to the officer for clarification and Mr Mike Crowe who was in attendance to speak against the application, was invited to make an address to the Committee. His address was summarised as followed:

- Mr Crowe explained he resided at 30B Cultra Avenue
- He was objecting on his own behalf and that of his neighbours, Mr & Mrs Clancy, whose property at 30A Cultra Avenue adjoined the rear of the subject site.
- The proposal totally disregarded, as did the Case Report, the very material approved extension to 30A. The Clancys had now contracted a builder and works were to commence early next year.
- The rear site was very much contrived.
- The overall site measured 0.42ha, which slightly exceeded the density zoning criteria of 0.4 ha. The proposal was to split the site into two both of which fell well short of the density criteria to the detriment of the character of the surrounding area.
- He could accept the subdivision of plots where exceptional circumstances applied. However, he argued that there were no such circumstances in this case.
- During Covid there was a very significant culling of trees on the rear Eastern boundary to facilitate the contrived of plot B, despite the Tree Protection Order

in Cultra - Fig 3, in the letter of objection by Messrs Clancy, illustrated the extent of the said culling.

- It would not be practical to position house B close to the rear western boundary, due to tall mature trees in that location, so the proposal was to site house B but 1m, 40" in old money, from the Clancy's dwelling and extension, which would sit right on the boundary line - the 3D modular image of Fig 1, in Clancys' letter of objection illustrated the point.
- Having made an investment well in excess of £1.5M, the notion that Planning would deem it acceptable to grant permission for another dwelling to be erected just 40' from the wall of your house was unthinkable.
- House B overlooked the Master Bedroom of 30A and the various rooms along the single storey extension. It was interesting to note that 6 out of the 9 first floor windows in house B would be required to have obscured glazing on account of the amenity impact on neighbouring properties.
- Access to Plot B was proposed along a private laneway that passed in front of 30A and 30B at its western end.
- Although the applicant may have negotiated a ROW over the lane with a previous owner of 30A, that in itself did not infer a right to develop the lands to the rear of 31 Old Cultra Road.
- There were currently two sets of manual gates in place on the laneway. Historically, a third set of gates were in existence but those, through time, fell into disrepair. Replacement of those gates had been included in the building contract for the extension works to 30A. That would result in three sets of gates along the lane, as existed before. It was not practical, in light thereof, for Plot B to take daily vehicle access over the private laneway.
- Roads Service required strict visibility criteria to be met at the junction of the private lane with Cultra Avenue for safety reasons, yet no concern was given to the potential heightened risks on the actual laneway itself.
- Visibility was restricted from the exit of his own property on to the laneway to the right due to the presence of a 10ft high wall.
- Drivers exiting 30A onto the laneway would have restricted visibility to their left, as the impending extension extended right to the edge of the lane.
- There were no physical boundaries between the forecourts of 30A and 30B and the laneway - children used these forecourts daily as open playgrounds.
- If the private laneway was in the public domain, he would contend that Roads Service would deem additional access along the laneway totally unacceptable on safety grounds. It begged the question - who would accept liability should there have been an accident?
- As highlighted in the Case Officer's Report, a previous similar application to sub-divide the subject site was refused and an appeal duly dismissed. Nothing had materially changed - density compliance issues still prevailed.

Following Mr Crowe's address, the Chair invited questions from Members.

Councillor McRandal sought clarity on the private laneway and if it was just this particular planning application that affected the sight lines on the laneway. The speaker responded that the application affected the sight lines from the exit of property no 30a and there were no sight lines to the left. He also clarified that a new extension from that property would come out to the edge of the laneway so there

would be no sight splays for anyone exiting number 31 on to what was a single track, private laneway.

In a further response to a query from Councillor Morgan, Mr Crowe confirmed that there were currently no sight splays from any existing access points on to the laneway but he argued that creating further traffic from the proposed new dwelling would only increase vehicle use and he believed if it were a public road DfI would have objected.

Responding to a final query from Alderman Graham, Mr Crowe confirmed that the laneway was a cul-de-sac.

The Chair invited questions to the Planning Officer, and Councillor McRandal queried the extension at property number 30A and why its proximity to House B had not been an issue. The officer advised that that was due to being at the side of the boundary with a total separation distance of 3.85m. The 20metre back-to-back minimum distance (between opposing rear first floor windows) guidance did not apply due the separation being a side arrangement.

Councillor McRandal asked if there were any issues in terms of overlooking to the front or rear of property no 30A and the officer advised that House B had no impact on natural light in terms of the lean-to extension, however the proposed side gable had failed a light test when assessed against the approved windows within the extension.

The officer explained that there were however other determining factors that had been taken into account and it was felt on balance that those outweighed the loss of light. He added that the three affected windows related to an ensuite that was not considered to be a habitable room, while the other two related to a small office room with narrow window and a guest bedroom. The main bedrooms however were located on the first floor of the property so it was felt that on balance, those factors outweighed the loss of natural light to this guest bedroom.

In a further query, Alderman Graham asked for clarity that DfI Roads could have no opinion in relation to access points on to the private laneway and the visibility splays that had been discussed.

The officer advised that it was a private laneway with existing vehicular access but statutory conditions for visibility splays could only be stipulated where it met the public road at Cultra Avenue. He confirmed that there would be a condition attached if the application was approved.

Alderman Graham found it troubling that the Committee was placed in a position to determine whether vehicular access on to the road was safe or not. He also felt that there needed to be some sort of control over light angles etc, noting that residents paid a lot of money to live at that location.

The officer confirmed following a query from Councillor Kendal that the application had been submitted before the planning application for the neighbouring property extension that had been referred to. He confirmed that the applicant of the latter

would have been aware of this proposal and the close proximity given there were architect drawings available.

Noting the previous refusal based on the site area, Councillor Kendal asked on what basis Planners had been able to diverge from that previous decision. The officer advised that the decision had been taken in 1988 and policy changes and Draft BMAP 2015 remained a material consideration at the site.

Returning to the objections of vehicular access on to private laneway, the Chair had understood that Dfl only had an interest in vehicular access on to a public road. He asked the officer what the Council had to take into consideration in terms of road safety issues on private laneways.

The officer advised that it had been recognised that there was already vehicular access in place on the laneway. The Council had no control over who could access the laneway and that was determined by the property owners. There were no formal policy guidelines in place with PPS3 relating only to public roads. It was felt that there would only be one or two additional cars accessing the laneway.

Reflecting on that response, the Chair felt that the Planning Committee was having to disregard safety issues due to a gap in the policy.

The officer provided further clarity to Councillor Morgan that there would be a condition for visibility splays attached to any approval of the proposal where there was access to the public road at Cultra Avenue.

Having failed to find a proposer and seconder for the officer's recommendation to approve planning permission, the Chair sought an alternative proposal.

Proposed by Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor Creighton, that planning permission be refused.

Councillor McRandal explained that his reasoning for the proposal to refuse planning permission was due to the overshadowing aspect. He referred to applications over recent months where that had been a factor, but in this case he felt that the overlooking related to what were habitable rooms. He noted in the previous cases, referring to an application in Ballyholme, that had related to non-habitable rooms, namely a porch.

On being put to the meeting with 3 voting FOR, 0 voting AGAINST, 7 ABSTAINING and 6 ABSENT, the proposal was CARRIED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor Creighton, that planning permission be refused.

(Councillor McCollum returned to the meeting – 8.15pm)

4.3 LA06/2015/0677/F - 251a Bangor Road, Whitespots, Newtownards
(Appendix V - X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's Report.

DEA: Newtownards

Committee Interest: A Local development application attracting six or more separate individual objections which were contrary to the officers' recommendation

Proposal: Replacement of existing structure with 1 No. single storey unit to accommodate stables, coach house, tack room, workshop and toilet

Site Location: 251a Bangor Road, Whitespots, Newtownards

Recommendation: Approval

Presenting a series of slides, the Principal and Professional Technical Officer (C Blair) outlined the case officer's report.

He explained that the application was for replacement of an existing structure with one single storey unit to accommodate stables, coach house, tack room, workshop and toilet.

The application was before the Planning Committee as it was an application with six or more objections contrary to the officers' recommendation. The application also had a Section 76 legal agreement associated with the proposal with delegated authority being sought to finalise.

All material objections had been considered within the case officer report and addendums.

Consultees had expressed no objections with some recommending conditions.

Providing some context, he explained that the proposal was originally for three new buildings on site and was associated with a business use. An amended application form and plans were received for the replacement of the existing structure with 1 No. single storey unit to accommodate stables, coach house, tack room, workshop and toilet. The applicant had confirmed that the building was for his own personal use to look after his horses/ponies and work on his own carriages. The building was not associated with a business use on the site.

The site was located in the countryside as the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015 for the area. The site was also located within a Local Landscape Policy Area (LLPA): 'Whitespots, Lead Mines, Golden Glen and associated lands'. The land outlined in blue to the rear of the site continued to gradually rise. The site was accessed via an existing right of way sandwiched between Nos. 251 and 253 Bangor Road, two existing dwellings.

Further slides provided some context from within the existing site and views from the lower lying Bangor Road to the east.

In terms of the existing structure on the site, Google Earth dated images showed that the existing building seeking to be replaced had been present on the site for at least 12 years. The existing structure was immune from enforcement action under section 132 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The existing structure had not been subject to any enforcement action given its immunity at the time of the enforcement investigation. There were other structures on site subject to an enforcement notice however those had been removed and did not form part of the current planning application.

The proposal was being considered under policies CTY 1 of PPS 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside' and policy OS3 of PPS 8: Open Space, Sports and Outdoor Recreation.

Policy CTY 1 set out a range of types of development which were in principle acceptable in the countryside, and further highlighted that other types of development would only be permitted where there were either overriding reasons why it was essential and could not be located in a settlement, or that it was otherwise allocated for development in a development plan.

The proposed new shed was on the same footprint as the existing dilapidated structure on site. The policy under which this proposal was being assessed was Policy CTY 1 in respect of non-residential development i.e. outdoor sport and recreational uses in accordance with PPS 8: Open Space, Sports and Outdoor Recreation.

Policy OS3 of PPS8 entitled 'Outdoor Recreation in the Countryside' set out that permission would be granted for the development of proposals for outdoor recreational use in the countryside where all of a number of criteria were met.

The headnote in this policy did not distinguish between recreational facilities for personal use and larger commercial operations. Therefore it was applicable to both, which in this case related solely to a site for personal use.

Copies of several horse passports were submitted to demonstrate the applicant's ownership of a number of animals. It was considered that the personal equine use of the site was appropriate to the countryside and it could not reasonably be accommodated within a settlement. It should be noted that the above policy did not set a minimum threshold for equestrian activity before which the erection of new buildings could be considered.

The proposed shed measured 11m x 11m and would have a pitched roof with a ridge height of 4m which was only 0.3m higher than the existing structure currently on site.

The shed would be a lightweight steel framed building finished in green corrugated cladding. Other finishes included clear translucent roof panels, timber sliding main central door and upvc windows.

There would be no loss of high value agricultural land as a result of the application. The current condition of the site, with dilapidated structures and old horse boxes, took away from the visual amenity and character of the landscape. The land rose to the rear of the proposed siting providing a natural existing backdrop, which helped the proposal to integrate sympathetically into the surrounding landscape and would not cause a detrimental change to, or further erode, the rural character of the area.

As such the proposal was also compliant with policies CTY 13 'Integration and Design of Buildings in the Countryside' and CTY 14 'Rural Character' of PPS 21.

There would be no adverse effect on residential amenity. Environmental Health offered no objections in relation to noise issues.

With regarding to road safety and access DFI Roads was consulted on the proposal and stated it would have no objections 'providing this application is non-commercial with little or no intensification in use of the existing access'. As the main use of the building was personal private stable use and workshop/tool store it was considered there would be no intensification in use of the existing access.

Finally, the Planning Committee was asked to note that a section 76 planning agreement was being prepared in relation to the site. That was considered to be the most robust mechanism required to ensure the proposal remained as domestic use rather than commercial. Once signed and completed the agreement would be registered on the statutory charge register.

The recommendation was to approve planning permission with delegated powers sought for the legal agreement with a decision to issue once the legal agreement was finalised.

The Chair invited questions to the officer for clarification.

Recalling a previous deferral of the application Councillor McRandal noted there were concerns in relation to the primary use of the site, as to whether that would be commercial or domestic. He asked for clarity on what officers considered to be commercial use and the officer confirmed that it related to an intensification of use in relation to customers and members of the public attending the site. The officer added that an enforcement investigation had been carried out in relation to alleged commercial use but there was no evidence of any commercial activity.

Raising a series of questions, Councillor Martin was able to establish that the existing building had never been given planning approval however it was too late for the Planning Department to take enforcement action as it had existed for more than five years which made it immune from enforcement action. The officer confirmed to Councillor Martin that it would have required planning approval at the time of construction but was now immune.

Given that history, Councillor Martin expressed a level of sympathy around the objections given that this application was for the replacement of an existing building that had never had planning permission.

The officer explained there had been a suggestion that the Planning Department could ask for a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) however there was no legislation requiring the applicant to provide one in this particular case. The applicant had however been able to provide significant evidence to show that the development did meet planning policy.

In a further query, Councillor McCollum asked if it was relevant as to whether or not the unit had previous planning approval and the officer advised that the history was immaterial and that the application on its own, as presented, was deemed substantial to proceed with a recommendation to approve.

Alderman Graham noted that the shed had been described as 'make-shift' and was concerned that the Planning Committee was potentially treating a make-shift building as something that could be replaced by a permanent structure. The officer clarified that while it did not have foundations, the existing unit was still regarded as a structure and it had been on site for at least 12 years and there was evidence that it was used for keeping horses.

Alderman Graham argued that the application was verging into PPS21 and recalled there were various definitions of farming activity. In this case there was no statutory definition but horse passports were being used as consideration.

The officer responded that the use of horse passports as evidence in this particular case was normal practice and they could be taken into account.

In a further query, the Chair asked about potential for commercial use, noting that the applicant held business interests off site. He questioned how that would be managed in terms of enforcement and the officer referred to the previous investigation that had concluded there was no established business use taking place at the site. The applicant did not live on the site and may have had business interests elsewhere but the proposal clearly stated it was for the applicant's personal use.

The Chair felt that a legal agreement would need to be well drafted given the applicant's off-site business connections which were clearly stated as part of the proposal. He spoke of the difficulties that officers could face in terms of enforcing this and the level of detail and specificity that the legal agreement would need to contain.

The Director clarified that the condition of personal use was in place to mitigate against intensification of use of the site such as members of the public attending. It was accepted that the applicant may carry out other elements of his business on the site such as the repairs, for example.

Recognising that a CLEUD would have demonstrated if any further work or development had been undertaken, the Chair asked if officers were satisfied that no work had been undertaken in the last five years that could have therefore been subject to enforcement.

The officer responded that it would have to have undergone material changes, explaining that if a partially collapsed wall was removed for example, that was not classed as development. He clarified that if structure was added within the last five years then the planning process would apply. He added that while a CLEUD had not been provided, which could not be forced upon the applicant, they had still provided significant evidence to show that the site met policy requirements.

In a further query, the Chair asked at what stage a run-down shed was regarded as abandoned and the officer advised that it was considered on a site-by-site basis. For agricultural land it was if there was no evidence of any agricultural use for example, but in terms of this site the Planning Department was content that use of the site was ongoing.

Responding to a query from Councillor Morgan, the officer clarified that the Section 76 legal agreement was currently with planning lawyers and any approval could not be finalised until that legal agreement was signed off. Assuming that the intensification of use concerns were more about controlling access on to the site, Councillor Morgan asked if, for example, the applicant kept 20 horses which were under his ownership but required people to attend numerous times per day to tend to them, if that would be considered as intensification of use. The officer maintained that it only related to commercial use if customers and members of the public were attending.

(Councillor Kerr joined the meeting, via Zoom – 8.44pm)

There were no further questions to the officer and the Chair advised that Ms Maria O'Loan was in attendance, via Zoom, to speak against the application. Ms O'Loan was invited to address the Committee and she introduced herself as a solicitor acting on behalf of objectors. Her address to the Planning Committee was summarised as follows:

- Ms O'Loan believed that the applicant was required to prove that any structure was immune from planning permission and the use that was relied upon was not only lawful but existing at the date of the determination. Usual practice was done through a CLEUD provided by the applicant.
- She believed it was a statutory process that allowed the applicant to submit verified and independent documentary evidence to support their claim. That was then assessed by Planners with legal advice as appropriate. This had not been the case in the application and she felt that the discussion so far had underlined the complexity of the matter.
- Ms O'Loan argued that the site was abandoned and drew members attention to the absence of suitable fencing or water troughs etc, along with the condition of the grass. She believed that demonstrated that it had not been used for a considerable period of time.
- She argued that the evidence before members contradicted that the access was used regularly for tending to animals. She argued that the use of access had been abandoned.
- At the very least the application must be assessed as having major intensification of existing use which was currently nil.
- Dfl response was based on the assumption that currently there was inactive use in terms of access and there would be no intensification of that use. As stated that was not the case and Dfl needed to be reconsulted on the application.
- Members could refuse the application based on the assumption that this would result in an unacceptable intensification of use of the laneway.

- While the case officer presented a simplistic view of the legal test of whether the site could be immune from planning permission, she argued that it was significantly more complex and nuanced than that.
- It was necessary to determine the planning unit which consisted of three buildings and an area of hard standing. She claimed that the hard standing was particularly relevant as it was not limited to just dilapidated buildings and any amendment to any building or the hard standing reset the clock in terms of planning enforcement.
- She claimed that satellite images showed that there may have been development that had taken place within the last five years.
- That factor underscored the importance of having a certificate of lawfulness and undergoing that associated process.
- The application also failed to comply with the public consultation requirement and the description of the application was inappropriate.
- Each planning application was required to be advertised and subject to public consultation and that must be accompanied by an accurate description of the location and of the development.
- The description of the development did not accurately reflect the development proposed. There was no evidence that the “structure” to be replaced was lawful, there was no reference to the septic tank or any associated hard standing required, the reference to “carriage house” was ambiguous and could lead to an argument that there was a residential element to the proposal, particularly when the development included a full shower room.
- The address of the development was not a recognised postal address and that may have caused confusion in relation to the advertisement.
- The case officer’s report was somewhat contradictory in its references to commercial use. It was important for the wording of the planning agreement and the reliance on it, that members at least had sight of the heads of terms noting that there had been reference throughout the debate to restrictions of horses only in the applicant’s ownership and references to visitors for commercial purposes. It was not entirely clear what exactly was going to be restricted.
- Ms O’Loan argued that for all of those reasons the application should be refused.

The Chair invited questions to the speaker from the Committee and Councillor McCollum sought further comment in relation to the advertised location and claims that the address was not recognised. She asked the speaker if she could accept that no 251 was still a relevant and identifying factor that 251a was in the vicinity.

The speaker argued that the statutory requirement was that there needed to be an accurate description of the site and 251a was not a postal address. Normal practice was to take the nearest address and list the number of metres. She argued that the advertisement for the retention of an existing structure was also confusing as it could be assumed that it related to a house. She argued that a coach house could also be used as a residential unit above or close to stables.

Councillor McCollum suggested it was semantical in terms of how Ms O’Loan would have otherwise chosen to advertise the location. She queried what she understood

to be a claim of unfairness or risk of prejudice caused to the public in terms of the alleged lack of identification and Ms O'Loan contended that the difficulty was that for members of the public to become aware of the unfairness it would unfortunately not be until after planning consent was granted and the development completed.

Ms O'Loan recalled examples of applications that had faltered through the court process for much less in terms of their descriptions and emphasised the importance that they were accurate, recalling a case where a townland had been slightly misspelt.

Councillor McCollum asked for clarity on the speaker's point about Members having sight of legal information and Ms O'Loan argued that the Committee was being asked to rely on a Section 76 legal agreement to secure an important planning restriction of no commercial use. There had been no information provided to Members in terms of what that would cover. She noted questions raised in the previous discussion about ownership of horses or the extent to which the applicant could carry out repairs in relation to his business for example. She provided further scenarios that needed clarity, for example if a friend of the applicant was given permission to use the site or if the applicant could accept deliveries to the site in connection with his business.

She suggested that a Heads of Terms would be sufficient at least and believed that other Councils provided key terms to Members.

Councillor McCollum said she was aware of the various terms of the agreement having discussed with officers and she had noted, with some surprise, that a Section 76 agreement formed a statutory charge on the land.

Referring to claims that there had been no grazing of horses on the land for more than three years, Alderman Graham asked what evidence that belief was based on and Ms Loan referred to independent evidence including a series of photographs displaying the condition of fencing, no active water troughs and overgrown land. All of which she claimed supported the statement. She added that the requirement of a CLEUD would have required detailed evidence and sworn statements to be provided by the applicant in terms of use of the site.

In terms of the implications of the alleged inactive use of the land, Ms O'Loan argued that that was highly relevant to access and being able to determine whether any new development would lead to an intensification of use. She further argued that it was a material consideration, pointing to PPS 8 Policy OS3, paragraph 8, which stated that development would only be permissible where the road network could handle extra traffic it would generate.

In a further query, Alderman Graham referred to the aerial photographs which dated back to 2009, and he asked for clarity on what they were alleging to show.

Ms O'Loan claimed that there had been a series of buildings over the years on the site that had come and gone and therefore they amounted to changes of the 'planning unit'. She believed that required further analysis and determination though it could not be clarified by aerial photographs and horse passports.

In terms of the aerial photographs, Ms O'Loan explained that it was difficult to see if there had been any structural changes but in recent photographs taken on site it was clear to see that some of the buildings were in a state of disrepair with elements removed and she questioned whether that was indicative of an intention to alter or extend and those factors needed to be taken into account as to whether it was immune from enforcement.

Alderman Graham queried the establishment of a legal agreement and how practical it was to monitor and bring the applicant to court if necessary. He also queried the financial implications of having to use the court process.

Ms O'Loan pointed to her experience as a specialist in environmental and planning law which included providing advice to public authorities and the drafting of Section 76 agreements. While they could be extremely useful mechanisms they were only as good as the wording contained within them and the ability to monitor compliance. She posed a series of questions that she felt needed clear guidance within the terms and conditions of any legal agreement. Was the planning permission personal to the applicant or could it still be utilised by another individual? Could horses that were stabled on the site only be under the ownership of the applicant or could they be kept there by family members etc? While she had an understanding of what officers were trying to control, she explained the difficulties in drafting such an agreement to address many of the complexities that could arise.

In terms of court costs, she referred to High Court injunctions which in her experience resulted in costs of over £100,000.

Councillor Martin asked if the existing building on the site was subject to planning enforcement, could the proposal for a replacement building be brought forward. The Chair would not allow the question to be put to the speaker however, feeling it was unfair given that no enforcement notice was in place currently.

The Chair asked about the alleged abandonment of use including that of the access at the site and how many years of inactivity Ms O'Loan believed there needed to be for it to be considered abandoned.

She explained that it depended and referred to case law relating to Foot and Mouth which had disrupted some uses for a period of six months and in that case, it was considered to be an abandonment of use. In other cases it had been a number of years and it was about intention and something that all should have been dealt with in a formal process. She felt in this case three years was a reasonable period. Traffic surveys would look at the last two years of data and she felt that was a good analogue.

(The meeting went into recess at 9.10pm and resumed at 9.25pm)

Speaking in support of the application, Mr Stuart Magee (agent), along with the applicant Mr Finnegan, was invited forward. His address to the Committee was summarised below:

- The applicant concurred with the Council's recommendation to approve the application.
- The applicant concurred with what was a thorough, detailed and well documented case written by Council which had considered all material planning matters, policy, legislation, site history and third-party representations in reaching its recommendation to approve.
- The applicant contended that this was a 'minor' planning submission which in 'layman's' terms sought only to replace one established structure with another, the planning merits of which were compliant with legislation and policy.
- The existing shed, established more than 15 years ago had been heavily documented, photographed and evidenced by the Council and by the previous Planning Department (DOE in Downpatrick) through site visits, reports and aerial photography taken at this and adjoining lands over many years, (including applications and appeals on behalf of work carried out by Queens University Belfast).
- The need for the replacement structure was to provide a modern, fit for purpose structure for Mr Finnegan – fit for purpose meaning simply a warm, weatherproof structure with running water, a toilet and winter stabling for his horses, this structure allowing Mr Finnegan to 'tinker away' in retirement making his own horse equipment, fixing his carriages and tending to his ponies and horses, all of which were bred and trained by him on these, his lands – in short his hobby (as accepted by Council and appeal 2018/A0008).
- Unfortunately, the term 'business', derived from various sources caused misinterpretation of the proposal. He wished to clarify all that had already been documented by the Council when it had considered this proposal acceptable in principle and to approve.
- Mr Finnegan fixed carriages which he used with his horses for charity events off-site – in 20 plus years those charity events had never required customers (or business) to visit the site or Mr Finnegan. Furthermore, this 'minor' element of Mr Finnegan hobby would not change, if permission was granted, in the future except to cease for reasons of age, ill health and after many years of civil occurrences between neighbours.
- The replacement structure, these lands Mr Finnegan had owned for 20+ years, his horses, his hobby was all he had now and in continuing that in a weatherproof structure allowed him to further tidy and upkeep the lands for his horses – in 'layman's' terms, retire doing what he had done and been involved with (at high sporting level and with royalty) since a child with his father, i.e. tend to and maintain his horses in peace.
- Reminded all parties of the applicant's acceptance of several changes, amendments, submission of reports and further evidential documents requested by the Council throughout the planning process, most significantly the 'unique' application of a Section 76 agreement.
- In legal terms, approval of the application afforded a 'higher level of protection' to the Council, in addition to planning conditions he contended were exceptional, 'rare', unnecessary and likely unprecedented in such a 'minor' case had been accepted by Mr Finnegan to replace one established structure with another fit for purpose unit allowing him many more years of retirement on his land at 251a Bangor Road to continue his hobby in peace.

The Chair invited questions from Members and Councillor McRandal referred to claims of previous enforcement action on the site and asked the speaker to comment on the absence of a CLEUD, given that the previous speaker had argued it had been normal practice to have one. Mr Magee responded that the enforcement action had not related to the structure in question and the Planning Department had been clear that the CLEUD was only voluntary and not a requirement. He could not advise the applicant, as his client, to pay a fee simply to gain a certificate when there was sufficient evidence presented and accepted from 2009. That fee would be better saved for the important Section 76 agreement.

In a further query, Councillor McRandal asked for the applicant's view on the claims by the objectors of abandonment and Mr Finnegan dismissed the claim as nonsense explaining that the only reason that the site hadn't been used lately was due to ill health and his wife had also feared using the site without any planning permission in place, an application had now been in the planning system for eight years. He alleged that 'every trick in the book' had been used to frighten them away from using the site but he advised that the only reason he had not been on site lately was due to ill health. The agent added that there was no evidence of abandonment and it was immaterial to the planning decision. The application was submitted eight years ago with a need for the structure, that need had only increased with Mr Finnegan's age and deteriorating health. He confirmed that the horses would be returned to the land once there had been approval.

Alderman Graham asked what the facilities were at present and how they compared to what was being asked for in the application. The applicant advised that there was workshop, stable and room for a carriage. The application was just to upgrade that space.

The Chair returned to the query by Councillor McRandal and the claim of abandonment. He noted Ms O'Loan had claimed that because the land had not been used for a period of time, that rendered the use of the access as abandoned. He asked what the current standard of the access was and Mr Magee explained that it remained open for use at any time. He added that the land was used by one person, the applicant, who was free to use his land which totalled eight acres and he was free to do as he chose with his horses whether they remained on or off the site. He felt that the intensification concerns had been dealt with and could be ruled out along with abandonment.

The Chair asked when the site was last used and it was confirmed that the applicant was on site the previous day walking his dogs. The applicant added that he did not understand the claims of abandonment.

The Chair queried the business arrangement and connections to a business off site and Mr Magee said there was no business on the site. The applicant fixed his carriages and carried out work attending charity events with his horses. He trained his horses on the land but every element of his client's business was carried out off site. One example was attending a Council run event at Cocklerow Cottages where he offered horse and cart rides for children. There were no customers or visitors to the site of this planning application.

Continuing, he explained that the only access to the site was usually his client with his horse and cart and that had reduced over the years given the civil occurrences with his neighbours which was thoroughly documented. He further clarified that Mr Finnegan did not operate a business at any other site and all business took place at events where he was requested to attend.

The Chair invited questions of clarification to officers and Councillor McCollum queried if there was a legal requirement for the applicant to provide a CLEUD and the officer confirmed that it was only a voluntary process. The applicant had chosen to submit the required information as part of the planning process. The Director added that legal advice taken specifically in relation to this case, had confirmed that a CLEUD was not required and officers could assess evidence provided by the client to demonstrate the building had been on site for a certain number of years. The passage of time had made the building immune from enforcement action.

Councillor McCollum asked for clarity that the Section 76 agreement was attached to the land as a statutory charge and that would transfer to any subsequent owners including use by family members. The Director confirmed that the inclusion of a Section 76 agreement had resulted from the legal advice taken following the previous deferral of the application. The agreement, in line with that advice, would address the concerns of the Planning Committee and would be paid for by the applicant. She confirmed that the agreement would be attached to the land rather than the individual.

Councillor Harbinson referred to claims around the alleged illusion of the address and how a court would view that but the officer explained that it related to a valid address, as verified with LPS, and was therefore legal and an accurate description.

In a further query, Councillor Harbinson asked about what was regarded as intensification of use, relating to the number accessing the private laneway of an earlier planning application site, however it was clarified that had related to the number of dwellings on the laneway if they had been in excess of five and not the number of uses.

Councillor McRandal queried Ms O'Loan's comments around the hard standing and that any development would restart the clock in terms of planning enforcement. The officer explained that alleged unauthorised development would be a matter for planning enforcement investigation. He confirmed that was new information and would require investigation but he explained that this particular application was dealing with the replacement structure on the site. He added in response to a further query, that there had been no evidence provided to show it materially affected the planning unit. He did not feel that a small area of hard standing should however be relevant to the consideration.

Councillor Martin referred to an attached addendum where an objector had stated that the site had been previously put up for sale with planning permission for stables for commercial use. When raised with the applicant the sign was removed given there was no approval in place. He asked when that had occurred and the officer

understood it was towards the end of the previous year although he had not been involved in the case at that time.

Alderman Graham asked if immunity from enforcement gave grounds for a new replacement structure and it was confirmed that as a result of the passage of time that structure was immune and had become lawful. It was therefore legitimate.

Alderman Graham queried if a building was therefore classed as established did that create a precedent for extension and the officer clarified that while hypothetical, it would require planning permission and the Director confirmed that it would also require a CLEUD in that particular scenario to establish lawfulness of the existing building before being able to extend, known as the Saxby principle in planning caselaw.

The Chair raised further questions, returning to the hard standing issue and the situation where the clock could be restarted on the entirety of the planning unit. He asked how the Planning Committee could legally proceed with a decision at this stage while a question like that remained outstanding. The officer explained that legal advice would need to be sought in that regard.

While the Chair had sympathy for the applicant, he was concerned that ignoring the matter of the hard standing could leave the Council open to judicial review.

The Director commented that it left the Committee in a predicament given that no new information was permitted but officers were not in a position to respond without investigating the new information that could be fundamental to the application.

Councillor Morgan felt that eight years was a huge amount of time for the Committee to make a decision and felt that one needed to be taken at this stage. Councillor Martin however disagreed and felt that the Council had a duty to make the best decisions it could based on all of the evidence before it, and in due regard to the law. He suggested a deferral in order to get further information around the hard standing along with legal advice.

Proposed by Councillor Martin, seconded by Alderman Graham, to defer for one month to allow officers to consider and seek legal advice regarding new information presented which relates to a hard standing.

The seconder, Alderman Graham supported the proposal and felt clarity was needed before a decision could be taken.

Councillor McCollum felt that it was unlikely that there was evidence to show the hardstanding was created within the last five years given that it had not been raised by the objector. It was also clarified that none of the photos submitted were dated so could not be used as evidence. She suspected deferral would unlikely result in any new evidence.

Councillor McRandal was concerned that potentially opening an enforcement case could be material to consideration of the application but the Director confirmed that it could only be material if it was established that there had been a breach of planning.

She believed that a month would allow sufficient time to establish whether there was an issue.

Given it would only be for one month, Councillor McRandal felt he would be content to support the proposal.

On being put to the meeting with 7 voting FOR, 4 voting AGAINST, 0 ABSTAINING and 5 ABSENT, the proposal was CARRIED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Martin, seconded by Alderman Graham, to defer the application for one month to allow officers to consider and seek legal advice regarding new information presented which relates to a hard standing.

(Alderman McDowell and Councillor Kerr left the meeting – 10.14pm)

4.4 LA06/2023/2000/LBC - Ards Art Centre, Town Hall, Conway Square, Newtownards
(Appendix XI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's Report.

DEA: Newtownards

Committee Interest: An application relating to land in which the Council has an interest.

Proposal: Replacement of ground floor windows to front elevation

Site Location: Ards Art Centre, Town Hall Conway Square, Newtownards

Recommendation: Approval

Presenting a series of slides, the Principal and Professional Technical Officer (C Blair) outlined the case officer's report.

He explained that the application was for Listed Building consent to replace ground floor windows to the front elevation of the Town Hall in Newtownards which was a Grade B+ Listed Building.

The application was before the Planning Committee as it was a Council application.

Slides were shown to display the location of the site in Conway Square and existing and proposed elevations.

A further slide showed the details of the proposed double-glazed windows. All timber work would be of traditional Georgian-bar design with painted white gloss to match existing windows.

HED had been consulted on the application and initially expressed concern regarding the proposed use of double glazing. However, following a subsequent site visit, HED confirmed that the existing windows were double glazed and were of no historic merit. On this basis, HED provided no objection to the proposal subject to

conditions to control the finishes of the windows to ensure the glazing did not affect the essential character of the listed building.

It was recommended that Listed Building Consent be granted with the following condition attached, that windows were required to be finished in hardwood, slim profile glazing – sample windows were to be agreed in writing prior to commencement.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor Morgan, that the recommendation be adopted and that planning permission be granted.

4.5 LA06/2023/1751/F - Hollywood Rugby Football Club, Belfast Road, Hollywood
(Appendix XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Case Officer's Report.

DEA: Hollywood and Clandeboye

Committee Interest: An application relating to land in which the Council has an interest.

Proposal: 1st floor roof terrace with railings

Site Location: Hollywood Rugby Football Club, Belfast Road, Hollywood

Recommendation: Approval

Presenting a series of slides, the Principal and Professional Technical Officer (C Blair) outlined the case officer's report.

He explained that the application was for a 1st floor roof terrace with railings at Hollywood Football club.

The application related to land in which the Council had an interest.

The site was accessed from Belfast Road. Hollywood Bypass was located to the north-west of the application site. Residential properties were located to the east and south of the application site.

Further slides showed the location of the roof terrace to the south west of the existing building and existing and proposed elevations, along with photographs of the site.

The roof terrace would overlook the existing pitches. It would be located approximately 40m away from apartments at 5 Belfast Road which were located on higher ground. Given the position and orientation of the roof terrace, relative to the apartment building, as well as the intervening separation distance, there were no overlooking concerns. All other residential properties were located in excess of 75m away from the proposed roof terrace.

Environmental Health had been consulted and offered no objections subject to conditions to control the hours of use of the roof terrace and to minimize noise impacts.

There were no objections from members of the public and it was recommended that planning permission be granted.

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

Welcoming the application, Councillor McCollum commented that it would enhance a much-used facility in Holywood and could be enjoyed by the community.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that the recommendation be adopted and that planning permission be granted.

5. UPDATE ON PLANNING APPEALS

(Appendices XIII - XIV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity attaching appeal decision notices.

Appeal Decisions

1. (a) The following appeal was allowed on 6 November 2023 and condition 6 was reworded.

PAC Ref	2022/A0068
Application ref	LA06/2018/1264/F
Appellant	CES Quarry Products Ltd.
Subject of Appeal	The conditional grant of planning permission.
Location	163 Moneyreagh Road, Castlereagh

Firstly, in terms of a preliminary matter, the Commissioner was satisfied that the appellant had correctly exercised their right to appeal the conditional grant of planning permission within four months of the date of notification of the decision under section 58 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The PAC therefore did not agree with the Council's assertion that the appeal was invalid, which had been on the basis that the café use was not included in the description of the approved development. The PAC considered that the absence of the café was not critical as it was proposed to be ancillary to the main retail use of the premises. Therefore, the appellant was correct that they may try to seek deletion of the word 'café' from the condition 6 text through an appeal.

A CLEUD was certified on this site under LA06/2020/0167/LDE on 30 June 2020 for the sale and storage of concrete products, aggregate and landscape supplies, DIY products and equipment had been ongoing on the site for a period exceeding five years.

Following this, this planning application was subsequently granted on 7 March 2022. Condition 6 of this approval stated –

“The café and retail use of the mezzanine floor of the building hereby approved, as shaded blue on drawing no.02 bearing the date stamp 19th November 2018, shall cease and all associated equipment shall be removed within 6 weeks of the date of this decision notice. No retail activity shall be permitted on the mezzanine floor, coloured blue on drawing no.02 bearing the date stamp 19th November 2018, of the building hereby approved without the written consent of the Council. Reason: To control the nature, range and scale of the commercial activity to be carried out at this location.”

The Commissioner did not agree with the Council’s view that the CLEUD did not establish any food or drinks activity at the site and referred to approved drawing No.04 which included a note stating the existing sales/office building “serves as a customer services facility where customers could meet staff, have a beverage and discuss products and requirements.”

In terms of The Planning (Use Classes) Order (NI) 2015 [‘the UCO’] the PAC confirmed that a café use was sui generis [no class specified] and as such was quite distinct from retail shops, which fell under Part A of the UCO. The Commission therefore found that a café use should be confined to a main town centre use and the sequential test outlined in the SPPS did not need to be applied.

The PAC further noted that the CLEUD certificate established retailing as a stand-alone use with no qualification or restriction to make it a secondary use to the quarry. The Commissioner stated that when he visited the site he observed more traffic attending the retail store than the concrete works and had concluded that the outlet was not functionally dependent on the adjacent quarry and concrete works. The PAC concluded that the effect of the Council’s approval was that a second primary use (retail) had been authorised at the site. As such the café was not required to be ancillary to the concrete works but to the retail store, which was a primary use in its own right.

The Commissioner, taking account of paragraph 1.12 of DCAN 4 considered that the café could not practically or viably operate on its own were the retail use of the premises to cease. He stated that the café was designed to provide refreshments for those who were already shopping for DIY or garden products at the site, and being on a mezzanine floor, it would not change the appearance of the building.

Therefore, the Commission concluded that he was persuaded that the proposed café would be ancillary to the retail outlet store. Additionally, this established that there was no conflict with the rural character of the area.

Furthermore, the PAC concluded that there would be no significant intensification in the use of the access. It was noted that the existing access, which was designed for HGV use would become sub-standard and the PAC had been provided with no evidence to the contrary.

Finally, the Commissioner had determined that the retailing use should be confined to the ground floor of the unit. This had not been the case during his site visit when he observed BBQs for sale in the mezzanine area. As part of the Commissioner’s decision, condition 6 of the planning approval had been amended to read as follows –

“The mezzanine floor shaded blue on the approved drawing no.02 bearing the date stamp 19 November 2018 shall be used solely as a café and for no other purpose. The café shall remain ancillary to the ground floor retail unit and shall not operate independently of it. No retail sale or display of goods shall be permitted on the mezzanine floor without the prior written consent of the Council.”

(b) The following appeal was dismissed on 23 October 2023

PAC Ref	2022/A0170
Application ref	LA06/
Appellant	BT Group
Subject of Appeal	2 No. Digital 75” LCD screens, one on each side of the Street Hub unit.
Location	Footpath outside the Courthouse, 16 Quay Street, Bangor

The main issues in this appeal are whether the proposed advertisements would:

- respect amenity;
- adversely affect the setting of a listed building; and
- maintain or enhance the overall character and appearance of a proposed Area of Townscape Character.

The site lies within the proposed Bangor Central Area of Townscape Character (ATC) as identified in dBMAP 2015. Notwithstanding that a lawfully adopted final version of BMAP is not in place, the impact of the proposed advertisements on the relevant key features of that part of the proposed Bangor Central ATC were assessed under prevailing planning policy.

There was no conflict or change in policy direction between the SPPS and the retained policies, namely PPS 6 ‘Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage’ and PPS 17 ‘Control of Outdoor Advertisements’.

The appeal site was in front of a Grade B2 listed building that was formerly Belfast Bank, a petty sessions courthouse, and was now a licensed music and arts venue (referred to as the “courthouse”) (HB23 05 011).

Policy AD1 of PPS 17 was the appropriate policy to assess the impact of the proposed advertisement on amenity. Policy BH11 of PPS 6 states that development would not normally be permitted which would adversely affect the setting of a listed building.

The Commission considered that the courthouse and its architectural features would be interrupted by the proposed advertising screens and the street hub unit that they would be displayed from. This would be due to the overall proposed height and solid form of the signage. The commissioner determined that the proposed advertising screens would stand out, be obtrusive and dominate the streetscape from critical viewpoints and particularly during periods of low light and adversely contribute to street clutter.

Additionally, the PAC considered the digital 75" LCD screens displaying moving advertisements intermittently, together with the use of bright and dark colours would compete and detract from the listed courthouse, its architectural features and its setting. The Commissioner considered that the Council's first and third reasons for refusal were sustained.

In terms of the Council's second reason for refusal, the Commissioner considered that as each application was considered on its own merits, it could not be said that the proposed advertisement set an undesirable precedent. Furthermore, Policy ATC3 of the PPS6 Addendum applied only to designated ATCs and the overall character and appearance of the proposed ATC could not be assessed due to the absence of a detailed character analysis of the proposed ATC. As such this reason was not sustained.

New Appeals Lodged

2. (a) The following appeal was lodged on 3 November 2023.

PAC Ref	2023/A0072
Application ref	LA06/2018/0673/O
Appellant	Laburnumhill Properties Ltd
Subject of Appeal	Proposed Dwelling and Garage
Location	Lands approx. 51m east of 1 Cardy Road East and approx. 11m south of 10 Cardy Road East, Greyabbey.

- (b) The following appeal was lodged on 3 November 2023.

PAC Ref	2023/L0012
Application ref	LA06/2022/0521/LDP
Appellant	Greenbay Apartments Ltd
Subject of Appeal	Commencement of development in the form of construction of foundations and the establishment of sight lines to satisfy conditions 1 and 2 on planning permission X/2008/1064/F.
Location	84 Warren Road, Donaghadee BT21 0PQ

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

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report and attachments.

The officer outlined the report and the two attached Appeal Decision notices issued during the last month.

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

6. QUARTER 2 2023/2024 PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR PLANNING
(Appendices XVI)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

The report for Quarter 2 was attached.

Key points to note:

- The first two quarters of this financial year had seen a considerable drop in the number of planning applications received, against previous years. This had a resultant impact on fee income against what had been anticipated.
- Property Certificate income had slightly exceed the year to date budget.
- Data in respect of enforcement cases concluded against statutory performance indicator was still unavailable at present; however, 76 cases were opened during Quarter 2 with 76 cases being closed.

Key achievements:

- Further to achieving the 15 week processing time for Quarter 1, in respect of applications in the local category of development, Quarter 2 was recorded as 13.0 weeks.
- There were no decisions issued in respect of applications in the major category of development during Quarter 2.
- There were 87 decisions issued in the householder category of applications, with 75% issuing within 8 weeks (the internal performance indicator), with 89% issuing within the 15 week target.
- One appeal decision against a refusal of permission was issued during the Quarter whereby the appeal was dismissed by the Planning Appeals Commission.

Emerging issues:

- Due to a number of complex planning applications and enforcement cases requiring legal input/representation. This coupled with the fee income being less than anticipated to date, had resulted in the year to date budget being exceeded.
- Staff attendance had been impacted by one instance of long term absence within the Unit.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

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

Councillor McRandal questioned the reasoning behind the considerable drop in planning applications compared to previous years. The Director explained that the trend was mirrored across all of Northern Ireland, and it had followed on from a considerable drop in applications the year before. She added that there had been a spike in domestic applications during Covid. There were still a high number of live decisions within their existing five year decision timeframe though so it was hoped that there would be a rise to report in the coming quarters.

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

7. QUARTERLY UPDATE ON TREES

(Appendices XVII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity stating that this report represented the quarterly update to Planning Committee regarding detail relating to Tree Preservation Orders served and applications for consent to carry out works to protected trees. This update provided information from 21 August (date of previous report) to 15 November 2023.

The table (attached) set out the figures from the date of the last report to Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the content of this report.

The Director outlined the attached report.

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

8. NIW RESPONSE TO MEETING REQUEST RE FENCE AT SEACOURT LANE

(Appendices XVIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity detailing that Members would be aware of the erection of the fence and gate by Northern Ireland Water at its Seacourt Wastewater Pumping Station, Bangor, and the subsequent certifying of the fence under permitted development rights.

Further to receipt of a letter from NIW's Chief Executive which was reported to the Planning Committee meeting (under Item 6) of 03 October 2023, Members agreed to recommend the following

The Director wrote to the Chief Executive on 02 November 2023 setting out the above request, and a response declining the request was received on 23 November 2023, which was appended to this report for Members' information.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report and the attached response from the Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Water.

Recognising that many Members felt passionately about the issue, the Chair referred the Committee to what he felt was a disappointing but unsurprising response from NI Water.

Councillor Martin expressed disappointment that NI Water had refused the request to meet with Members and felt that engagement was always a good way to reconcile difficulties.

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

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

9. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) – STRATEGIC POLICY
(Appendices XV-XVI)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

A report from the Director of Prosperity setting out 'policy in development' pertaining to options for Members' consideration and agreement in respect of the draft Plan that is not at public consultation stage.

10. QUARTERLY ENFORCEMENT REPORT

(Appendix XVII)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

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

It provides updates for Members in respect of the status of live enforcement notices, court proceedings and proposed summons action.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 10.36pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Environment Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Wednesday, 6th December 2023 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Morgan

Aldermen: Armstrong-Cotter (Zoom)
Cummings
McAlpine

Councillors: Boyle McKee (Zoom)
Cathcart (Zoom) Rossiter
Douglas Smart (Zoom)
Edmund Wray

Officers: Director of Environment (D Lindsay), Head of Waste and Cleansing Services (N Martin), Head of Regulatory Services (Temporary) (R McCracken), and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Blaney, Harbinson and Kerr.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION BY RE-GEN – RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT (Appendix I)

The Chair welcomed Joseph Doherty, Managing Director of Re-Gen, to the meeting along with some of his colleagues and he made a deputation in relation to the work of Re-Gen in managing recycling and waste.

Re-Gen was based in Newry and recycled waste from across the United Kingdom and Ireland, and that contributed greatly to the Northern Ireland economy. While the company managed some waste locally, Northern Ireland was still dependent on the export market for some materials which could not be recycled locally. He explained how some of the residual waste the company received was sent to

Sweden which had the infrastructure to use that waste to produce heat for individual homes there. The carbon involved in shipping the waste was considered to be negligible considering the benefits that it produced.

However, Re-Gen was investing £50M on the non-recyclable waste fraction in Newry and that investment aimed to take mixed waste and form it into fuel which was a far better product than simply incinerating it. It was his opinion that the Beacon project, planned locally, was too large and was about ten years out of date. He considered that it would be better value to use shorter term contracts with SMEs which offered solutions and reduced the need for a large waste energy plant. New technologies were being developed rapidly and committing to one long term solution at this point could prove to be wasteful in the long term.

Many countries had already, or were, introducing taxes on carbon and waste and those charges would have a considerable impact on behaviour. He described the benefits of a co-mingled recyclable collection system. Indeed, the top Councils in terms of recycling used that system which he believed to be simpler for the householder. It had been recognised that when householders were asked to separate recycling into different containers, more waste was sent to residual bins. It was therefore imperative that recycling be made as easy as possible and Re-Gen viewed new technology and robots as the future, using Artificial Intelligence to decipher materials.

Members were invited to ask questions and Councillor McKee thanked Re-Gen for the presentation and referred to the company's use of cement kilns to burn residual waste. Mr Doherty said it was the aim of the company to move closer to this in the future since that produced a quality product, but it should be recognised that it would not cope with all waste. The Member believed that public education on matters relating to recycling and waste was still of great importance even with the move to using robots to help in the recycling process.

Councillor Boyle also appreciated the presentation and referred to the Directorate's enthusiasm for everything related to recycling and the reduction of waste. He was aware that it was often Elected Members who were at times apprehensive to make changes and he asked for an opinion on what single thing the Council could do to improve recycling in the Ards and North Down Borough.

In response it was the view that reducing the size of the residual bin would be the biggest 'win' the Council could achieve in the long term. He recognised the problem that the Council had in that householders would view that as a reduced service, but it was a policy that would have to come at some point. He suggested that the recycling capacity could be increased at the same time which would force people to recycle more.

He explained that as carbon taxes came in that would force more opportunities for recycling and the Council would have more options. It was for that reason that he did not believe it to be wise to tie up waste for decades at a time, in a recycling plant in Belfast. Landfilling was not an option, but incineration should be viewed as a stepping stone until society moved to a position of creating less waste.

The Chair asked where the glass collected from the co-mingled went and it was explained that it was currently sent to Belgium because companies in Northern Ireland had not invested in the technology that was available. He considered that householders in Northern Ireland were still being asked to do all the recycling work when there was technology available to do that – but had not yet been invested in.

Councillor McAlpine had been fascinated to hear that a co-mingled system of recycling worked better and asked if there was any research on that. Re-Gen had a paper on that which they agreed to share as well as extending an invitation to Members to view the facilities they had in Newry.

Councillor Cathcart was aware that there was a recycling and waste energy plant close to Dublin and asked Re-Gen if it would not make better sense in terms of carbon footprint to send waste there rather than to Sweden. It was explained that Dublin had the same issue in that the heat element generated in the Swedish plants could not be used. Building a waste plant was a significant long-term investment and different methods of dealing with waste were being developed all the time, and so the need for a large local energy waste plant was starting to diminish.

Councillor Cathcart referred to the smaller residual bin alongside the larger recycling bin and the costs involved to change bins. He considered that residents might consider that they were getting a better service if they were able to recycle glass, textiles, waste electricals and soft plastics with a more regular collection.

Councillor Wray believed that the Deputation had been very beneficial and would welcome a visit to see the Re-Gen plant at Newry. Meantime recycling was stressed and maximising the value from that along with reducing the black residual bin space.

The Chair thanked the delegation from Re-Gen and they left the meeting at 7.40 pm.

NOTED.

4. PROPOSED STREET NAMING – BRYNMOR PARK, NEWTOWNARDS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that a small development comprising 11 dwellings was currently under construction at 111 Bangor Road, Newtownards.

The developer had requested the name Brynmor Park for the new development.

Brynmor was derived from a feminine name of Welsh and Gaelic origin, meaning “hill”. The new development sat on the side of a hill located off the Bangor Road and had grass land and protected trees forming the entrance to the development.

RECOMMENDED that the Council adopts the street name of Brynmor Park for this development.

That the Council accepts the general name and delegates acceptance of suffixes to the Building Control department.

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

5. STREET NAMING REPORT – REACTIVATION OF SLOANS HILL, MILLISLE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that a dwelling was currently being constructed on a site adjacent to 8 Mud Row, Millisle.

The owner had requested that the street serving their dwelling be named Sloans Hill. Archived maps from pre-1973, showed there were historically 7 cottage dwellings numbered 1-7 Sloans Hill on that site, accessed off Windmill Road, Millisle.

However, presently records held Sloans Hill as an unadopted street and it was requested that the name Sloans Hill be adopted.

RECOMMENDED that the unadopted name of Sloans Hill be adopted for this dwelling address.

That the Council accepts the general name and delegate acceptance of suffixes to the Building Control department.

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

6. RENAMING OF A STREET – 78B, 78C AND 78D NEWTOWANRDS ROAD, BANGOR – STAGE 2

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that a small development comprising of 5 dwellings was currently at the final stages of construction at 78 Newtownards Road, Bangor.

A report was brought to the Environmental Committee on 7 November 2023 to start the first stage of the process of re-naming a street for the three dwellings 78b, 78c and 78d Newtownards Road, to Morston Manor. The recommendation from the meeting was for the next stage to commence survey actions and report back to Council once completed, with a recommendation for action based on the finding of the survey process.

On 16 November 2023, the Building Control department sent letters to the occupiers of 78b, 78b and 78d Newtownards Road, asking them to confirm they were still in agreement with changing their address. There was official confirmation from the permitted quota of residents that they were satisfied that their address may change. It was now therefore possible to proceed to the final stage of street re-naming process set out under Council's policy.

RECOMMENDED that the laneway be re-named Morston Manor, which is in keeping with the general neighbourhood.

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

7. NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL AUTHORITY MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STATISTICS, APRIL TO JUNE 2023 AND QUARTERLY UPDATE ON RECYCLING PROGRESS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the official waste management statistics for the first quarter of 2023/2024 (April to June 2023) had been released by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

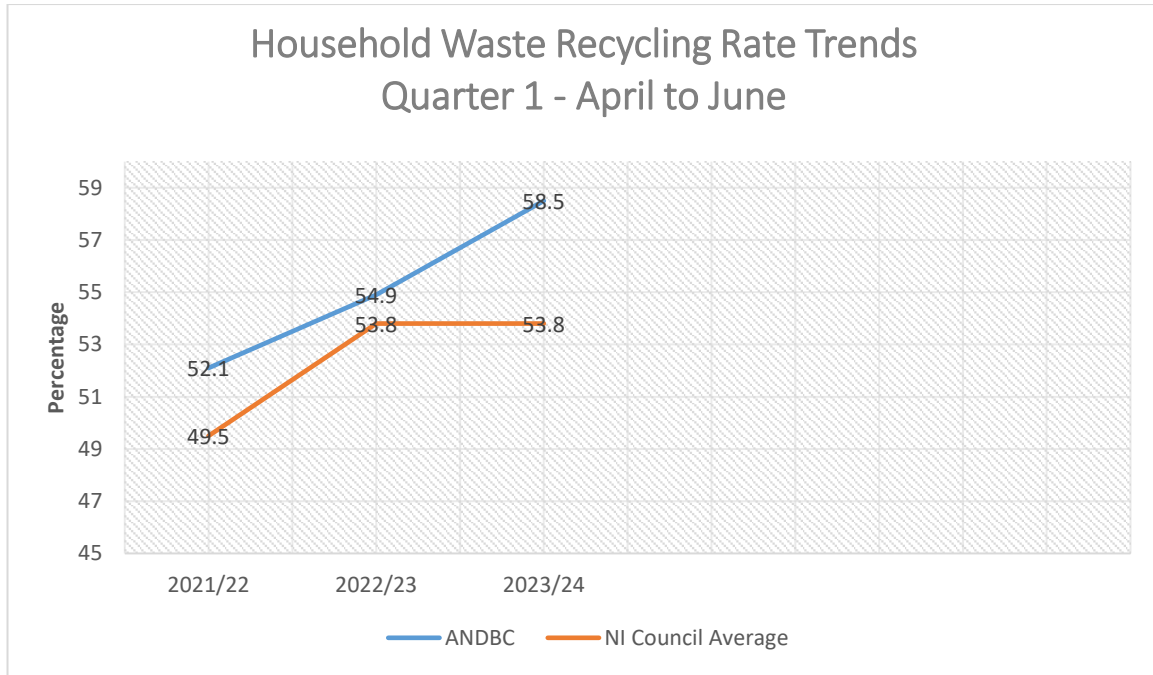
The aim of this report was to:

1. Report key quarterly waste management performance statistics relative to the new baseline year of 2021-22, and
2. Provide some detail around operational waste service management activities/actions that had been implemented during the quarter with the aim of improving performance.

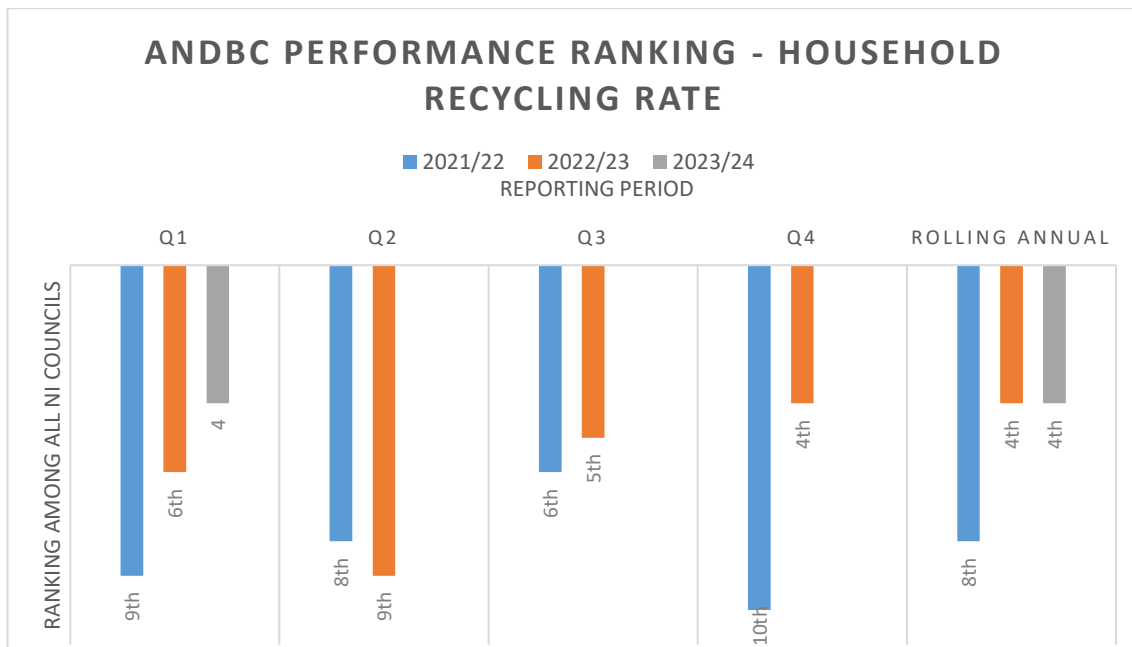
Northern Ireland Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics – April to June 2023

The significant headlines contained within the latest DAERA report showed that:

- i. The household waste recycling rate **increased by 3.6%** compared to Q1 last year, (from 54.9% to 58.5%).

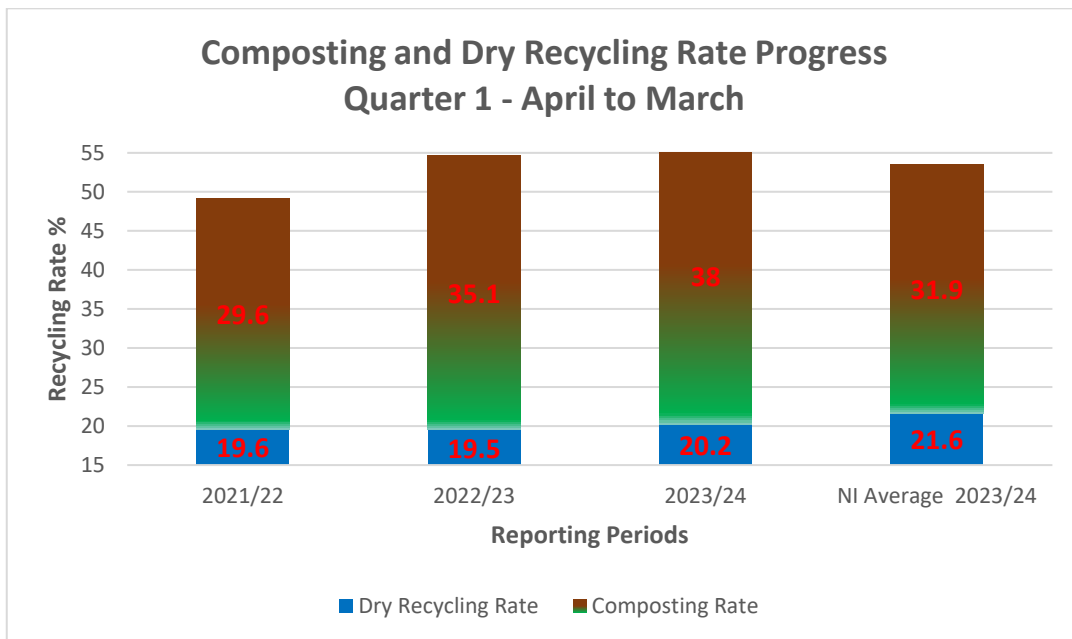


- ii. The household waste recycling rate of 58.5%, was 4.7% **higher** than the NI average of 53.8%.
- iii. The Council was ranked **4th** out of the eleven NI Councils for its household waste recycling rate.

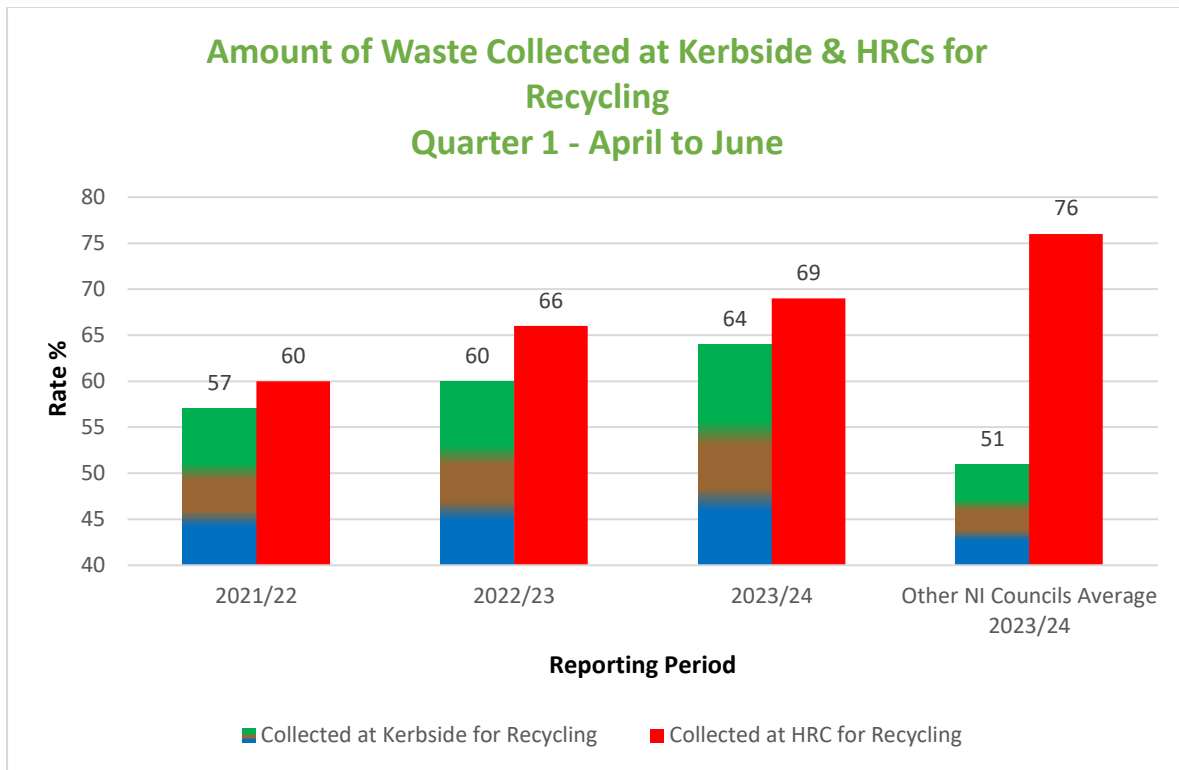


- iv. The household waste composting rate **rose** by 2.9% (from 35.1% to 38%) and was 6.1% **higher** than the NI Council average (ranking 4th out of 11 Councils).

- v. The household waste dry recycling rate **rose** by 0.7% (from 19.5% to 20.2%) and was 1.4% **lower** than the NI Council average (ranking 9th out of 11 Councils).



- vi. The Council received 15% more waste per capita at its HRCs compared to the average for other NI Councils (down from 33.5%).
- vii. The Council received 49% more non-recycled waste at its HRCs per capita than the average for other NI Councils (down from 78%).
- viii. 69.1% of HRC waste was collected for recycling (up from 66%), compared to a 76% average for other Councils.
- ix. The amount of waste collected for recycling through the kerbside bin collection system was higher than the average for other Councils – 64%, compared to an average of 51% for other Councils.



Operational Performance Improvement Measures

Marketing and Communications Indicators

MC1 - 23 social media posts were issued, with associated engagement/management of feedback across Waste and Recycling on ANDBC corporate channels. Header images on all social media channels had also continued to be present throughout the reporting period.



MC2 - 13 articles were published in print press and online (including 6 Bin-ovation news articles).

MC3 – 29 community engagement and education events were delivered.

- 5 Recycling Educational Presentations
- Over 230 attendees
- 24 Summer Schemes
- 500 participants engaged in a recycling education themed game and craft events

Household Recycling Centre Indicators

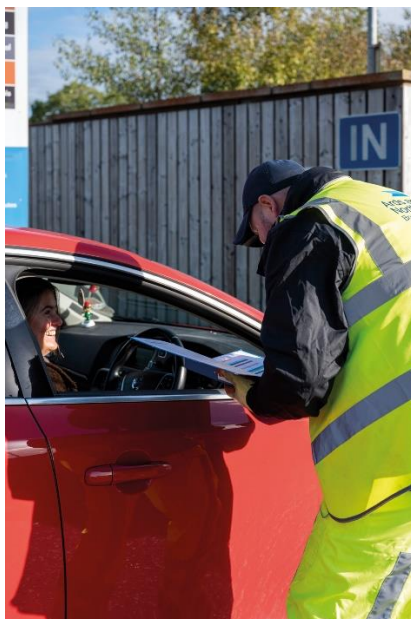
HRC1 – Volume of blue bin recyclable materials separated from mixed waste by residents on-site: 762,460 litres



That equated to approximately 32 tons of blue bin waste; whilst that was a relatively modest weight of material, it represented a very large/visible volume of recyclable waste extracted from bags of mixed waste which was initially intended to be placed in landfill skips at HRCs. A collateral benefit of that practice of requiring removal of blue bin recyclables from black bags of mixed waste before using the landfill skip was that it should help to 'educate' householders - promoting more efficient separation of waste in the home and greater use of blue bins at the kerbside.

That represented just one type of recyclable waste category which was prevented from entering landfill skips at HRCs as a consequence of the Council's more focused attention to supervision of landfill skip access; many other recyclable waste types would also have been prevented from entering the landfill skips as reflected in KPI, HRC3.

HRC2 – Number of out-of-Borough visitors turned away from site: 397



That was a significant number in itself, but it was likely to be the case that a significant number of out of Borough residents would have avoided coming to the Council's sites because of the widely publicised focus upon checking ID for everyone entering and those turned away would in all probability avoid further attempts to enter and use the HRCs; the impact of that would also be reflected in HRC3 and other KPIs.

HRC3 – % change in tonnage of total waste received (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced a **26% decrease** in the total amount of waste received at its HRCs, down from 9249T to 6873T.

HRC4 - % change in tonnage of waste received for landfill (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced a **42% decrease** in the amount of waste received for landfill at its HRCs, down from 3664T to 2127T.

HRC5 - % change in tonnage of waste received for recycling (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced an **15% decrease** in the amount of waste received for recycling its HRCs, down from 5585T to 4746T.

HRC6 - % change in proportion of HRC waste materials collected for recycling (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced a **9.1% increase** in the proportion of all waste received at HRCs which was collected for recycling, up from 60% to 69.1%.

Kerbside Household Waste Collections Indicators



KS1 – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (yellow): 6079

KS2 – Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (amber): 414

KS3 - Number of recycling alert stickers applied to grey bins (red): 179

KS4 – % change in tonnage of total waste collected (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced almost **no change** in the total amount collected at the kerbside, 15,165T to 15,185T.

KS5 - % change in tonnage of grey bin waste collected for landfill (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced a **16.5% decrease** in the amount of grey bin waste collected, down from 6509T to 5433T.

KS6 - % change in tonnage of waste collected for recycling (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced a **13% increase** in the amount of waste collected for recycling, up from 8656T to 9752T.

KS7 – % change in proportion of kerbside waste materials collected for recycling (compared to same period in baseline year 2021-22)

- The Council experienced a **7% increase** in the proportion of kerbside waste that was collected for recycling, up from 57% to 64%.

Summary and Trend Analysis of Indicators

Indicator Reference	Monitoring Period 1 (December 2022 – March 2023*)	Monitoring Period 2 (April 2023 – June 2023)
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	*Waste tonnage indicators reflect period January to March 2023 only	
MC1 Social media posts	25	23
MC2 Print press and online articles	10	13
MC3 Engagement events/sessions	17	29
HRC1 Blue bin waste	1,322K Litres	762,460 litres
HRC2 Visitors denied entry	1742	397
HRC3 Total HRC waste compared to 2021/22	16% Decrease	26% Decrease
HRC4 Landfill skip waste compared to 2021/22	27% Decrease	42% Decrease
HRC5 Recycling skip waste compared to 2021/22	8% Decrease	15% Decrease
HRC6 Proportion of HRC waste collected for recycling compared to 2021/22	5.5% Increase	9.1% Increase
KS1 Yellow warning stickers on grey bins	2784	6079
KS2 Amber warning stickers on grey bins	255	414
KS3 Red warning stickers on grey bins	52	179
KS4	4.8% Increase	0% No Change

Total kerbside waste compared to 2021/22		
KS5 Grey bin waste compared to 2021/22	9.3% Decrease	16.5% Decrease
KS6 Kerbside waste collected for recycling compared to 2021/22	20.7% Increase	13% Decrease
KS7 Proportion of kerbside waste collected for recycling	7.2% Increase	7% Increase

Summary Analysis of Indicators

The report showed a very encouraging picture, and generally conveyed continued reversal of the downward trend that the Council had experienced in its sustainable waste resource management performance over the past couple of years. Following the changes to the waste service model design and the associated education and engagement campaigns, the Council was experiencing sustained and further improving falls in the amount of landfilled waste as well as improvements in recycling rates. During the reporting period, the Council experienced:

1. A further fall in the total amount of landfill waste both at HRCs and kerbside, with no increase in kerbside waste volumes. Overall, it received/collected 2,691 tons less of waste destined for landfill over a 3-month period (April to June 2023) compared to the same period in the baseline year of 2021/22; at current landfill cost (£127.42/T), **that represented a £342,887 landfill saving.**
2. A significant further rise in the recycling rate at HRCs. The percentage of materials collected for recycling at HRCs rose by 9.1% compared to the same period in the baseline year of 2021/22. **The Council’s overall Borough household waste recycling rate rose by 9% compared to the same period in 2021/22.**

Whilst the indicators set out in the report were very encouraging indeed and reflected a lot of hard work and dedication on the part of the waste and recycling teams, undoubtedly there was much further progress to make if the Council had any chance of ultimately reaching the 70% recycling target for 2030 that was laid down in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. Continued bedding in and ongoing careful management of the new booking system for HRC access, the planned review of the kerbside collections model and a strategic review of HRC capital assets, would be critical.

It was important to stress that 'step change', sustained improvements in both the HRC and kerbside recycling rates would be required to move towards the new 70% target.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

Councillor Rossiter was happy to propose the recommendation and asked why the Council's statistics were higher than the national average. The Director explained that, as outlined in the report, the single biggest issue behind that was the reform of the HRC service delivery model which had begun the previous December. New arrangements were being bedded in and mainstreamed, and the sustainability of those changes had been patently yielding significant fruit for the Council. Step changes were being seen in this quarter's statistics, and that momentum was building. It was very heartening that the Council appeared to be back on the correct recycling trajectory.

Alderman Cummings agreed that the report was encouraging and was aware of a few glitches in the new HRC booking system, and wondered if most of those had now been resolved. The Director confirmed that there had been a very few relatively minor glitches and that those outstanding would be resolved soon. He was delighted that the changes had been introduced as smoothly as they had, since they had affected 100% of the Council's customer base and relied upon the use of technology. That was a testament to the officers who had worked extremely hard on the new systems.

Councillor Boyle thanked the Director and thought that it would be remiss not to mention the number of visits permitted by any individual to an HRC and he asked for further information on that. In response the Director said that, as promised, there was no limit to the number of visits a householder could make to the HRC for legitimate household waste disposal needs. However, having said that the system was set up to prevent abuse by individuals coming to sites with material that was not household waste. Built into the system was a mechanism for monitoring how frequently bookings were being made by an address, and when a threshold number of online bookings was reached a very politely worded message appeared on the booking system, asking the user to telephone to make further appointments. However, it was stressed that in genuine circumstances, householders were accommodated with any additional HRC visits required. He advised that the threshold figure built into the system had been set at more than twice the UK average for household HRC visits, to give as much flexibility as possible before anyone was asked to contact the Council to arrange additional bookings. He emphasised that this mechanism was essential to preserve the integrity of the system and to prevent its abuse for non-household waste disposal purposes.

Councillor Wray thought there was a lot of good news in the report and the message was clear that if the Council was to meet targets by 2030, change needed to be radical. He asked about best practice and was informed that Directors of Councils were in touch and experience was shared. Waste disposal was a key service of

Councils and Elected Members were rightly cautious about how they embraced change, but it was important to recognise the scale of the financial, economic and social impacts of their decisions in this service field. The Northern Ireland government was shortly due to consult upon a common collections framework, that would establish the minimum standards that would be required in Council waste and recycling collection models.

Councillor Edmund referred to the size of some people's gardens and their need to use the HRCs frequently for garden waste. The Director confirmed that where a householder specified disposal of compostable waste as the reason for their HRC visit, there was no limit to the number of online bookings that could be made – and site staff would simply check that such bookings were indeed being used for that specific purpose.

Councillor Cathcart asked about the timeframe for adapting the system to allow for more visits to the HRC if there was a genuine reason for that. The Director explained that officers were working on that, and it was hoped to be resolved soon and before Christmas. The Member was pleased that the Council was moving in the right direction and looked forward to further reports.

Councillor Douglas referred to a family of six in her constituency and it had reached the quota for online HRC bookings. The majority of that family's waste was recycling, and she asked if they could get back to being authorised for making further online bookings before Christmas. The Director felt that was possible, and he stated that one of the benefits that had been discovered through speaking to householders that had triggered the online booking threshold, was discovering that some local people were not receiving all the other waste and recycling services from the Council that they were entitled to. For example, some residents in the legacy Ards Council area still only had the old 140L blue bin which had originally been introduced for paper and card collections only. The family Councillor Douglas referred to might be entitled to a larger blue bin, the cost of which would be less than the cost of driving regularly to the HRC and much more convenient.

The Chair thanked the Director and his staff who had contributed towards the excellent progress outlined in the report and looked forward to the position getting even better.

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

8. Q4 LICENSING ACTIVITY REPORT (JAN TO MARCH 2023)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the information provided in the report covered, unless otherwise stated, the period from **1 Jan to 31 March 2023**. The aim of the report was to provide Members with details of some of the key activities of the Licensing Service, the range of services it provided along with details of level of performance.

Applications Received

The Service dealt with a wide range of licensing functions which required the officers to consult with the PSNI, NIFRS and a range of other internal Council Sections in making their assessment of an application.

	Period of Report 1 Jan to 31 March 2023	Same quarter last year 1 Jan to 31 March 2022
Entertainment Licence	36	33
Cinema Licence	0	0
Amusement Permits	2	2
Marriage & Civil Partnership Place Approval	4	2
Pavement Café Licence	2	0
Street Trading Licence	4	0
Lottery Permits	8	8

Most of the licences issued were for renewals and hence the workload was constant year on year. Renewing a licence still entailed considerable work to access the application and consult with the other bodies.

Regulatory Approvals

That was the number of licences, approvals and permits that had been processed and issued.

	Period of Report 1 Jan to 31 March 2023	Same quarter last year 1 Jan to 31 March 2022
Entertainment Licence	22	31
Cinema Licence	0	0
Amusement Permits	2	2
Marriage & Civil Partnership Place Approval	3	3
Pavement Café Licence	5	1
Street Trading Licence	2	0
Lottery Permits	10	9

Off Street Car Parking

Whilst the Off Street Car Parks usage had been steadily increasing since the lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions, they had not fully returned to pre Covid levels. An indication of the activity in the car parks was shown by considering the level of PCN's issued. The recorded income though showed a marked reduction.

	Q4 Income 2022/23	Q4 Income 2021/22
Total ticket sales income	£191,937	£210,264

PCN's Issued

	Period of Report 1 Jan to 31 March 2023	Same quarter last year 1 Jan to 31 March 2022
Bangor	383	231
Hollywood	256	259
Newtownards	386	300
Total	1025	790

The Car Parking Strategy had yet to be implemented and offered an opportunity to redevelop that valuable asset. As the Members would be aware there was a problem with the legislation introduced by DFI in 2015 and that prevented Councils from changing their Car Parking Orders. This mainly prevented the Council from changing Tariffs and introducing EV charging on its sites. DFI had now recognised the problem and were establishing a Working Group to look at ways to amend the legislation.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

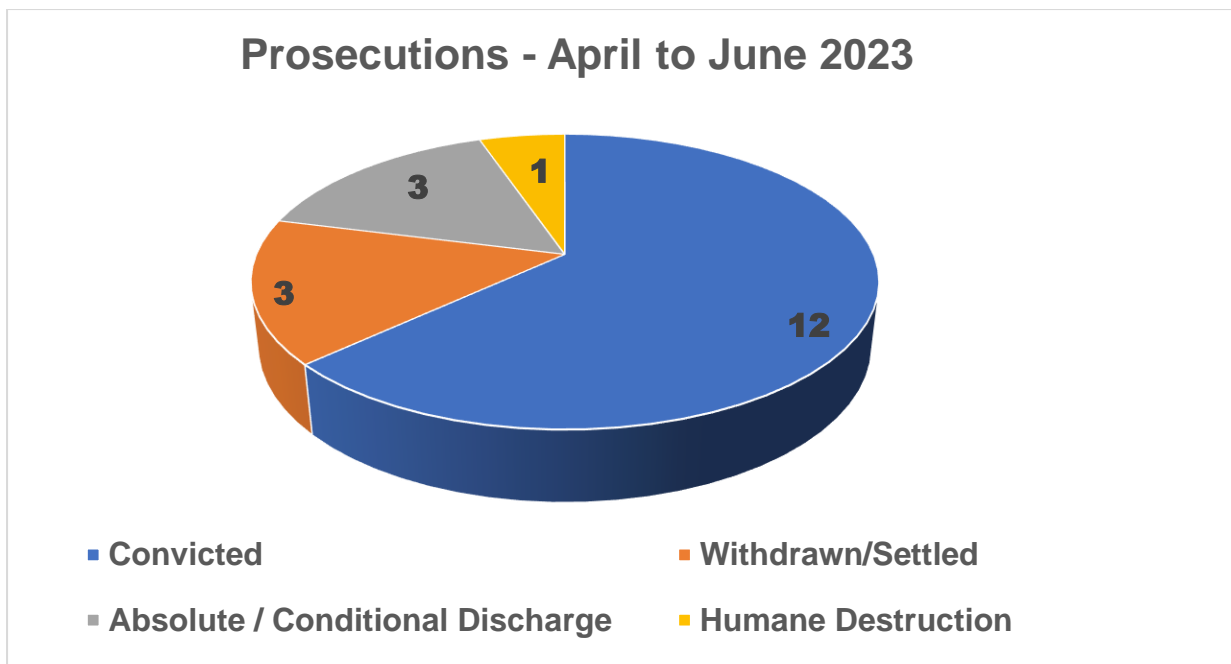
AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. RESULT OF COURT PROCEEDINGS (1 APRIL - 30 JUNE 2023)
(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing:

The following convictions were secured at Newtownards Magistrate's Court between 1 April 2023 and 30 June 2023. See Appendix A attached.

In accordance with the instructions of the Resident Magistrate, the Council's solicitor would notify defendants upon first appearance in court in response to a summons, that they may seek to have the matter withdrawn upon payment of legal costs and any fixed penalty notice previously offered. The cases were then adjourned to permit a further opportunity for payment. That had resulted in a number of cases being settled on the day of court upon payment of all costs and fines.



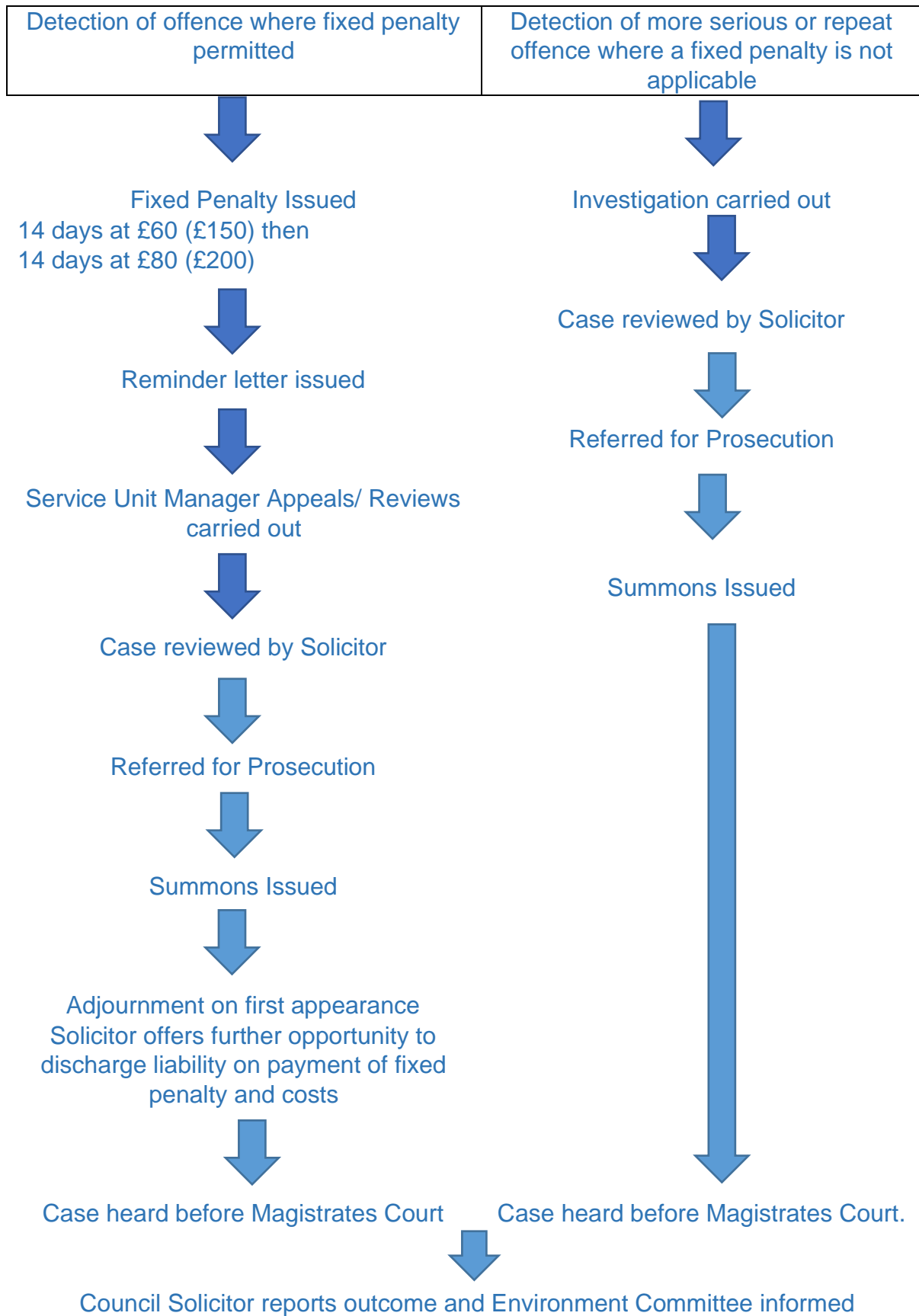
The above pie chart outlined each of the **19** prosecution cases which were disposed of during the period of the report. Convictions were secured against 12 defendants during that period.

Please note in some cases a defendant may be prosecuted for more than one offence. In total three cases were 'Withdrawn/Settled', i.e., withdrawn following payment of the relevant fixed penalty sum along with Court and Council legal costs and in one case the criminal prosecution of the defendant was withdrawn in accordance with legal advice following the dog destruction order being imposed.

Two cases were heard in respect of a person being the keeper of a dog with no valid dog licence held and those resulted in granting of an absolute discharge in one case and the other a conditional discharge.

In a further case in which a dog had attacked another dog and a person, as well as breach of control conditions the Judge convicted the defendant of permitting two dogs to attack a person and a dog and sentenced the defendant to three months imprisonment. However, due to a previously clear record, he suspended the sentence for two years. He conditionally discharged the defendant for two years in respect of the remaining charges of keeping dogs which had attacked another animal and the breaches of the control conditions. He ordered the defendant to pay £50 and £250, by way of compensation orders. He awarded £250 towards the Council's legal costs, together with the court fee of £42. He also made a contingent dog destruction order. He informed the defendant that if they committed another offence they would be brought back to court and face a custodial sentence, and the dogs would be destroyed.

The enforcement process carried out by the NET was as followed:



RECOMMENDED that the Committee notes the report.

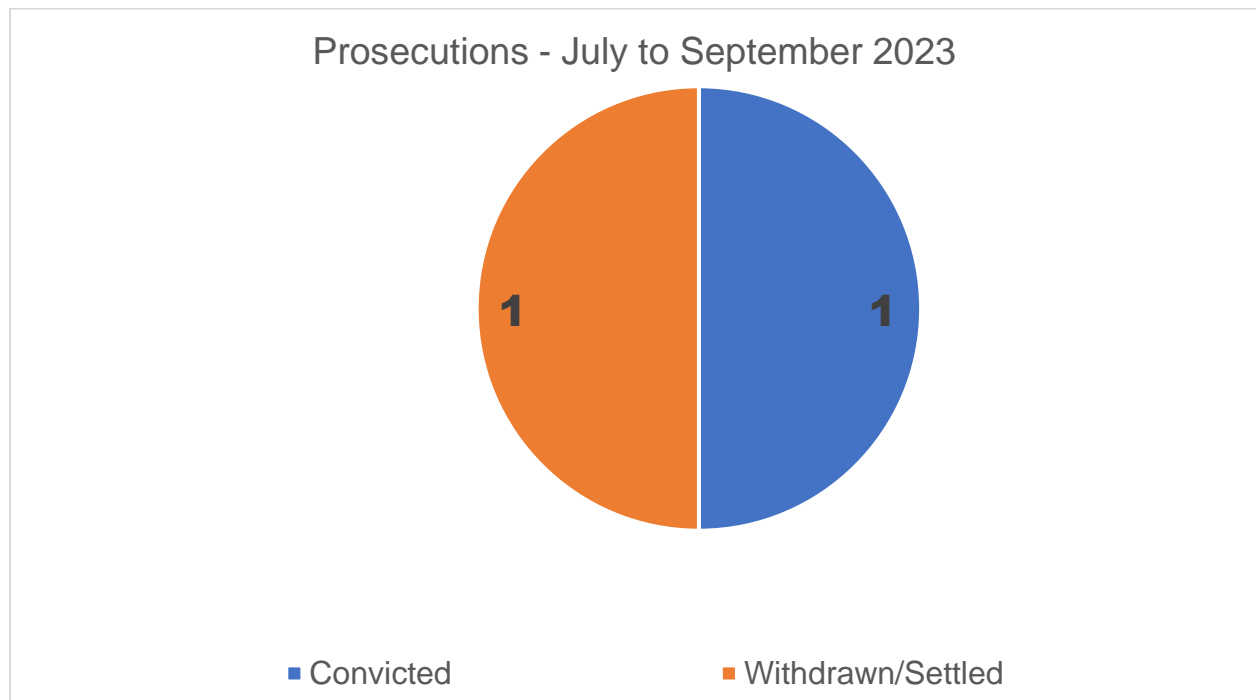
AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

10. RESULT OF COURT PROCEEDINGS (1 JULY TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2023)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing:

The following convictions were secured at Newtownards Magistrate’s Court between 1st July 2023 and 30th September 2023. See Appendix A attached.

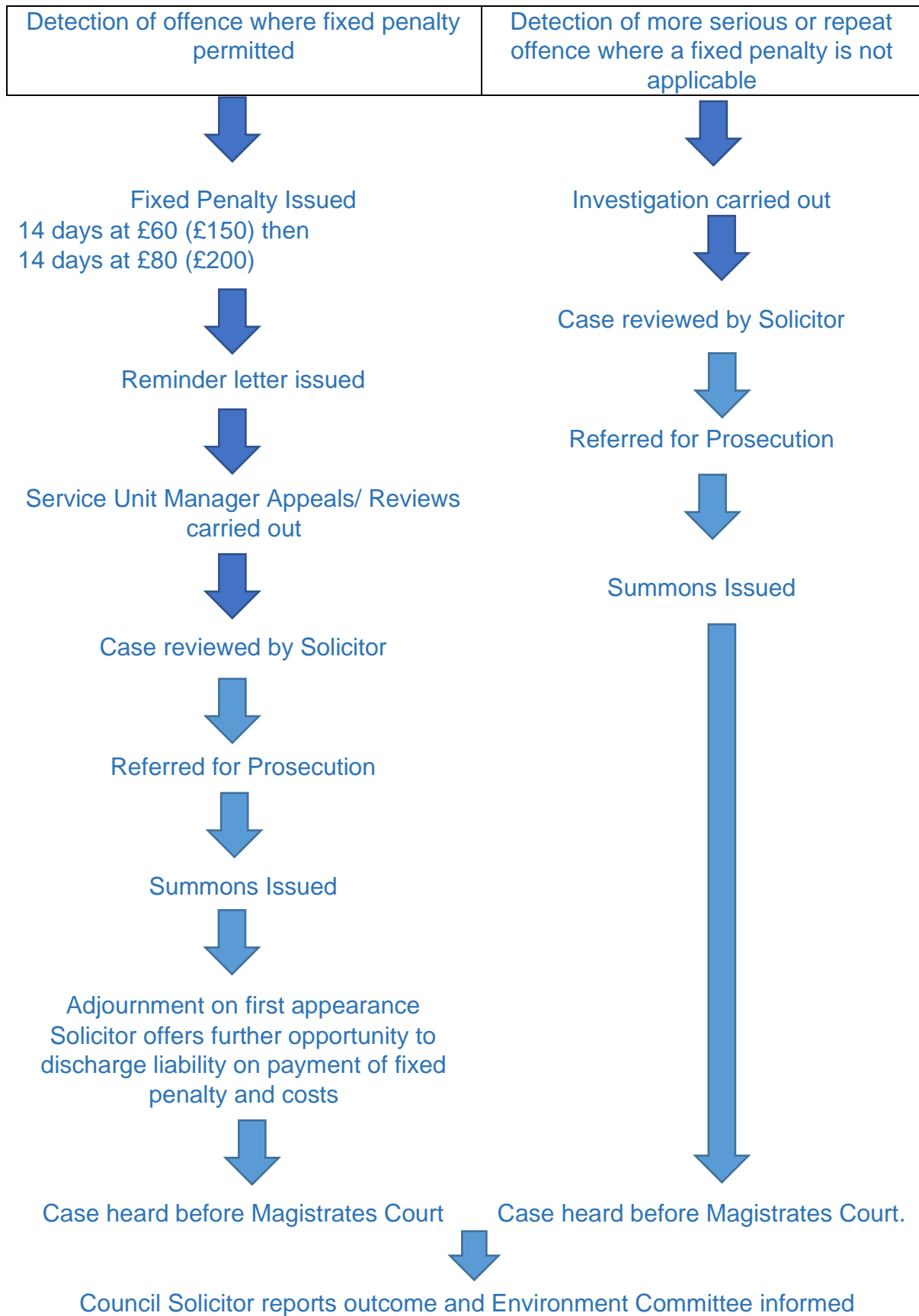
In accordance with the instructions of the Resident Magistrate, the Council’s solicitor would notify defendants upon first appearance in court in response to a summons, that they may seek to have the matter withdrawn upon payment of legal costs and any fixed penalty notice previously offered. The cases were then adjourned to permit a further opportunity for payment. That had resulted in a number of cases being settled on the day of court upon payment of all costs and fines.



The above pie chart outlined 2 prosecution cases which were disposed of during the period of the report. Convictions were secured against 1 defendant during the period. Please note there was court recess in July.

Only one case was heard for a littering offence in which the defendant was fined a total of £385 and a second case was withdrawn as the defendant had moved away and summons was unable to be served.

The enforcement process carried out by the Neighbourhood Environment Team was as followed:



RECOMMENDED that the Committee notes the report.

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

Alderman Cummings referred to the matter about sending out a court summons when a resident had moved on and the case could not be closed. He urged the Council to follow that up, if possible, but the Director replied that it was in the hands of the Courts Service and the Council was not able to control that.

Councillor Boyle welcomed the reports, and it was important that residents saw that enforcement action was being taken in such matters. He thought that sometimes the Council was slow to sell its successes to local residents. Members were informed that while prosecution details were often reported by the press that covered the Court sittings, the Council also periodically produced a press release on enforcement action taken and he would ensure that that continued on a regular basis.

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

11. REVIEW OF CHARGES RELATING TO WASTE COLLECTION SERVICES FOR 2024 - 2025

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the preparation and approval process for charging schedules (previously called pricing policies) had changed from that used previously. In summary, charges that were within the control of the Council should be increased by inflation, which was currently 6.7%. The new charges would be applicable from April 2024, but the review was carried out now as part of the Rates review process.

In terms of the supply of new and replacement waste containers, the Council continued to supply them at cost price with free delivery of the containers. Finance had commented that the service should be moving to cost recovery including deliveries. Officers had agreed to review that aspect of the service in future but recognised that it was not a straightforward issue with several factors that impacted on that element of cost.

Increases in line with the policy were reported to the relevant Committee for information.

The revised charges for 2024 – 2025 were set out in the table below.

Revised Commercial Waste Charges for 2024 - 2025

Commercial Residual Waste (Grey Bin)

Container size	Current charge	Revised Charge from 1 April 2024
140 litres	£4.00	£4.25
240 litres	£7.50	£8.00
360 litres	£9.25	£9.85

660 litres	£15.00	£16.00
1100 litre	£20.80	£22.20

Commercial Waste – Mixed Dry Recyclables (blue bin)

Container size	Current charge	Revised Charge from 1 April 2024
240 litres	£2.30	£2.45
360 litres	£3.50	£3.75
660 litres	£5.80	£6.20
1100 litres	£10.40	£11.10

Commercial Waste – Food Waste (Brown/Green bin)

Container size	Current charge	Revised Charge from 1 April 2024
240 litres	£4.10	£4.35

Commercial Waste – Glass (Red bin)

Container size	Current charge	Revised Charge from 1 April 2024
240 litres	£2.90	£3.10

Bulky Collection Charge (up to 6 items)

Current Charge	Revised Charge
£30.00	£32.00

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the revised charges for 2024-25.

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

Councillor Boyle considered that the increases were inflation based. Councillor Cathcart noted that it would be looked at as part of the Rate setting process and was in line with inflation but pointed out that the bulky waste charge had been £20 for a long time and had risen £12 in the space of a year which seemed excessive. He wondered what other options were available to residents.

The Head of Waste and Cleansing Services stated that there were other services available to collect items, but the Council was providing good value for money. Alderman McAlpine added that the Council would collect up to six items for that fee.

The Director clarified that the above inflationary price rises were in accordance with agreed Council policy and would therefore not be subject to change through the estimates process; rather the projected income from those new charges would be reflected in the draft estimates that would be brought before the Council in coming weeks and months.

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

12. NOTICE OF MOTION

There were no Notices of Motion.

13. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

14. CAR PARKING ENFORCEMENT CONTRACT UPDATE

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON

A report relating to tenders for the provision of car parking enforcement services was considered.

It was agreed that the contract for car parking enforcement, cash collection and PCN processing, be awarded to Marsden Holdings.

15. UPDATE REPORT ON KERBSIDE WASTE COLLECTIONS REVIEW

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

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – INFORMATION RELATING TO CONSULTATIONS OR NEGOTIATIONS

An update report on the work of the Elected Member Working Group that has been established in relation to the review of the Council's kerbside waste collection services model, was considered.

It was agreed that the report be noted.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.41 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Place & Prosperity Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards on Thursday 9 December 2023 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor McCracken

Aldermen: Adair (Zoom)
Armstrong-Cotter (Zoom)
McDowell (Zoom)

Councillors: Ashe (Zoom) MacArthur
Edmund (Zoom) McCollum
Gilmour (Zoom 7.03pm) McLaren (Zoom)
Hollywood Rossiter
Kennedy (Zoom 7.04pm) Smart

In Attendance: Director of Place (S McCullough), Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Head of Regeneration (B Dorrian), Head of Tourism (S Mahaffy), Head of Economic Development (C McGill) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

1. APOLOGIES

The Vice Chairman (Councillor McCracken) sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies had been received from the Chairman, Councillor Blaney.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Vice Chairman sought any Declarations of Interest, and none was declared.

NOTED.

(Councillor McLaren joined the meeting at this stage via Zoom – 7.02pm)

3. Q2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 (FILE 160167) (Appendix I)

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

Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every four years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

The report for Quarter 2 2023-24 was attached.

Key points to note:

- There had been certain challenges within the first half of the year such as DfC’s withdrawal of budget for the LMP, only to reinstate it, but delayed allocation of funds; targets had therefore been pushed back to later in the year.
- Much of officer time within the ED Service Unit had to be devoted to the development of the successor service to *Go For It* and as a result, along with other budget priorities across the overall service area, some programmes had to be curtailed.
- Following a joint meeting with DfE and NI Audit Office (NIAO), it had been agreed that Councils should reference both the statutory targets and the *Go for It* programme targets. Officers were therefore reporting on the two sets of targets for Business Start-up activity: the original target set as part of transferring functions under RPA (referred to as NIBSUP2) and the revised target issued last year by DfE for *Go For It*. The new target would not be formally agreed to replace the original until the Executive was in place.

Key achievements:

- The Labour Market Partnership was reinstated, and officers had managed to re-recruit staff who had left previously due to the uncertainty over funding. As a result, intensive planning was able to take place to ensure rollout of support and optimisation of budgets within this financial year.

- While attractions had come under pressure due to increased costs and footfall numbers, they had continued to develop and enhance their respective offerings and had ensured all elements of the contracts had been delivered. August saw the launch of the new Ocean Tank at Exploris to coincide with its 7-year anniversary.
- Business Start targets had been exceeded as support was extended under *Go For It* while the new service was in development.

Emerging issues:

- With late allocation of budget from DfC it would be challenging to procure and deliver all initiatives agreed by the LMP before the end of the financial year.
- The new Enterprise Support Service would require enhanced resources in order to fully deliver the requirements of the support.

Action to be taken:

- Officers would work with HR and other Councils to optimise work streams and staffing.

RECOMMENDED that Council note this report.

(Councillor Gilmour joined the meeting at this stage via Zoom – 7.03pm)

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

4. DIGITAL UPDATE (FILE DEV23)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity stating that the report detailed an update summary on the development of digital projects:

1. Peace Plus – “Smart Towns and Villages”
2. Innovation Hub
3. Digital Transformation Flexible Fund

1. Peace Plus – “Smart Towns and Villages”

Summary

The East Border Region (EBR) organisation was made up of the following Council partners: Ards and North Down Borough Council; Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon Borough Council; Meath County Council; Monaghan County Council; Newry, Mourne and Down District Council; and Louth County Council. It was the body through which Council had typically accessed funding for cross-border or inter-regional projects.

Members would be aware from the report presented in June 2023 that two projects had been in development through EBR under the Peace Plus strategic priority 2.4 “Smart Towns and Villages”.

The funding call for this priority was yet to open but was expected to do so before Christmas 2023 and the funding mechanism could only be applied to towns and villages with a population of less than 18,000.

Two projects for this funding mechanism which EBR had been coordinating were:

1. Digi Hubs
2. C.H.A.R.I.O.T.

Project 1: Digi Hubs

The Digi Hubs project was expected to be made up of all six EBR partners in addition to:

1. SERC
2. East Border Region organisation
3. Dundalk Institute of Technology

This project was designed to bring in capital funding to retrofit an existing underutilised Council asset to accommodate digital transformation hardware and software.

The project took a holistic approach to digital transformation. It combined physical Mini Digital Hubs with a Mobile Digital Lab, to ensure accessibility for both urban and rural communities. Additionally, the emphasis on cross-border collaboration and the involvement of academia, industry, and government created a comprehensive and inclusive digital ecosystem. This project recognised that digital innovation should be inclusive, community-driven, and sustainable, laying the groundwork for a thriving digital future that benefited everyone in the region.

Key points for the project:

- Develop an area-based approach to smart projects.
- Use a social innovation-led approach to maximise the potential of ICT to deliver improved social and economic outcomes in target areas.
- Use technology to enable, accelerate or support strategic goals such as economic growth, wellbeing, sustainability, environmental solutions, social inclusion and cross-border relationships.

Further reports would be brought to Council as the project was developed and the benefits further evaluated by officers; however, at this stage, Council had been asked to consider potential eligible existing Council assets located in towns or villages with a population of less than 18,000 and to propose its preferred location for inclusion in the Digi Hub project proposal. The sites would need to house digital transformation hard-ware and soft-ware.

The detail of the project was still to be further worked up and much more discussion on the realisation of the concept was each area was required; but it was estimated that approximately €0.5 million would be available for digital transformation purposes per partner Council. As part of the funding, it was thought that budget could be made available for a resource to manage the hub area and support that it would offer.

Project 2: C.H.A.R.I.O.T. (Councils Harnessing Augmented Reality and Internet of Things)

This project was developed by officers in Council and presented to the EBR working groups. Despite strong feedback from SEUPB (Special EU Programmes Body) the EBR region had taken the decision not to proceed with this project due to lack of engagement by two of the cross-border partners and a decision from the third to leave the project. Without a cross-border element the project was not eligible for funding. Feedback had been requested from EBR as to why the cross-border parties had either not engaged or withdrawn; no feedback had been received to date.

2. Innovation Hub

Members would be aware that the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) provided the opportunity under the digital pillar for the development of an Innovation Hub. Previous reports had detailed the development of an Outline Business Case (OBC) for a hub specific to the Film/TV and Digital Technology Sectors.

The draft OBC for the Hollywood Innovation Hub had now been submitted to Invest Northern Ireland (INI) for review as the body appointed by the Department for the Economy (DfE) for feedback before being submitted for Board approval and casework. Once feedback was received, and any required amendments made, a report would be brought to Council for approval prior to full submission to the DfE.

2. Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF)**Background**

DTFF was a new £7.5m digital transformation initiative developed by Belfast Region City Deal partners and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and was supported by the wider city and growth deals across the region. It was a unique project as it was one of the first Cross-Growth deal projects to be developed. It was delivered by all local authorities across NI under the Full Fibre Northern Ireland Consortium (FFNI) and supported by Invest NI. The project was part funded by the NI Executive, UK Government, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and all local authorities in Northern Ireland.

Aims of DTFF

DTFF's key purpose was to support economic recovery and fast track the progress of the micro and small business community to respond to the opportunities of digital transformation using advanced and emerging technologies.

The programme sought to address the financial barrier that many small businesses faced when seeking to digitally transform, by establishing a capital grant fund that would support investment in equipment critical to their strategic digital transformation ambitions. This grant could assist those smaller organisations that did not have the necessary capital available to develop and trial new products and services using new and advanced technologies.

The DTFF capital investments were designed to enable business transformation and not improve the 'digitisation' of existing business models/operations. As such the DTFF would fund advanced digital technologies projects which included the following:

- Smart technologies/ smart environments and the Internet of Things (IoT)
- Process automation via robotics/cobotics
- Big-data and analytics
- Immersive Technologies (AR/VR/MR/Haptics)
- Artificial intelligence and machine learning; and
- Distributed ledger systems/ blockchain technologies

For full eligibility guidelines please refer to the DTFF website: www.dtff.co.uk

If successful, DTFF could offer a grant towards a Digital Transformation Project up to 70% with 30% match funding to come from the applicant. The 70% intervention rate was typically unheard of from government funded grants but was important to stimulate innovation amongst micro and small businesses.

The programme aligned with a number of other key projects in the Digital and Innovation Ecosystem including those offered through the City and Growth deal projects and was supported by a number of key stakeholders operating in the same area.

Key Issues

Newry, Mourne and Down Officials would centrally manage and administrate the DTFF grant with support from all Councils. Marketing and PR activities would be coordinated by NMDDC with local animation conducted by local Economic Development teams.

The first call for the project opened on 8 November and would close on 6 December. A series of pre-briefing sessions were being delivered across all council areas including online sessions for those businesses that could not make it in person.

Eligibility and Application guidance would be made available at those pre-briefing sessions and provided through the DTFF website along with the Expression of Interest: www.dtff.co.uk

The priority was to open the first funding call to allow businesses to apply, however a formal launch was being developed in parallel to promote the scheme officially.

At the time of writing the report the Council soft launch pre-briefing session of the project was booked for 21 November, 10:00am while the formal launch was planned to take place in Riddell Hall on 29 November 2023.

RECOMMENDED that Council:

1. Proposes its preferred location (which meets the criteria of a population of less than 18,000) for inclusion in the Digi Hub project proposal for the purpose of receiving capital investment for digital transformation purposes;
2. notes the progress of the development of the draft OBC for the AND Innovation Hub; and
3. notes the status of the DTFF and agrees to promote the programme to relevant businesses, where possible.

(Councillor Kennedy joined the meeting at this stage via Zoom – 7.04pm)

Alderman McDowell proposed that officers bring back a report looking at Comber and Donaghadee in the first instance and notes Items 2 and 3 of the recommendation.

Alderman McDowell commented that the issue for the Council was to identify its preferred location and as Holywood was being considered under the BRCD the next two main towns for consideration within the Borough were Comber or Donaghadee. He suggested that assessments needed to be carried out into the availability of options for business premises in both towns to enable the Council to make an informed decision on its preferred location for inclusion in the Digi Hub project proposal.

Councillor McCollum seconded the proposal adding that in the absence of sites being identified the Committee was not in a position to have a full and frank discussion on the matter.

At this stage Councillor MacArthur stated that she had a number of questions which she wished to ask. Firstly she noted the report was not clear in detailing what was actually being offered. She stated that from a Donaghadee perspective with Hope Street filming and a number of creative industries already established there, a Sub Group was very keen to establish a Creative Industry Hub within Donaghadee and a potential location for that was being considered. As such she was keen to advise that there would be an appetite for this in Donaghadee.

The Head of Economic Development confirmed that work was in progress, and she confirmed that Donaghadee would meet the criteria for a population under 18,000. She added that other locations throughout the Borough where the Council had Community Centres would also fit within that criterion. She added that if a private building was to be considered it was noted that would require an Expression of Interest exercise to be undertaken. The officer reiterated that the report before members was drafted to ensure the Council was in the running in respect of the project.

Councillor MacArthur indicated that she wished to make an amendment to Alderman McDowell's proposal that any report to come back was completed following consultation with local community groups. Alderman Adair indicated that he was content to second the amendment.

Councillor Rossiter asked why Holywood had not been included for consideration. In response the Head of Economic Development apologised to the member stating that given its population it should have been included.

Councillor Smart while having no issue with what had been proposed sought further clarification around which Groups the Council would be consulting with. He also asked what the variants were to what had been included within the report and the proposal which had been tabled. The Head of Economic Development indicated that she was not entirely sure what exactly would be required at this stage in respect of the proposal adding that she would have some concerns around it in respect of timing. Councillor Smart asked if it would be more appropriate for Community Groups to contact the Council to discuss it further and that would therefore eliminate any potential favouritism being shown to certain Groups.

Councillor Gilmour acknowledged that the matter was time sensitive with the Council required to indicate a clear expression of interest in the Digi Hub project. Referring to Councillor Smart's suggestion she commented that could be difficult as not all Community Groups may know themselves what any potential project may look like at this stage. As such, she would agree that Councillor MacArthur's suggestion would be the better option. She added that in terms of moving forward she would seek clarification that what was on the table would be a good indicator of the Council's interest at this stage.

In response the Head of Economic Development advised that she hoped to identify in principle and work through in due course. She added that further information would definitely need to be brought forward and included in any future report to establish how the project could actually work. Continuing, she confirmed that in general terms the Council had indicated that it would be interested in any project that could bring benefit to the Borough; however, she was unclear if all of the areas identified could be nominated. She reiterated that they did not have all of the details they would like to have at this stage.

By way of summing up, Alderman McDowell indicated that he was willing to accept Councillor MacArthur's amendment. He commented that he had suggested both Comber and Donaghadee as they were two of the larger settlements which could benefit from this project. He noted that Holywood was already being included for a Digi Hub as part of the Belfast Region City Deal. Continuing he questioned if Community Centres were to be used as part of this project would they then become limited to the services and availability they could offer. Alderman McDowell stated that without all of the relevant information it was difficult to make an informed decision on the matter. As such he suggested that consideration could be given to the establishment of a small Working Group comprised of a number of members from the Committee which could then report back to it in January 2024. Continuing he also welcomed Councillor MacArthur's comments about the work which had already been undertaken in the community in Donaghadee.

Alderman McDowell also took the opportunity to remind members that the proposed project had only been made possible as the result of development through EBR

under the Peace Plus strategic priority 2.4 “Smart Towns and Villages”. As part of that it was estimated that approximately €0.5 million would be available for digital transformation purposes per partner Council.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McDowell, seconded by Councillor McCollum, that:

1. **Officers bring back a report looking at Comber and Donaghadee in the first instance and furthermore that the community groups for both Comber and Donaghadee are consulted with regards to this.**
2. **Notes the progress of the draft OBC for the AND Innovation Hub; and**
3. **Notes the status of the DTFF and agrees to promote the programme to relevant businesses, where possible.**

5. TASTE AND - FOOD AND DRINK SECTOR DEVELOPMENT UPDATE 2023 (FILE TO/TD182) (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity stating that since 2022, the local Food and Drink sector had many successes at International, National and Regional Food and Drink Awards, as well as working with officers to develop and launch the Taste AND Food and Drink Destination Development Plan 2023-27. Unfortunately, there were still challenges within the sector. It had a marginally less tumultuous year than the three previous, although the primary challenges of staffing and energy costs persist and were likely to continue for many years ahead. The resultant inflationary pressures had now started to take their toll on both food production and hospitality with business closures from the start of the year. The Food and Drink network had lost approximately a dozen businesses since the last membership registration period in January 2023.

Staff and recruitment issues were having the most impact on restaurants with businesses not being able to operate a full team for shift schedules to pre-Brexit and pre-pandemic levels, this was a national picture. This had led to reduced operational hours and reported a rise in ‘burn out’ for overburdened staff. Training and therefore career progression was also seeing an impact.

The war in Ukraine and global insecurity had built upon the impact of Brexit in terms of food prices, the supply chain was more disjointed, and businesses advised they needed to source new suppliers of core ingredients and find new ways to reach customers via direct sales. The upside of this issue was that businesses had become more agile to meet customer needs and local producers were seeing more opportunities to find local customers. Businesses were increasingly resilient and much more diverse in terms of services and products. More of what was made locally was staying local and those who lead newly formed businesses were more ambitious and skilled to take on the tough environment.

Taste AND Food and Drink Achievements 2023

The following highlights the activity and achievements year to date.

1. Taste AND Food and Drink Destination Development Plan 2023-27

The second Food and Drink Plan for the Borough was developed and launched in October 2023. The four-year plan contained 12 actions, with a scheduled mid-term review in 2025.

2. Training Programme

There was a significant increase of in-person training support this year (62 attendees), through collaboration with NI Food and Invest NI, which included:

- Trends and Development in Food and Drink (February)
- Digital Marketing Masterclass (March)
- Food Photography Masterclass (March)
- Recruitment & Retention in Hospitality (April)
- Meet the buyers Masterclass (May)
- SALSA (safe and local supplier) Accreditation (on-going)

3. Trade Shows

In 2023, there had been a total of 26 partially or fully subsidised spaces for industry at trade shows and events outside the Borough, which were shared among 19 producers.

- May: Balmoral Show (8 businesses)
- June: Love Your Food Show, Belfast (4 businesses)
- June: Garden Show Ireland, Antrim (4 businesses)
- August: Honey Fair, Hillsborough (4 businesses)
- September: Dingle Food Fest/Eat Ireland in a Day Showcase (5 businesses)
- October: Distilleries Showcase Belfast (1 business)

At the Eat Ireland in a Day Showcase event at the Irish Food Awards, Bow Bells, Capparelli Cooks, Copeland Distillery, Clandeboye Estate Yoghurt and Morning Glory Granola took five of the six available spaces allocated to Ulster-based producers. This was Taste AND's first formal showcase of producers outside Northern Ireland with substantial coverage via Bank of Ireland's sponsored Bord Bia promotion of the events.

The first trade show of 2024 would take place in Spring at the Love Your Food Show in Belfast, with nine businesses participating. Unfortunately, due to rising costs for attendance at those shows, it was likely there would be a reduction in the number of businesses that could be supported by Council.

4. Taste Summer in Ards and North Down

The Comber Earlies Food Festival event included a new feature called 'Taste AND Meet the Maker'. This was an opportunity for 12 Taste AND members to be interviewed by festival ambassador Lotte Duncan and for the audience to sample their produce. Lotte Duncan then featured the producers within her "Truly Scrumptious Podcast series". The feature was considered a success by participants and audiences and would return in 2024.

The shoulder activity featured a Comber Earlies showcase dinner and a garden market at No 14 The Georgian House, as well as the return of three activities at McBrides on the Square including The Big Food (Charity) Quiz, Indie Fude's Beer and Raclette Night, and the Sunday Comber Earlies Lunch.

5. Taste Autumn in Ards and North Down

Shoulder events included Wild Dining at Orlock with Ballyboley Dexters and Lightfoot Kitchen, Chilli 6 at Harbour & Co, The Seafood Showcase Dinner at Pier 36 and culminating with the Chilli Festival at Bangor Castle Walled Garden, in partnership with the Council's Parks Service. Approximately 4,000 attended over the two days.

Chilli Festival 2023 featured eight local producers and three local international-themed restaurants featuring on the demo kitchen hosted by SERC. This collaborative event had helped enforce a key food strength of the Borough.

Award Winners 2023

The 2023 Food Awards season had now drawn to a close and had been the most successful year ever for both for Taste AND producers and restaurants. Throughout the year the Food and Drink Officer had continued to drive local businesses to enter local, national, and international awards through providing information and technical advice for entry.

The 'gold standard' food and drink awards in produce are the UK's "Great Taste Awards", announced in August and Ireland's "Blas na hEireann Awards", announced in September. For the alcoholic drinks producers, the gold standard class of awards are the "International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC)", the "World Gin Awards" and the "World Whiskey Awards". Collectively, those were considered the "Food and Drink Oscars".

Other notable awards for food were the "Irish Quality Food Awards" and the "British Quality Food Awards", which were retail market focussed, as well as the "Free From Awards*", "UK Butchery Awards", and the "UK Food Manufacturing Excellence Awards". Local food and drink businesses awards of note were the "Farming Life Awards" and the "Belfast Telegraph Business Awards".

For restaurants, the most prestigious and respected awards were Michelin Guide/Bib Gourmand, with AND now having had four of those.

See Appendix for the list of Awards.

Looking forward to 2024

Taste Ards and North Down Local Food Heroes Awards

To highlight the achievements of local businesses the 'Local Food Heroes', an Honours Reception with the Mayor takes place each Spring. This year's event would be held on 6 March at Bangor Castle to celebrate the success of producers and restaurants. It would also include the 3rd Lady Dufferin Award for producer of the year and an inaugural 'Local Food and Drink Champion' awarded to the business that gave the most support to local produce selected by producer members.

Food and Drink Industry Week

To reflect the needs of the industry a Taste AND Food and Drink Industry Week would be delivered in Spring. This would include careers support, training, buyer to buyer activity and the Local Food Heroes Awards.

Food and Drink Network Changes

The Food and Drink Network Committee (Committee members nominated by the network member representatives of the industry sectors) had voted to move to a more formalised and structured approach to membership for 2024. Prospective members would now be required to apply, with an application assessed by a panel against an agreed set of criteria based on use of local ingredients or produce, contribution to network development, and local food festivals and activities. Members had long considered that a move towards a 'local standard' would be required and now felt that the publication of the new Food and Drink Destination Development Plan enabled that to happen.

The Committee had now formalised three types of membership (full, associate and provisional), new enhanced member terms and conditions, a member code of conduct, suspension policy, along with the creation of membership and event fees to improve the long-term operational development of Taste AND. Network Committee accepted this may lead to a decline in membership numbers, perhaps as much as half, but considers that was a necessity to ensure Taste AND could move forward with an active body of invested and responsible members. This model was one that had been adopted following investigations and discussions with a number of similar Networks, which had been long established in ROI. It would be kept under review by officers.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

The proposer, Alderman Adair, commended officers on the report commenting that the Borough was undoubtedly the home of good food and networks such as this were extremely useful to promote the Borough further as a food destination. He referred to the many successful food and drink inspired events which had taken place throughout the year, including Portavogie Tide & Turf Event and the Comber

Earlies Festival, both of which had showcased the finest produce from a wide variety of local producers throughout the Borough.

Echoing those comments, the seconder Councillor Edmund agreed that the Borough offered a fantastic variety of local produce and any opportunity to promote that further was to be welcomed.

Councillor McCollum noted the efforts made to tighten the membership of the Food and Drink Network Committee and this she felt would assist to improve the overall offering quality.

Councillor Smart took the opportunity to commend all of those involved and welcomed the continued support. He noted the ongoing issues with staff and recruitment and welcomed that the Labour Market Partnership was providing assistance with that. He added that as a Newtownards councillor he would be delighted to welcome a Taste Ards and North Down event to Newtownards.

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

6. DRAFT TOURISM STRATEGY FOR NI: 10 YEAR PLAN - CONSULTATION RESPONSE (FILE TO/TD187) (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity stating that the consultation for the draft Tourism Strategy for NI 10 Year Plan opened on 6 November and closed at 17:00 12 January 2024. The Strategy was available on the link below, along with a consultation questionnaire.

[Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland: 10 Year Plan | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/draft-tourism-strategy-for-northern-ireland-10-year-plan)

The draft Plan set out the Department for the Economy's vision and mission for the growth of the tourism sector in Northern Ireland over the next decade. It stated it would help position the region internationally as an attractive place to visit, making visitors feel welcome whilst at the same time helping to make the lives better of all citizens. It further stated that it would seek to deliver on the objectives of the 10X Economic Vision by generating economic growth that was sustainable, inclusive and innovative.

The Department wanted all interested parties to consider the draft proposals for growth in the tourism sector. Tourism NI would also be consulting with the tourism industry via a parallel process of industry engagement. A session for Council officers was due to take place on 27 November 2023.

Members were encouraged to view the full draft Strategy online, and to encourage local tourism businesses to respond directly prior to the consultation deadline. The consultation exercise was being promoted locally via the tourism industry ezine.

Summary of draft Tourism Strategy for NI: 10 Year Plan

Vision

Establish NI as a year-round world class destination which was renowned for its authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture and which benefited communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core.

Mission

Support the Tourism sector in building a more innovative sustainable and inclusive tourism industry for all the people and places in NI which enriched its people, its economy and its guests.

Strategic Aim

To increase the value of tourism to the NI economy by 50-75% compared to 2019 (last full year of statistics available) *note the 50-75% increase in the value of tourism expressed in the Aim was based on Compound Annual Growth of 4-6%.

Themes

It was designed to be a roadmap, premised on five themes, which seek to strive for a new and ambitious growth trajectory that was **Innovative, Inclusive, Sustainable, Attractive and Collaborative** over the next decade. Those were the core of the Strategy, with accompanying objectives, and were designed to support continued growth in tourism in NI to appeal to both overseas and domestic visitors, and also contributed a better quality of life for the people of who lived here, enriching communities and spreading the economic and social benefits of tourism throughout the region.

Framework

The Strategy provided a framework for delivery bodies such as Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to work with other public authorities and the tourism industry to shape and develop local tourism strategies and action plans which would support the industry to prepare for future success.

ANDBC Response to Consultation

An online response could be submitted (or emailed directly) to the Department. A suggested Council response was attached as Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the ANDBC Response to Questionnaire - Tourism Strategy: 10 Year Plan Consultation and returns it to the Department for the Economy by 12 January 2024.

Councillor MacArthur proposed, seconded by Alderman Adair, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor MacArthur, expressed her thanks to officers for the report as tabled noting that 8% of those in the Borough were employed within the tourism sector. As such she suggested that officers were asked to push Tourism NI further

on this through a more robust consultation response. Referring to the 'Embrace a Giant Spirit' promotion, Councillor MacArthur asked what work was involved in supporting this.

In response, the Head of Tourism commented that the reference to jobs was based upon 2019 data and as such she agreed that it would be useful to have more up to date information to form a more accurate comparison. Continuing, she informed members that the document had been published by the Department for the Economy who then in turn had engaged with Tourism NI. It was noted the Council did engage with its colleagues in Tourism NI on a regular basis and the collaborative approach which had been adopted over the past few years had proven to be successful.

In respect of a firmer response, the officer explained that it was felt that had already been addressed within the dispersal piece which highlighted that dispersal visitors did need to take place. She added that if members so wished she could highlight that further. Finally in respect of the 'Embrace a Giant Spirit' promotion, the Head of Tourism expressed the view that it had not warranted the amount of recognition which had been anticipated given the amount of investment and resources which had gone into it. She indicated that the Council had proactively tried to encourage local businesses to become involved with this and look at innovative ways to bring products back to the ethos behind the brand that being authenticity and uniqueness.

Councillor MacArthur acknowledged the content of the dispersal message but remained of the opinion that the Council's response needed to be stronger in its message.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman Adair concurred with the comments raised by the proposer and particularly those in relation to the numbers employed in the Tourism Sector. Alderman Adair acknowledged the work which had already been undertaken by officers to promote tourism throughout the Borough and was of the belief that Tourism NI needed to place more importance upon the East coast of the Ards and North Down Borough. This he stated was particularly important given its close proximity to Belfast and he expressed the view that currently too much emphasis was placed upon the promotion of the North Coast of Northern Ireland.

Concurring with his colleagues Councillor Edmund named numerous tourist attractions dotted throughout the Borough all of which were in close proximity to Belfast and cruise ship visitors to Northern Ireland's shores. As such he agreed that Tourism NI needed to sit up and place much more emphasis upon the promotion of the Borough of Ards and North Down and all that it had to offer.

At this stage Councillor McCollum asked if the Draft Strategy was perhaps long on words but short on action and, as such, she sought clarification on whether or not there was a budget attached to it.

In response the Head of Tourism indicated that those were two areas which had been flagged and advised that currently there was no action plan and no indication of what any potential budget may be. As such, she agreed that it was an aspirational document even though its content all sat in line with the Strategy there still remained

many unanswered questions. The Head of Tourism indicated that if members so wished she could include a more strongly worded response, noting that there was a specific word count restriction set on that response.

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

7. Q2 TOURISM SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 **(FILE TO/MAR4/160127)** (Appendix IV)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every four years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

The Service Plans would be reported to relevant Committees on a half-yearly basis as undernoted, with the report for Quarter 2 included at end of report:

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

Key points to note:

- Digital communications channels were critical to promoting the Borough as an appealing visitor destination by growing audience reach.
- Return to higher level of 'out of borough' visitors, especially out of NI post-Covid at events had not returned to pre-Covid levels.
- Change of the location for Comber Earlies Food Festival was deemed a great success by participants and attendees.

Key achievements:

- Development and launch of the TASTE AND Food and Drink Destination Development Plan 2023-27
- Delivery of the AND Experience 2023 programme against performance targets.

- Social media audience continued to grow at a very high rate, 17% above target, driven by highly engaging content and strong imagery of the Borough.
- Waste service had reported 0% contamination in waste collected at Tourism events year to date.

Emerging issues:

- Ongoing challenges in recruitment for seasonal staff on limited hours contracts. Potential to impact progression of outreach visitor servicing if recruitment not successful pre-season 2024.
- Continuing extremes of weather and the potential impact on event delivery.
- Desire to increase recycling stations at events, subject to budget.

Action to be taken:

- Investigate further weather mitigating events equipment.
- Train additional casuals to support recycling measures at events.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

Referring to the emerging issues listed in the report, the proposer Councillor MacArthur expressed her thanks to the team and sought clarification on those.

In response the Head of Tourism, referring to the issue around seasonal staff, reported that this year the team had been very successful in securing a number of excellent staff for the season. Going forwards she indicated that officers would be considering other methods of seeking seasonal opportunities. Continuing she advised that in respect of the more extreme weather conditions being experienced each year, the team would continue to consider what alternatives could be put into place. It was noted that alternatives to gazebos had proven successful during this season with much positive feedback received.

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

8. Q2 REGENERATION SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24 (FILE 160127) (Appendix V)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

The report for the period April 2023 to September 2023 was attached.

Key points to note:

- Within the Rural Development Section, the Temporary Rural Development Manager and an Assistant Regeneration Officer both secured new permanent manager posts within the Council. A temporary Manager had now been appointed and took up post in September.

Key achievements:

- Small Settlements projects were progressing well, and community engagement was supportive of the proposals.
- Portaferry Public realm works had commenced.
- The review of the City/town Masterplans had been completed.
- Work had commenced on developing regeneration projects for future funding.

Emerging issues:

- It was becoming evident that there was limited access for Peace Plus funding for regeneration projects. However, the Council would continue to work with EBR to try and get projects included in the programme.
- It was becoming evident that funding for regeneration projects from central government in the next financial year would be very limited.

Action to be taken:

- Continue to work with government departments to try and secure funding.
- Work closely with EBR over the development of future projects.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

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

The proposer, Alderman Adair commended the Regeneration team on its work and welcomed the commencement of the Portaferry Public realm works. Having visited Portaferry in recent days he had been informed of two new businesses planning to open in the town and as such he also took the opportunity to commend the work of the Portaferry Town Steering Group. Continuing, he indicated that he had a question in relation to the Small Settlements funding and sought an update on two projects, one at School Lane, Ballywalter, and the other at Kircubbin Promenade.

In response, the Head of Regeneration advised that the project at School Lane, Ballywalter, was currently with the Education Authority's legal team, while the project at Kircubbin Promenade was currently with the Planning Service for consideration.

At this stage Councillor McCollum sought clarification on the two red flags on the performance indicators within the report.

The Head of Regeneration commented initially on the second one which considered attendance, explaining that as the team of eight/ten people had one member of staff off on long term sick that had affected the attendance figures. In respect of the budget, the Head of Regeneration stated that this was something which was flagged every month. He stated that for every project undertaken it was impossible to get the associated invoices in on time to fit the accounting profile. The figures before members were based upon month eight and the invoices for those projects may not be received until a couple of months later. He added that while it had been flagged in red, for him it was not a big issue as it was more of an accounting profiling matter.

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

9. VILLAGE ENTRANCE SIGNAGE SCHEME (FILE RDP189)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place stating that as members would be aware, it was agreed in April 2022 that an Entrance Signage Scheme would be implemented under the Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme. The project included the production and installation of village entrance signs in the rural villages and settlements across the Borough to replace the existing signage.

This scheme was now complete, with a total of 40 new entrance signs installed.

Outstanding Issues

Cloughey

The new village entrance sign located at the junction of Ardminnan Road and Manse Road (private land) was installed as per the planning approval and the previous sign location, however, the landowner made a complaint regarding its position. Previously, a legacy Ards Borough Council sign had been in situ in the same location for many years, but it was much smaller in size. The landowner was not content with

the larger signage, and as a result officers instructed the contractor to remove the sign and deliver to the North Road depot.

Officers had since attempted to locate the sign; however, this could not be found. The contractors advised that the sign was delivered on the 10 November 2022, however, officers at the depot confirmed they had no knowledge of this delivery.

It was proposed to purchase a new sign and install it at a new location. The site identified was Portaferry Road A2 within close proximity to the 30mph sign, subject to land ownership and planning consent.

The following costs would be required:

- Planning Fee - £217
- Production and Installation - £1,125.

Kircubbin

An audit of the former signage was conducted prior to the commencement of the entrance signage scheme. The audit identified one sign for replacement in Kircubbin (south end of the village) which was replaced, however, it was brought to the attention of Council officers that a second sign located at the entrance travelling from Greyabbey was overlooked (this sign had been damaged by a vehicle and removed). Requests had been received to have this additional sign produced and installed to complete the entrance signage project within Kircubbin.

It was proposed to install this sign in the same location, or within close proximity subject to landowner and planning consent.

The following costs would be required:

- Planning Fee - £217
- Production & Installation - £1,125.

It should be noted that an underspend of £885 in the Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme had been identified and the Department for Communities had agreed reallocated of the budget to purchase the overlooked entrance sign.

Cottown

Shortly after the installation of the new entrance sign at Cottown (on the Bangor side of the village) complaints were received from residents of two properties within close proximity.

One individual made contact to advise that they had removed the sign as they believed it was blocking their view of oncoming traffic. As a result, damage to the sign was incurred, this was reported to the PSNI.

Whilst the individual should have contacted the Council before removing and damaging the sign his primary concern was safety and his belief was that this was

the necessary action to avoid potential road safety issues. This belief was shared by DfI Roads Risk Management, although the location received planning approval.

The costs to repair the sign and reinstall would be £1,172 (including planning fee).

It was proposed that this sign remained in storage until such time that a location could be agreed with DfI Roads and the residents.

Rural Development Programme 'Welcome to Portaferry' Signage

As members may be aware, a number of years ago under the Rural Development Programme, Portaferry Community Collective Ltd received funding for the purchase of 'Welcome to Portaferry' signs. At that time, one of the signs was placed behind the wall at the Football Field on Coach Road. This location was chosen because of the short turnaround time to have the signage installed (funding requirements). The preferred location was the corner behind the wall at Demesne View/Coach Road. It was agreed that after the sign was erected the Council would take ownership and maintenance of the sign.

It was always the intention to move the sign to the preferred location. Portaferry Community Collective Ltd had now obtained planning consent and DfI approval to move the sign to the preferred location and would cover all associated costs.

Portaferry Community Collective Ltd had requested the Council agreed to this as the owner of the sign.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees to:

1. Cloughey Entrance Signage – proceed to purchase a new sign, obtain planning permission for an alternative site, and install the sign. Costs can be met from existing service budgets.
2. Kircubbin Village Entrance Signage – proceed to purchase a sign, obtain planning permission, and install a sign within close proximity of the original sign. Costs to be met from the underspend identified under the Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme and existing service budget.
3. Portaferry Signage (under the Rural Development Programme) – continue the ownership and maintenance of the sign once relocated with the caveat that the Council will not be responsible for purchasing a new sign if the existing one is damaged during the replacement process.

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

The proposer, Councillor Smart welcomed the report and the progress, which was being made, particularly as he was aware those issues had remained unresolved for quite some time.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman Adair expressed his delight on reading the report and paid tribute to the officers involved for their work with this. He added that the signs were beautiful, and he also took the opportunity to thank the Ards Peninsula Village Partnership for its assistance with this.

Agreeing that the signs did look fantastic, Councillor McLaren expressed some concern that the sign for Cloughey had gone missing and as such she asked if officers had done all they could to try to locate the sign. She also asked if there was any indication of any suspicious, inappropriate theft of the sign.

In response the Head of Regeneration expressed his frustration with the situation particularly as the sign was delivered to the large compound at the North Road, Newtownards, where everyone had searched for it unsuccessfully. He added that he did not believe that it had been stolen and as such the report before members was recommending the next steps to be taken.

Councillor Rossiter asked if Crawfordsburn had been included in the Scheme and the Head of Regeneration confirmed that it had been. As such Councillor Rossiter asked for the signs at Crawfordsburn to have some maintenance carried out following a number of complaints from residents advising that they had become overgrown.

Referring to the issue of where to locate the sign at Cottown, Councillor MacArthur sought clarification if any indication had been given from DfI on a more suitable location for it. She added that she had been working with residents in respect of a number of road safety issues in the area given the number of serious accidents which had occurred there.

In response, the Head of Regeneration indicated that officers were working with DfI, and he reminded members that the sign had previously successfully received planning permission based on no objections to its location by DfI Roads. He added that it was necessary to remember that another section within DfI had then raised an issue with it and as such it was a case of trying to ensure that all the appropriate sections and departments were on board before proceeding any further with the reinstatement of the sign.

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

10. PROJECT 24 EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST FOR PODS AND HUB (FILE 141973)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place stating that Project 24 was a temporary revitalisation project located on Queen's Parade, Bangor funded by the Department for Communities (DfC) and Council. It utilised 12 bespoke artist pods and an event space called 'The Hub'.

The project ran successfully for ten years, opening in April 2013 and closing in March 2023. The site was cleared in May 2023, with control of the site being handed back to DfC in June 2023.

A condition of the Contract for Funding for the project was to ensure the infrastructure within Project 24 was reclaimable and where possible to ensure its future use for regeneration and/or economic benefit. The infrastructure that was deemed reclaimable consists of 12 shipping containers (the pods) and one event space structure (the hub).

Expression of Interest

The Council previously agreed to issue an Expression of Interest to external bodies for the reuse of the pods and hub. The Expression of Interest process opened on Thursday 12 October 2023, closing at 12 noon on Thursday 9 November 2023. The Expression of Interest was advertised in local press (Spectator and Chronicle newspapers) and on the Council's social media platforms.

Interested parties were asked to submit an Expression of Interest which was assessed on the following criteria using a pass/fail scoring system:

- a) The proposed project demonstrated a regeneration and/or economic benefit (e.g. enhance footfall, support evening economy, support employment etc)
- b) The proposed project was located within the Ards and North Down Borough.
- c) The applicant had sufficient funds or identified a funding stream to cover all costs of transportation, statutory approvals and/or installation.
- d) The applicant would provide the Council with all statutory approvals prior to the pods being made available.

A total number of 30 applications were received, one of which was from an internal department and was excluded.

Applicants were permitted to apply for a maximum of two pods per Expression of Interest. A total of 47 pods were applied for and five requests for the Hub.

An initial assessment of the Expression of Interest forms was conducted by officers from the Regeneration and Community Development Units. Officers were unable to recommend an allocation as the scheme was oversubscribed with applications that met the pass/fail criteria.

It was now proposed to invite all applicants who submitted an Expression of Interest to a second stage assessment.

The second stage would be assessed using the following criteria:

- a) Footfall - Applicants would be required to detail the level of footfall their proposal aims to attract and how they propose to do this (this should be in addition to existing footfall).

- b) Support Employment - Applicants would be required to detail how the proposal should support employment and how they proposed to do this (this related to new job creation)
- c) Regeneration Benefits – Applicants would be required to detail the wider regeneration benefits of the proposal. How would the proposal encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the area*
*Area – Ards and North Down

Applicants would also be required to provide the following evidence:

-Proof of Statutory Consents

Applicants would be required to contact statutory agencies to enquire as to what statutory consents were required. A copy of the correspondence must be provided. Where consents were required, applicants must confirm they would obtain should their applicant be successful.

Infrastructure would only be released when all statutory consents were obtained, and evidence was provided.

Note – the proof of statutory consents would not be scored as this was included in the first stage.

Marking System

Responses would be awarded a mark out of 5 for each criterion.

Excellent response that meets the requirement. Indicates an excellent response with detailed supporting evidence and no weaknesses.	5
A good response that meets the requirement with good supporting evidence. Demonstrates good understanding of the requirement.	4
Meets requirement. The response generally meets the requirement but lacks sufficient detail to warrant a higher mark.	3
A response with reservations. Lacks convincing detail to demonstrate that the proposed response will meet the requirements.	2
An unacceptable response with serious reservations. Very limited detail to demonstrate that the proposed response will meet the requirement.	1
Failed to address the question.	0

It was proposed applicants would be issued a letter of invite to the second stage assessment in early January 2024, with three weeks to respond.

An assessment panel would assess and score the second stage responses by the end of January.

If it was agreed to proceed with this proposal, a report would be brought back to Council detailing the outcome of the second stage assessment and a recommendation for allocation of the 12 shipping containers and the Hub based on the final total scores awarded to each applicant.

RECOMMENDED that Council agrees the above proposal to invite applicants to a second stage assessment.

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

Welcoming the report, the proposer Councillor McCollum noted the work which had been undertaken to date and the enthusiastic responses received. She agreed that the second stage assessment needed to be robust and asked if consideration had been given to scoring in respect of any potential tie situation.

The Head of Regeneration agreed that situation could indeed arise; however, he reminded members that any project which demonstrated a regeneration and/or economic benefit would be more heavily weighted as part of the marking system. He added that he believed there was enough scope within the process to mark all applications fairly.

Councillor McCollum commented that her thoughts would be that any process such as this would need to bear up to any scrutiny after the process had been completed. As such, she suggested this was an opportunity for officers to look at this proactively and ensure all the appropriate boxes were ticked to reassure the public that the process had been carried out openly, transparently and robustly. In response the Head of Regeneration commented that because of what his team did it was funded externally it was audited all the time and as such this process would be similarly assessed. He acknowledged that there would be a number of applicants which would be disappointed and as such it was his wish to ensure the process was carried out as fairly as possible.

Councillor McLaren expressed some concern with the criteria for the second stage of the application process. She acknowledged the incredible work carried out by community volunteers who worked tirelessly throughout their own communities and as such she was worried that the criteria, particularly Item b) which could exclude community groups from being able to apply for the pods. She acknowledged the importance placed upon regeneration; however, she greatly believed in investment in community and resident groups who gave their own time in order to improve those areas which they lived in. As such she felt the Council could potentially be doing them a disservice and she sought clarification from officers about what percentage would be removed from existing applications as that would that reflect her concerns for the community applications.

The Head of Regeneration advised that as he had not been involved with the first assessment round, he would not be aware of what percentage was community related. He reminded members that the pods had originally been provided to Project 24 as a regeneration initiative to provide people with the opportunity to set up small

businesses and therefore it had been suggested that going forwards the pods should continue to be used in the same vein. He acknowledged the community benefit and community use, but questioned what they would become, be it either additional stores or a facility to hold items in. He added that this Committee and the Council could dictate what direction they wanted for the pods; however, officers believed they should still be used for the purpose of regeneration.

Appreciating the officer's comments, Councillor McLaren acknowledged there were very few community groups which could invest in employing someone and as such that was where her concerns lay. Continuing she stated that she believed residents groups did an amazing job for their communities and as such it was just a concern which she had.

Councillor Hollywood noted that an internal department had been excluded from the process and he sought further clarification on that. The Head of Regeneration advised that the Council had previously agreed the scheme should be external to the Council and as such the internal project was excluded and taken out of the process.

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

11. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION – SAFETY CONCERNS AT KIRCUBBIN HARBOUR (FILE 141973) (Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place stating that at the meeting of the Place and Prosperity Committee held on 7 September 2023 the response from the from the Historic Environment Division (HED), which was issued on behalf of the Departments for Communities and Infrastructure, concerning the above was discussed.

It was agreed to defer consideration of the response to allow the Kircubbin Harbour Working Group to consider this. Alderman Adair undertook to contact the Group to seek their views. This was subsequently agreed by the Council.

Alderman Adair confirmed he had contacted the Group but had been unable to secure a response.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the response from the HED.

Alderman Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that Council deferred a decision on the Kircubbin Harbour report to February 2024.

The proposer Alderman Adair advised that at the last meeting of the Kircubbin Harbour Working Group some members had been unavailable to attend and as such he felt it was only right to give them their place to have a say on this matter at the next available opportunity.

The seconder Councillor Edmund concurred with his colleague's comments.

The Head of Regeneration indicated that it was a matter for members; however, he advised that at a meeting of the Working Group held earlier that week, the correspondence had been discussed and consideration was being given to how best the Group could purchase the Harbour to carry out the necessary works. As such he believed that members of the Working Group were fully aware of the current situation.

In summing up the proposer Alderman Adair acknowledged the work carried out to date and expressed his thanks to all involved for that. He stated that he had been asked to have the matter deferred and as such he was just representing the views which he had been given.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Adair, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that Council defer a decision on the Kircubbin Harbour report to February 2024.

12. Q2 CAPITAL PROJECTS PERFORMANCE REPORT (FILE 160127) (Appendix VII)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every four years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 2 (H1)	April – September	December
Q4 (H2)	October – March	March

The report for April to September 2023 was attached.

Key points to note:

- There continued to be good investment in staff briefings with regular fortnightly team meetings, alternating between Teams and in person.
- Professional development was also continuing as the unit continued to deliver a capital portfolio in excess of £170m over the next 10 years.
- There continued to be a good level of consultation with other Councils and Government departments through BRCD, Community Estates, the Greenways projects, Councils Estates Forum, and individual meetings.

Key achievements:

- Continued to share capital knowledge and allow a holistic approach to all large, small and maintenance capital projects undertaken by a wide range of directorates through CPAG.
- Working with CPD to produce tender documents which take account of social value on all funded project as council policy developed.
- Contractor on site beginning Portaferry Public Reams Works.

Emerging issues:

- Council resources to deliver ambitious capital delivery.
- High construction inflation.

Action to be taken:

- Continue to review capital cost estimates.
- Assist in the Estate Strategy development.
- Assist in capital transformation projects.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

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

13. LEVELLING UP FUND ROUND 3 (FILE RDP208)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place stating that on 20 November 2023 the UK Government announced the availability of £1 billion for Round 3 of the government's Levelling Up Fund. The official announcement could be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-billion-boost-for-levelling-up-government-backs-55-transformational-local-projects-across-the-uk>

Members should note that funding did not include any projects in Northern Ireland with the Government advising that '*In Northern Ireland, given the current absence of a working Executive and Assembly, the Government is not proceeding with this round of the Levelling Up Fund at this time. We will continue to work closely with projects and places in Northern Ireland that were awarded a total of £120 million in the first two rounds of the Fund.*

This new funding was allocated by a reassessment of the projects which were unsuccessful in Round 2 and would be awarded to 55 transformational projects in communities across the UK excluding NI.

Officers had been in contact with the LUF team to enquire if timing, budget, theme, and approach/process for Northern Ireland was known. DLUHC had confirmed:

'The UK Government will work with NI Executive once power sharing is restored to determine how to best support communities across Northern Ireland. Our priority remains seeing the restoration and return of a locally elected and accountable Executive, because that is what the people of Northern Ireland need and deserve.'

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

Councillor Rossiter proposed, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the Committee asks the Chief Executive to write to the NI Secretary of State to ask for his intervention to ensure that Round 3 of Levelling Up is opened up to NI and that the Council notes the Levelling Up Fund does not require the restoration of the Assembly, as it is a direct payment from Westminster.

The proposer, Councillor Rossiter suggested that the Chief Executive be asked to pursue this matter further in order to secure much needed funds and ensure consistency from Westminster.

Expressing his support the seconder, Councillor Smart agreed this course of action was necessary to ensure everything possible was done to secure future investment in Northern Ireland. He added that it remained a tragedy that Northern Ireland was still without a functioning Assembly. Continuing, he noted the interest there was in Newtownards for consideration of Levelling Up Funding and he asked what the Council's role would be in that.

In response, the Head of Tourism advised that as the result of the first round of Levelling Up Funding Greenway projects at Comber, Newtownards, Conlig and Bangor had commenced. She added that, as yet no criteria had been set in respect of Round three of the funding; however, officers would endeavour to draft up new Business Cases for projects for inclusion as part of the rates setting process.

Alderman Adair thanked Councillor Rossiter for his proposal, adding that it was an outrage that Northern Ireland had been excluded from this funding. He added that Northern Ireland should be treated the same as the rest of the UK and the lack of funding was undoubtedly being driven by those at Westminster.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Rossiter, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the Committee asks the Chief Executive to write to the NI Secretary of State to ask for his intervention to ensure that Round 3 of Levelling Up is opened up to NI and that the Council notes the Levelling Up Fund does not require the restoration of the Assembly, as it is a direct payment from Westminster.

14. NOTICES OF MOTION REFERRED TO COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL(FILE)

The Vice Chairman advised that no Notices of Motion had been referred to the Committee by Council.

NOTED.

15. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

The Vice Chairman advised that there were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

(Alderman Adair left the meeting at this stage – 8.19pm)

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

16. PICKIE Q2 2023-2-24 REPORT (FILE 171006)

*****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)

This report details the performance of Pickie Fun Park over the second quarter of the 2023/2024 financial year, as operated by Pickie Ltd on behalf of the Council, in respect of visitor numbers and financials. Members were asked to note that whilst profits were down against same quarter last year, the operator continued to promote activities via social media. Existing rides are maintained and all main attractions now refurbished and all fully operational.

17. EXPLORIS Q2 2023-24 REPORT (FILE DEV3C)

*****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)

This report to Members sets out the performance of AEL, operator of Exploris on behalf of the Council, for Quarter 2 of the current financial year. Members' attention was drawn to how Exploris had recovered well due to the efforts of the AEL team, exceeding its expectations in Quarter 2, with the official opening of the new ocean tank in August coinciding with its 7th anniversary since reopening in 2016. Since relaunch visitor numbers have increased, and due to wet weather in July, visitors were up significantly compared to previous quarter.

This report contains commercially sensitive information on the operation of Exploris by a private operator (AEL) under an operating agreement with Council.

18. BANGOR MARINA Q2 2023-24 REPORT INCLUDING BANGOR MARINA QUARTERLY REPORT JULY – SEPTEMBER 2023 (FILE 141671) (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)

Report from the Director of Prosperity attaching Bangor Marina Q2 23-24 report. The covering report detailed that Members would be aware that Boatfolk operated Bangor Marina on behalf of Council. As part of the agreement, Boatfolk provided a quarterly report, which was presented to Committee as received, covering the entire range of activities undertaken in the Marina, and commercial information.

19. KINNEGAR UPDATE REPORT (FILE RDP 37)

*****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)

This report gives an update on the timeline for the completion of the Strategic Outline Case (SOC).

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.24pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Corporate Services Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Tuesday 12 December 2023 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Moore

Aldermen: Graham (7.04 pm) Mcllveen
McAlpine Smith

Councillors: Chambers Irwin
Cochrane (zoom) Kennedy (7.02 pm)
Gilmour (zoom) MacArthur
Irvine, S McRandal
Irvine, W

Officers: Director of Corporate Services (M Steele), Head of Administration (A Curtis) and Democratic Services Officer (J Glasgow)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend were received from Alderman Brooks and Councillor McCracken.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest notified.

3. PERFORMANCE REPORTS

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the respective Directors attaching corresponding appendix. The report detailed that Members would be aware that Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil this requirement Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

(a) Community Planning
(Appendix I)

Key points to note:

- Significant work undertaken on a whole systems approach to obesity. A leadership group was established and a meeting of the workstream group used to assess data and make a recommendation on the focus of this project.
- Continued involvement in the regional group reviewing the implementation of the test Integrated Care Partnership within the Southern Trust area.
- Special meeting of the Strategic Community Planning Partnership convened to discuss the Newtownards feud and wider implication.
- Dementia Friendly Communities Partnership, led by SEHSCT, established to develop a regional (and then local) action plan. ANDBC’s Community Planning Service had developed the engagement methodology using the Big Game to gather feedback from people living with dementia.

Key achievements:

- Dashboards (stats) had been established for absenteeism figures as well as customer complaints.
- Work had been ongoing to collect data that could be used to measure Council’s Carbon Footprint (Scope 1 emissions).
- Updates had been undertaken on the Labour Market Partnership Strategic Assessment and the Big Plans whole population indicators.
- Research had been gathered from the Well Fed Social Supermarket, Community Advice Ards and North Down and the two Trussell Trust Foodbanks to gather evidence on poverty in Ards and North Down. This information would be used to help develop a local anti-poverty action plan.

Emerging issues:

- Whole Systems Approach to Obesity Phase III was complex and would require support from PHA. That would take longer than the initial timescale identified for developing causal maps.

- An Ending the Harm workstream had been potentially added to the list of community planning workstreams. That would be a sub-group of the Strategic Partnership.

Action to be taken:

- Meeting of the 3rd Sector Community Planning Forum to take place in January 2024
- Employee appraisals would be scheduled.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

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

(b) Corporate Communications
(Appendix II)

Key points to note:

- This report detailed progress made against Service Plan KPIs. It should be noted that some KPIs were reported on a half-yearly and some on a full yearly basis. All KPIs would be reported against during the course of the reporting year.
- The period under review included a number of significant events requiring promotional, graphic design and technical event support. That presented some resourcing challenges as the post of Multi-Media Technician remained unfilled despite two recruitment exercises.
- The period under review included the Local Government Election – which required dedicated communications and technical support and provided an excellent opportunity for officers to work with a number of key local and regional journalists over a two-day period.

Key achievements:

- All Council social media channels had seen growth over the period – averaging at a 28% increase in followers and a 21% increase in reach. Significant in that achievement had been a dedicated focus on the development of the Culture Ards and North Down Facebook and Instagram channels through the use of rich multi-media content e.g., reels on Instagram and some small paid for digital campaigns to promote the Ards Guitar Festival and Aspects Festival.
- A number of successful events took place during the period including May Day in Holywood, the Comber Earlies Food Festival, Sea Bangor, the Form Sculpture Exhibition, Rhys McClenaghan Celebration Event/ Origin Gym Opening, Veterans Evening in Newtownards and Taste Summer. Support including graphic design, technical support, marketing and PR was provided to each. Promotion of the Aspects Festival was particularly strong, resulting in early and high ticket sales across all events and significant positive media coverage including TV and radio on both UTV and BBC.

- Significant positive media coverage was secured for the City of Bangor and current regeneration plans (Bangor Waterfront/ Queen's Parade/ Court House) when BBC NI's Flagship Breakfast Programme broadcast from the City in August. The Mayor and Director of Place both featured on the show.
- Internal comms: a new monthly 'Top 5' Brief was launched in September to provide a consistent cascade of key corporate messages for managers to their teams. This delivered on a request made by staff at the Chief Executive Roadshows at the start of the year. A number of internal events were delivered including focus groups around internal communications and the 'People Plan', the SUM Forum and Summer Sports Days. High levels of attendance and engagement at each.
- Three public information sessions were delivered to help explain the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Project to residents and businesses. Out of these sessions, FAQs were developed and added to the Bangor Waterfront section of the Council website – which had seen a 16% increase in traffic over the period. Attendees at these sessions were encouraged to sign up to receive the new Bangor Waterfront e-zine (launched October 2023).
- Ongoing programme of communications (PR/ graphic design/ technical event support/ social media content) work to promote a range of Council initiatives including the In Bloom Programme/ Recycling Programme/ Grants/ Project Ella/ Shine ED Programme.

Emerging issues:

- The process to procure a new web platform for the Council was delayed in order to widen to the scope of the project to meet our growing digital transformation needs. A suitable platform provider was successfully appointed in September and, with support from the Transformation Service, a programme of work was now being fast tracked to migrate www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk to the new platform over the next 6-8 months, as well as identifying new digital opportunities for a range of service areas.
- Following the delivery of a very successful Spring Destination Campaign, which achieved significant visibility for Ards and North Down in the Republic of Ireland and UK target markets, work was progressing on a campaign for the Autumn period, with the intention to profile a number of local providers and offers.
- Supporting the Council's Sustainability Commitments, a Social Media campaign ran during late summer/early Autumn with a broad mix of messaging around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)/ Council's Roadmap to Sustainability/ and 'Small Steps Big Impact' examples of practical actions residents could take to improve their own sustainability (e.g. eco settings on washing machines; reducing water wastage during everyday tasks and choosing walking/cycling short journeys over taking the car etc). Mixed reactions to the campaign and queries received highlight the need for further education work in this area, which would be progressed over the next year.
- Resources continued to be prioritised on employee engagement and communications activity, including actions from the People Plan.

Action to be taken:

- Citizen Lab – a new digital engagement platform – was procured in September via Transformation funding. It was proposed to launch the platform

in January to complement existing traditional engagement activities being organised for the Bangor Waterfront Redevelopment Project. Resources would be put towards developing engaging multi-media content for the platform in advance of launch. Delivery of the Council's biennial Resident Survey was to be completed by the end of December 2023.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

Alderman McIlveen referred to the new Council website and he asked if Members would have the opportunity to provide input into the design of that website. He noted that the current website design model was used by other Council's however he found the current website inaccessible for users.

The Director noted that Communications and Marketing did not fall within his directorate however undertook to pass those comments onto the Head of Communications and Marketing.

(Alderman Graham entered the meeting – 7.04 pm)

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

(c) **Finance**
(Appendix III)

Key points to note:

- Although, spend against budget was showing a red status, that was because bank interest received was significantly higher than budgeted.

Key achievements:

- Policy work had progressed well this year, with 2 new policies agreed in the first 6 months.
- Transaction activities were all above target and performing well.
- Budget reporting was back on track this year, having struggled to hit the 9-working day target last year, had been on time each month this year.

Emerging issues:

- Month end reconciliation processes were not hitting their target, due to staff vacancy. That post was in the final stages of recruitment.
- Unplanned workload still was affecting the ability to deliver improvement initiatives with only 1 out of 16 delivered in the first 6 months, although work had started on a number of those, a significant number would not be completed before the end of the year.

Action to be taken:

- Finalise recruitment of new trainee accountant.
- Consider month end processes again to see if greater flexibility of team members could contribute to improvements in the reconciliation process.
- Improved communication was required to ensure all team meetings were communicated adequately to staff who could not attend.
- Increased focus on improvement initiatives was required a weekly manager meeting in order to maximise delivery of objectives.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

(d) Strategic Transformation and Performance
(Appendix IV)

Key points to note:

- Spend against budget was slightly lower than expected (93.9%) due to the vacant:
 - Procurement Officer post (filled since June 2023); and
 - Performance Improvement Officer post.
- Attendance was well above the Council average at 96.6% (against a target of 93%).
- The Head of Service was leading the facilitation and development of the Council’s Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028, which would be issued for public consultation early in 2024.

Digital Services	
Key achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's telephony estate had been reviewed and implementation of new solution would commence in late November 2023. • Draft IT DRP was going to CLT for approval in late November 2023. • WAN project implementation underway. • Systems and network uptime was 99%. • 96% of service calls are satisfactorily addressed within timescales. • Digital Services were leading the development of our Digital Strategy, in collaboration with our external specialists, BT. A draft strategy would be available for review in early 2024. • Significant work had been undertaken to progress recommendations from our Cyber-security audit.

Emerging Issues	Succession planning was an identified risk within the service.
Action to be taken	Staff training and development, particularly in relation to cyber-security profiled for 2024.
Transformation Service	
Key achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation Service established in September 2024 (1 x Manager, 3 x Transformation Officers (1 vacant) and 1 x Performance Improvement Officer (vacant)). Performance management process reviewed and new service plan template issued for consultation and implementation (November 2023). Business Continuity Plan completed (November 2023). Core PPE underway, to be completed in December 2023. Performance Improvement Plan (2023/24) completed. Self-assessment report (2022/23) completed.
Emerging Issues	<p>Significant number of large-scale projects in the pipeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leisure transformation Office rationalisation Organisational restructure <p>Resourcing the above would prove challenging given the two vacant posts referenced above.</p>
Action to be taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Performance Improvement Officer post to be recruited as soon as possible. Agency support continued to be the only route for the Transformation Officer post, as external recruitment was unsuccessful (due to the temporary nature of the post).

Procurement Service	
Key achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement savings for the Council are over target for the year to date (£155,756 versus £125,000). There have been zero procurement challenges.
Emerging Issues	Historically, over the last 5 years, the PSU (with a full team of 3 staff: Procurement Manager; Procurement Officer; and Procurement Assistant) managed an average of 25 tender exercises per year.

	<p>Circa 43 tender exercises were/ are programmed for the year 2023.</p> <p>There are approximately 30 procurement exercises already identified for 2024.</p> <p>This represents an increase in tenders of circa 70% for the PSU.</p> <p>Whilst the Procurement Officer post was filled in June 2023, the PSU had been without a Procurement Assistant since early August, again reducing the staff complement to two.</p> <p>The current structure (FTE 3) does not have the capacity to address the increased workload nor to identify corporate tenders which can achieve significant efficiencies across the organisation both in terms of monetary savings and also process/ transactional savings.</p>
<p>Action to be taken</p>	<p>The Council had (unsuccessfully) tried to recruit an additional Procurement Officer and were currently seeking agency support while reassessed potential future options.</p>

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

In respect of the emergency issues, Councillor W Irvine asked the Director to comment regarding the resourcing issues detailed. The Director explained that the post within the Transformation Service had since been filled through an Agency. Therefore, there would soon be a full complement of staff within that team.

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

(e) Administration
(Appendix V)

Key points to note:

The majority of targets in the Administration Service Plan were measured annually.

Key achievements:

Despite the number and complexity of information requests (FOI/DSAR) the Council had continued to respond within the statutory timeframe for 97% (FOI) and 100% (DSAR).

The Council introduced a new Complaints Handling Procedure in line with the NIPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure which reduced the procedure from 3 to 2 Stages before the complaint can be escalated to NIPSO. That was launched in October 2023 and the first report would be in March 2023 on Jan - Mar 2023.

Emerging issues:

It was apparent that high impact weather was now hitting the Borough more frequently than in the past. The Risk Management team had robust reporting mechanisms to alert officers and provide horizon scanning and live information to the public and Elected Members (through the Communication team).

Action to be taken:

We continue to work towards all of the KPIs.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

(f) **Human Resources**
(Appendix VI)

Key points to note:

- This report gives updates on performance against the 14 Service Plan KPIs with 10 of the KPIs having been achieved and four not having been achieved.

Key achievements:

- In 96% of cases, an offer of employment had been made within six weeks of a job being advertised.
- All candidates had been notified of results of shortlisting and interviews within a two week period.
- The Flexible Working Policy had been reviewed and updated to include a section on Hybrid Working with a new policy being created entitled the Agile Working Policy
- The Agency procurement process had been completed and successful Agencies have been appointed to fill any agency roles within the Council, all relevant policies have been updated to reflect this.
- The new online Appraisal Scheme had commenced following a comprehensive review of the existing scheme.
- Following the APSE Absence Review, an Absence Action Plan had been produced including an Absence Dashboard.
- The HR and OD Service was under budget for the first half of the year and staff absenteeism in the HR Service was low with attendance levels of 96.6%

Targets not Achieved:

- Number of days lost per employees who are sick across the organisation was 15.5, there was a target in place of 12 days.
- 45% of the actions in the People plan had been completed out of a target of 50%.
- 27.17% of employee appraisals have been completed out of a target of 50%. The new appraisal scheme was launched in September with an 18-month completion period during which time an appraisal meeting and at least 1 follow up review meeting must take place for each employee. Both line managers and employees receive regular reminders, encouraging completion of appraisals.

Action to be taken:

- Continue with regular reminders to carry out employee appraisals under the new Scheme.
- Ensure that actions under the People Plan are being progressed.
- Continue to analyse absence statistics and constantly develop and review new ideas to encourage higher attendance at work.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

Proposed by Councillor MacArthur, seconded by Councillor McRandal, that the recommendation

Councillor MacArthur referred to the targets not achieved noticing that only 27% of staff appraisals been carried out and wondered the reasoning for that and if that would have an impact on the 18 month target. The Director explained that a new employee appraisal scheme had been introduced and as part of that Managers were working with their employees to set objectives in relation to their service area for the next 18 months. The target was in relation to the setting of those objectives and the Director was not concerned in that regard. The next quarterly report would provide a more accurate outcome.

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

4. QUARTERLY REPORT ON EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS (FILE EQ33)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services detailing that in accordance with the Council's Equality Scheme, a progress report was required to be submitted to the Council's Corporate Services Committee every quarter. That ensured the Council complied with its obligations to meet its equality and good relations duties and responsibilities, as identified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This quarterly report formally covered the period 1 July

2023 – 30 September 2023, with any additional updates in October and November 2023 also included.

Consultative Panel

Due to other commitments of panel members, a meeting of the Consultative panel was postponed until January 2024. The panel members reviewed Council policies via email, and suggestions were taken on board and added to the screening forms.

Screening of Council policies

The Internal Screening Panel met in October 2023. Officers from across the Council directorates reviewed the screening of 11 Council policies. That enabled comments to be received, considered, and addressed before policies were finalised.

Policies were screened via an online JotForm, and within that form population data was included in order that officers can consider this when screening and determining whether the policy had any section 75, rural or sustainability impacts. During this quarter, the Compliance Officer (Equality and Safeguarding) updated the JotForm to ensure it included the most up to date data from the 2021 Census and Council Employee data. All Heads of Service and Service Unit Managers had been issued a reminder of the Council's screening obligations and instructions on completing the JotForm.

Quarterly Consultations

The Council had a requirement within the Equality Scheme to publish the outcome of screened policies quarterly. A quarterly report was uploaded onto the Council's website on 31 October 2023.

Equality Action Plan

The Compliance Officer (Equality and Safeguarding) continues to review and ensure that items outlined in the plan are in place and on track. Officers are reminded of their responsibilities during the quarterly Screening Panel meetings.

Diversity Ambassador

The Local Government Equality and Diversity Group (the Steering Group) prioritises and influences equality, good relations, diversity, and inclusion initiatives across local government in Northern Ireland. The Steering Group attempted to bring together best practices across the sector and, in so doing, seeks to integrate the priorities of the Steering Group with the ongoing work of individual Councils.

A significant proposal identified by the Steering Group was the creation of a network of Diversity Ambassadors, comprising both Elected Members and officers, to promote the equality and diversity agenda in Councils actively. ANDBC would be represented on this network by the three Elected Members nominated at the Council's Annual Meeting to be Diversity Ambassadors, along with the Compliance Officer (Equality and Safeguarding) who would represent Council in an officer capacity. The Compliance Officer and Compliance Manager met with the Steering Group in September 2023 to better understand the proposed network and Ambassador role.

The Diversity Ambassadors would work within their Council and community to support the delivery of the regional Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan, help drive behavioural and cultural change across the local government sector and focus on the action plan for 2021 – 2023. That would take the form of workshops to which Elected Members had been invited, taking place on the following dates:

Workshop 2 -Thursday 21 March 2024 13.00 pm– 18.00 pm

Workshop 3 - Thursday 20 June 2024 13.00 pm – 18.00 pm

Best Practice Event - Thursday 10 October 2024 13.00 pm – 18.00 pm

Disability Forum

The Council's Disability Forum was scheduled to meet in December 2023.

At the meeting, Colostomy UK would give a presentation on their Stoma Friendly campaign. That campaign aimed to raised awareness of Stoma Users throughout the UK.

The Compliance Officer (Equality and Safeguarding) would update Forum members regarding the Stoma Friendly Toilets agreed upon by Council. The Officer would also advise that Council was looking into becoming Disability Confident; that involved creating a movement of change and encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain, and develop disabled people.

Disability Action Plan

The Compliance Officer (Equality and Safeguarding) continued to work to deliver the Disability Action Plan. That was reported through the Internal Screening Group and the Disability Forum. At those meetings, any identified concerns may be added to the plan to ensure appropriate actions were identified and undertaken promptly to enable the Council to remain compliant with the relevant legislation.

Complaints

During this period, no Section 75 complaints had been received.

Safeguarding

In October 2023, all 11 Councils were required to complete an audit questionnaire issued by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) further to section 12 of the Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 which imposed duties on Councils and other public bodies in relation to the welfare of children and adults at risk of harm.

The section 12 audit questionnaire asked a wide range of questions. Section C of the form required responders to demonstrate clear lines of accountability within their organisation regarding safeguarding and promoting child welfare, including who had ultimate accountability. It states that where individual members of staff hold responsibility for providing advice or expertise regarding safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, "the nature and extent of their responsibility was identified in terms of their job descriptions, and in the professional

codes of conduct that apply to the person concerned; and by clear lines of accountability within their agency."

Further to the completion of this questionnaire, officers had initiated a review of Safeguarding to ensure the current processes in place allow Council to meet its safeguarding obligations, including that there were structures in place to ensure safeguarding was being led at a senior level.

Another Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) was appointed in December 2023. Linda McAlister, Community Development Officer, based in South Street, Newtownards, would work alongside Council and two other DSOs to continue to raise the profile of Safeguarding, which was the responsibility of everyone within the Council.

Employee training had been developed in line with the Keeping Safe initiative, which aims to raise awareness of the issues concerning Safeguarding Children and adults at risk. Between November 2023 and March 2024, the Council aims to train 270 employees across all directorates.

The Compliance Officer (Equality and Safeguarding) continued working with officers across Council to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people and prevent and protect them from risk and harm.

Three Safeguarding referrals have been made in this reporting period.

It Takes All Sorts

Following the success of the 'It Takes Allsorts' programme in 2022, it was agreed to hold further sessions during 2023/24. Those would take place between 12 and 1 pm to allow staff to attend during their lunch break and would largely be held online as that tended to draw higher attendance rates.

The events this year were planned as follows:

- Monday 2 October 2023, Cost of living Crisis (online)
- Wednesday 6th December 2023, Disability Awareness (hybrid)
- Thursday 11th January 2024, Suicide Awareness (online)
- February 2024 (date TBC), Leaving the Ukraine (online)

The events were also open to Elected Members and the wider public to attend, and officers have circulated details of the events to stakeholders including community groups to encourage partnership learning.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this report.

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

5. ITEM WITHDRAWN

6. ROADMAP TO SUSTAINABILITY UPDATE (FILE SUS1)

(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services attaching update on Roadmap Actions. The report detailed that the Roadmap to Sustainability (the Roadmap) was agreed by Council in March 2021. It had been developed to formalise the Council's commitment to becoming more sustainable and to act as a key enabler in this regard. The Roadmap ran from the period 2021 to 2028 to coincide with 2 Corporate Plan phases. It would be updated periodically, with the accompanying Action Plan reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

The first update report summarising progress against the key actions agreed in the Roadmap was provided to Council in December 2021 with further updates provided every six months since. The latest six-monthly update against actions had been prepared for Members and was attached to this report.

As reported in June 2023 Corporate Committee it was the intention to review the Roadmap in line with audit recommendations and legislation.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes this update report.

Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor MacArthur, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen referred to the recent article that appeared in the Chronicle regarding the lack of tree coverage in town centres, noting that had previously brought a Notice of Motion to Council on the replacement of urban trees. It was an identifiable problem particular in Newtownards town centre and he asked for a update on the replacement of those trees.

The Director took the Members' comments onboard and undertook to pass those onto the relevant department.

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

7. D-DAY 80TH ANNIVERSARY

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Corporate Services providing the undernoted detail:

Correspondence from Bruno Peek, Pageantmaster

The Council had received correspondence from Bruno Peek, Pageantmaster, to participate in D-Day 80 on 6 June 2024 in commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy. Communities were encouraged to take part in this important occasion, remembering those that gave so much to ensure the freedom we all share today.

Previous Commemorations

Some members may recall that, on the 50th Anniversary of D-Day, D-Day veterans paraded in Bangor and a replica of the Lone Sailor statue that stood in Washington DC was presented to the Council. On the 60th Anniversary of D-Day, legacy North Down Borough Council hosted significant events during which the North Pier was renamed the Eisenhower Pier. That event was attended by General Eisenhower's granddaughter.

However, in 2019 there was no budget available to mark the 75th anniversary, so a "modest" event took place in the form of a solemn service of commemoration. A small additional panel to the existing Second World War mosaic was erected to mark the Anniversary. The US Consul General Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau attended the event. The Council hosted an afternoon tea, following the service.

Proposed Commemorations

Beacon lighting

The Council had been invited to participate in the beacon lighting initiative. The beacons would symbolise the light of hope that emerged from the darkness of war. It was proposed that beacons would be lit at 9.15pm on 6 June 2024 at The Castle, Bangor, Conway Square, Newtownards and Burr Point, Ballyhalbert for the International Tribute.

Commemorative Service

Consideration had been given to either holding a Commemorative Service event on Thursday, 6 June 2024 or as part of the Sea Bangor weekend on Sunday, 2 June. As part of the consideration officers had liaised with the Council's Military and Naval contacts who had advised that very limited resources would be available on D-Day 6 June as they were focussed on events in England and France, however, if the event was held outside of 6th June then there would be the possibility of assets would be available. Two options had therefore been scoped out and were detailed as follows:-

Thursday, 6 June

A Commemorative Service be held on the Eisenhower Pier and that General Eisenhower's granddaughter be invited as the Guest of Honour along with relevant dignitaries. A call could be put out for any World War II veterans to attend, although the numbers were likely to be very small. A Senior Military and Naval representative would be in attendance.

OR

Sunday, 2 June

The annual Sea Bangor event was due to be held on 1st and 2nd June at the seafront. A Commemorative Service be held at McKee Clock Arena and that General Eisenhower's granddaughter be invited as the Guest of Honour along with relevant dignitaries. A call could be put out for any World War II veterans to attend, although the numbers were likely to be very small.

The service would commence in the morning or early afternoon. It would be led by a Military Padre and the Mayor's Chaplain. The Band, Bugles, Pipes and Drums of

The Royal Irish Regiment would also take part in the service. Senior Military and Naval representatives would be in attendance.

At 12 noon a gun salute would take place on the Long Hole, signalling the Sunday opening of Sea Bangor. At 6pm, at the conclusion of Sea Bangor, The Band, Bugles, Pipes and Drums of The Royal Irish Regiment would perform a Beating Retreat in McKee Clock arena to close the event.

Further Military and Naval resources may be available and discussions are ongoing with Council contacts.

Civic Reception

A civic reception would be held following the service in the City Hall, for both Options.

Costs

Costs were likely to be in the region of £3,500 which would include travel and accommodation for General Eisenhower's granddaughter, bus hire and catering. The costs associated with the beacons would be in the region of £1,500 to include pipers, choirs and staff costs. A total budget of £5,000 would therefore be required.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agrees:-

- a) To light beacons on D-Day – 6 June 2024.
- b) The Commemorative Service and event will be held on 2nd June 2024 as outlined in this report.
- c) To hold a Civic Reception.

Proposed by Councillor W Irvine, seconded by the Mayor, Councillor Gilmour, that the recommendations be adopted.

Councillor W Irvine highlighted the historical significance of D-Day and felt that Bangor should play a significant role to mark the event. He asked if discussion could be kept open with the Armed Forces to expand the event on the Sunday and suggested schools and community group involvement.

The Head of Administration took onboard those comments and stated that could be further explored.

The Mayor agreed that Sunday was the best choice of day for holding the Commemorative Service given the challenge with resources available from the military. She felt extending the invitation to General Eisenhower's granddaughter would also be a fitting tribute. The Mayor was in agreement with Councillor W Irvine suggestion of tying in with the local schools and local communities. She encouraged any further assets from the military to enhance the event if possible. The location of the McKee Clock arena would also make the service more accessible to allow people to attend and commemorate D-Day.

Councillor Kennedy asked when initial contact had been received from Bruno Peak regarding the holding of potential events. The Head of Administration advised that was within the past number of months.

Councillor Kennedy further asked what work had been done to engage with the local communities and how they would be participating. The Head of Administration stated the main discussions regarding the event had been with the military officials. Approval of this report would allow for further work to progress.

In relation to the beacons, Councillor Kennedy asked that discussion remained open in relation to the number of beacons and viewed three beacons across the Borough as inadequate. He sought an assurance that consideration would be given to increasing the number of beacons.

The Head of Administration stated that the locations detailed in the report were the traditional three locations for a beacon. If consideration was to be given to more, the budget would increase.

Alderman Graham supported the principal of the report, he expressed a degree of disappointment that the events could not be held on the anniversary of D-Day itself however recognised the reasoning for that. He felt the anniversary date should be the main focus of attention highlighting the importance of that date. Alderman Graham stated that he was not entirely happy with the commemoration being tied in with Sea Bangor and was bewildered as to why there would be gun salute to mark the beginning and end of Sea Bangor. Overall, he understood the difficulties however reiterated he was not completely happy with the two events being mixed.

Councillor McRandal stated that in view of the Bangor connection and the significance of the anniversary he felt what was proposed within the report were appropriate actions of commemoration.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor W Irvine, seconded by the Mayor, Councillor Gilmour, that the recommendations be adopted.

8. NOTICES OF MOTION

(a) Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor S Irvine, Councillor W Irvine and Alderman Brooks

That this Council Amends its flag policy to include the flying of the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round.

Proposed by Councillor S Irvine, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor S Irvine stated that in the aftermath of the first world war the people of Britian needed a focus for their grief, loss and pride which seen war memorials erected across the UK in the greatest wave of remembrance this nation had ever seen. War memorials formed part of Northern Ireland's rich cultural heritage and provided connection with the global conflict which shaped the world today. They

provided insight into the changing face of commemoration as well as artist, social, local, military and international history. The war memorials remembered those fallen for their service and their sacrifice, recognising the freedom those men and women fought to preserve.

The Borough was richly steeped in history of the World Wars and Councillor S Irvine felt it was only fitting to honour that heritage 365 days a year. He went on to explain why he brought the motion forward advising that when on his election campaign he had been frequently asked why the flag had not been allowed to fly on war memorials. He noted that on 1st July for the Battle of Somme commemorations, the Union flag had not been raised on the war memorial. Also, on 11th November for Remembrance day there had been no flag on the Cenotaph it was only flown on Remembrance Sunday. Councillor S Irvine hoped the Council could agree on the motion and form a new policy for war memorials. He did not wish for the matter to develop into a political statement but one of respect and remembrance.

Councillor W Irvine stated that the motion was not intended to cause offence and felt it was fitting and respectful to have the Union flag fly at war memorials 365 days a year. He believed the motion had the support of a large majority of residents in the Borough as was evidenced in the previous EQIA. Many people had raised with him their dismay and concern that the Council had made the decision not to fly the flag 365 days a year at war memorials. There were many countries across the world that did not enjoy the same freedoms and it was down to those that were remembered at war memorials and the sacrifices made. The motion would allow for the flag to be flown at a time of national emergency, crisis, passing of significant figure and other significant dates. He appealed to all parties across the Chamber to back the motion.

Alderman McIlveen noted that the Council did go through an EQIA process earlier in the year and he questioned if that process would stand. The Head of Administration advised that process would need to be gone through again.

Alderman McIlveen was supportive of the motion and felt it was important that the flag was flown at war memorials. He asked those parties who had their own policy around the issue of flags that they respected the views of the majority referring to the clear majority voice that came from the people during the previous EQIA. If a further EQIA was to be undertaken in relation to this motion those views should be respected.

Councillor Chambers supported the motion and asked if the motion was agreed to that the condition of the flags be maintained. Also, a number of flag poles were in need of being upgraded particularly referring to the current condition of the flagpole at Groomsport.

Councillor McRandal stated that the Alliance party had a long standing and well known policy in support of flying the Union flag at Civic headquarters on designated days. That party policy was a balanced arrangement acknowledging the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK whilst also upholding legal obligations. Alliance treated the Union flag with respect not to score political points. Alliance continued to support the flying of the Union Flag at war memorials at relevant remembrance events. Councillor McRandal felt that the motion was contrary

to Section 75 Good Relations duty. Flying the Union flag at remembrance events served to highlight the significance of the period and he felt flying it permanently could risk undermining that. The British Legion had previously opposed proposals to fly the Union flag permanently at the Cenotaph, Belfast City Hall arguing the garden of remembrance was sacrosanct and should not be politicised. Alliance felt the motion was a political move and they could not support it. If the proposal was to be agreed there would be three union flags flown in Holywood, two of those would be in close proximity situated at the war memorial and Queen's Leisure Complex. The motion would make the Council's flag policy more expansive and extensive and may also result in the Council acting against its legal duties, potentially risking legal challenge.

Alderman Smith added his support to the motion and expressed his disappointment that the Alliance Party were unable to provide their support. The Council had already set a precedent; Comber, Ballygowan and Greyabbey flew the flag 365 days a year at their war memorials. Those flags were in good condition and maintained well. He felt it was only appropriate for the flag to be flown at the war memorial as a mark of respect to those who had fought and died. He appreciated the point regarding the number of flags that would be situated in Holywood however felt that could be overcome. He did not believe the motion would impact on good relations and there was strong support across the Borough. Alderman Smith appealed to the Alliance Party to allow for the democratic decision to be taken and implemented.

Alderman McAlpine referred to the previous EQIA and stated that the Equality Commission stated that the EQIA should not be used a plebiscite or a referendum instead all qualitative and quantitative information should be brought together to inform the decision making process. Referring to the make-up of the Borough, Alderman McAlpine stated that it was approximately 15% Catholic highlighting the need to take everyone's feelings into consideration. She stated that she was remembering various family connections when thinking about remembrance however there was other people that fought in the wars who did not see their allegiance to the Union flag. Alderman McAlpine highlighted the risk involved if a case was taken and wondered if there was potential liability for individual Members.

Councillor Kennedy stated that all authority including that of the Government was derived directly from God and that the fundamental responsibility with that was to defend people from foreign aggression and establish an enforced legal framework to punish the law breaker. Continuing, he said that time and again men and women of the Country had united in defence of those fundamental principles, and many had paid the ultimate price protecting freedoms for subsequent generations. Because of that, it was a mark of deep and enduring appreciation of what those people did on for those alive today that the nation acknowledged the ongoing importance and value of that sacrifice; something that was reflected in the solemnity of the cultural of remembrance referring to the importance and poignancy of remembrance. He suggested that they were not distant sentiments for just those in Ulster that experienced the atrocities of the IRA and their fellow travellers during the troubles whose murderous actions led to the painful addition of so many names to the war memorials across the country; a statement he evidenced by supplying some examples of terrorist attacks across Northern Ireland. Councillor Kennedy stated that the flying of the national flag on war memorials was not as suggested by the Alliance

Party or other pan-Nationalist parties; a puerile exercise in sectarianism but rather one of the most profound ways a nation could express its collective gratitude. He continued, querying how those that had paid the ultimate sacrifice would think today in observing how those whose freedom they fought and died to protect would use said freedom to pander to those who sent so many to their graves. Councillor Kennedy thought this statement could refer to incidents across the nation in recent times where War Memorials had been desecrated by progressive liberals marching with those whose stated aim was the annihilation of the Jewish people.

As Councillor Kennedy continued, the Chair interjected, reminding Councillor Kennedy to adhere to the motion and every Members' obligation to show respect.

Councillor Kennedy referred to the disappointing and rigid response from the Alliance Party to oppose the expression of national gratitude, stating they did not want to offend those people that murdered so many. He expressed his disappointment with the Alliance Party and found their ideology deeply objectionable.

Alderman Graham believed the motion did provide an opportunity for the Union flag to be flown in a respectful and dignified manner. The Republican movement had stirred up division against the union flag. He was convinced that there was people of all religions and no religion that would be happy to support the flying of the Union flag. Alderman Graham appealed to Members that the motion was not intended to offend; it was an opportunity to fly the flag in a dignified manner. Remembering those who fought for King and country.

On summing up, Councillor S Irvine stated that he had recently spoken with a catholic family who would welcome the flying of the flag at any war memorial as long as it was well maintained. He urged the Alliance Party not to call the decision in. He did not wish for the motion to be a political issue but one of remembrance and respect.

The Notice of Motion was put to the meeting and was declared CARRIED with 10 voting FOR and 2 AGAINST.

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

9. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of any other notified business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

10. RENEWAL OF CLOUGHEY BEACH LEASE

(Appendices VII)

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

*****NOT FOR PUBLICATION*****

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

Council was asked to approve the renewal of the Lease of Cloughey Beach for a further 10-year period from 5th April 2023.

The recommendation was agreed.

11. TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF LEGAL SERVICES

(Appendix VIII)

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

*****NOT FOR PUBLICATION*****

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

Council was asked to approve the contract for the provision of legal services is awarded to the top scoring companies for each lot as detailed below.

The recommendation was agreed.

12. EXTENSION OF CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF OFFICE FURNITURE

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

*****NOT FOR PUBLICATION*****

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

Council was asked to approve to modify and extend the contract for the Provision of Office Furniture for a one-year period until 13 January 2025.

The recommendation was agreed.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

The Director reminded Members that an estimates workshop would be held on 18 December. In terms of the next meeting of the Corporate Services Committee to be

held on 9 January 2024 he advised it was his intention to focus on estimates at that meeting and would hope to reduce the number of other reports forthcoming.

The Chair took the opportunity to wish Members a Merry Christmas.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.59 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Hybrid Meeting of the Community and Wellbeing Committee was held on Wednesday 13 December 2023 at 7:00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Martin

Aldermen: Adair
Brooks
Cummings (7.42pm)

Councillors:	Ashe	Hollywood
	Boyle	Irwin
	Chambers	S Irvine
	Cochrane	W Irvine
	Creighton	Moore
	Douglas	Kendall

Officers: Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Community & Culture (N Dorrian), Head of Leisure Services (I O'Neill), Head of Parks & Cemeteries (S Daye), Head of Environmental Health, Protection & Development (A Faulkner) and Democratic Services Officer (R King)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for lateness was received from Alderman Cummings.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman asked for any Declarations of Interest and the following were declared.

Councillor Chambers – Item 17.1 - NOM and Item 21 - Northern Community Leisure Trust Quarter 2 2023-2024

Councillor Moore – Item 20 - Extension of Advice Service Contract by one year

The Chair, Councillor Martin and Councillor W Irvine declared a potential interest in Item 21. Councillor W Irvine was an existing member of NCLT whereas the Chair had been recently nominated to replace Rachel Woods but had not yet formally been appointed. They advised that they would declare an interest and leave the meeting if applicable during the debate.

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION WAR YEARS REMEMBERED

The Chair welcomed representatives of War Years Remembered, Mr David McCallion (CEO) and Mr David McKimm (Trustee). They delivered a 10-minute address to the Committee which was summarised as follows:

War Years Remembered had committed to moving its museum to new premises in Newtownards on the Crawfordsburn Road. The move to the Borough was widely supported and would be of immense public benefit. However, the charity was overstretched financially and did not have the budget to relocate to and renovate the new premises. The charity was asking for Council aid in the form of a one-off cash injection to see the project to completion and to ensure the sustainability of the organisation going forward.

Mr McCallion explained that he had grown up around a rich wartime history and that his grandfather had served in World War II. Irish soldiers had been at the forefront of every major battle and he recalled collecting items of memorabilia since he was a child. His interest developed through childhood and he recalled earning money in order to buy new artefacts to add to his growing collection.

The collection told the story of soldiers from this island and further afield. Northern Ireland had been a pivotal spot during the war years, he referenced the kinder farm at Millisle, the former air base at Ballyhalbert where the Polish Air Force was based and a further base in Whiteabbey where US soldiers were stationed.

He explained the importance of protecting the history for future generations, given that there were no longer any WWI veterans and now only a very small number of those from WWII. Those veterans were the fabric of the museum.

He talked of the potential loss of the collection to national museums including the Imperial War Museum, and explained there would be limited access to the public if that happened, with many of the collection just archived and therefore no longer displayed publicly.

He spoke of the significance of Blair Mayne and the museum's research over the last three years which had uncovered a bigger story with wider family connections and more information about Blair Mayne himself and his character beyond his well-documented struggles with PTSD along with his sporting achievements and his work as an Antarctic surveyor.

Continuing, Mr McCallion explained the public benefit and engagement that WYR provided and its beneficiaries which included schools including children with additional needs, veterans and community groups.

Mr McCallion handed over to his colleague Mr McKimm who outlined the current financial status of the organisation and its struggles in relocating to Newtownards

and securing a long-term lease to keep the museum open to the public. In order to meet the relocation costs, finalise a lease and carry out essential renovations, WYR was asking for a one-off cash injection totalling £57,200.

That was made up of the following:

- £12,800 to complete the relocation from Ballyclare to Newtownards
- £19,400 for renovations to bring the building up to a safe and required standard
- £25,000 to cover overheads until reopening

The Chair thanked the deputation for their presentation including slides of the collection, adding that it was important to keep this history alive. He asked if one of the images on display was a Vickers and Mr McCallion confirmed WYR was the only museum in the north of Ireland with an original World War I 1912 Vickers. Most of the other Vickers in museums were either replicas or from World War II. He said that WYR prided itself on displaying only original artefacts.

The Chair was impressed by this and shared a story that his mother had told him, explaining that she had lived behind an American camp and there were no sweets available due to rationing. She still fondly remembered the American soldiers passing her bubble gum through the back garden fence.

The Chair invited further questions from Members of the Committee.

Expressing his support for the relocation, Councillor W Irvine felt it would be a real scoop for the Borough to secure the WYR museum, noting the potential tourism benefits.

He queried the projected visitor numbers and Mr McKimm advised that annual visitor numbers in the previous location in Ballyclare had averaged 5,000. It was hoped to grow that figure in Newtownards as it had a larger catchment area and the reopening would be supported by a significant marketing campaign to increase numbers overall. He recalled one off events around Armed Forces Day and Newtownards Airfield, for example, had seen 20,000 visitors attend. He felt that with the right support the museum could attract that number. He also highlighted existing tourism links to cruise ship visits to Northern Ireland and he hoped to build on that opportunity.

In a further query, Councillor Boyle asked what sort of income the projected visitor numbers would bring and what WYR annual overheads would be and Mr McKimm explained that standard overheads were £30,000 per year and that was traditionally achieved through visitor donations. The rent however in the new location would increase overheads to £70,000 per year. In terms of income, he added that visitors paid £10 per head so 7,000 visitors would hit that figure and in addition the museum was hopeful of accessing grant funding of £10,000 per year and it had identified possible new funding opportunities in the Republic of Ireland. Those conversations could only continue once the museum was back up and running. He confirmed in

response to a further query that at the very least, the museum planned to break even.

Alderman Brooks asked about the museum's previous location in Ballyclare, admitting that despite working in the area himself, he had never been aware it was based there.

Mr McCallion explained that it had been based in Dennison Industrial Estate and while not 'forward facing' it hadn't needed to be, given the level of interest in the collection, locally and notably from the Republic of Ireland and America. He explained that the requirement to move had resulted from rental increases in the Ballyclare base and further advised that the museum had closed at that location as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. He added that the new location in Newtownards, interestingly was located next to the TA Centre where Blair Mayne's brother and sister had had previously been members of the Royal Artillery there.

Councillor Douglas asked if the organisation's outreach work with children with additional needs would continue in Newtownards and Mr McCallion advised that this would continue as part of an engagement programme which would include a range of community groups. Mr McCallion had explained that he had been aware of another museum which turned away 274 pupils with additional needs but WYR had been able to meet those requirements. He admitted that WYR did not boast about its community engagement work.

Councillor S Irvine asked if WYR had a date in mind for opening in Newtownards and Mr McCallion explained that it had two dates in mind. St Patrick's Day initially given the significance of the day for Irish regiments but if that came too soon, then it was desired to open on June 6th which would be the 80th anniversary of D-day – he explained that the museum had an extensive D-day collection.

Councillor Hollywood pointed to the nearby Somme Heritage Centre and asked if WYR saw that as a competitor or if it expected to compliment the offer from that facility. Mr McCallion explained that he did not see any museum as a competitor and he referred to work and events that he had been involved in at the Somme Heritage Centre in the past. He explained the differences between the museums and how WYR was close to being an imperial war museum whereas the Somme Heritage Centre was focused on that particular battle. Therefore, the move to Newtownards would only compliment it. He spoke of the wider benefits they would have for tourists in terms of attending Newtownards for a longer period in order to visit both museums.

The chair thanked Mr McCallion and Mr McKimm for attending and they left the meeting.

4. COMMUNITY & WELLBEING DIRECTORATE BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT SEPTEMBER 2023 (FILE FIN45)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Community & Wellbeing Directorate's Budgetary Control Report covered the 6-month period 1 April to 30 September 2023. The net cost of the Directorate was showing an underspend of £568k (9.7%) – box A on page 3.

It was noted that the 2023/24 Leisure income budget was prepared with the assumption that VAT status for Leisure income would change from 1 April 2023 as a result of HMRC accepting that leisure activities should be considered as outside the scope of VAT. This had not happened yet. An estimate of VAT on Leisure income for the first 6 months was £200k (the Council will receive this back when its claim was settled) so, if the VAT status had changed on 1 April 2023, Leisure's budgetary performance would be approximately £200k better than shown in this report.

Explanation of Variance

Community & Wellbeing's budget performance was further analysed on page 3 into 3 key areas:

Report	Type	Variance	Page
Report 2	Payroll Expenditure	£524k favourable	3
Report 3	Goods & Services Expenditure	£62k adverse	3
Report 4	Income	£106k favourable	3

Explanation of Variance

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

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Payroll	(524)	Mainly due to a number of vacant posts across the entire Directorate which should be filled as the year progresses.
Goods & Services		
Community & Culture	(36)	Small underspends within Externally Funded Projects and Arts & Museum
Parks & Cemeteries	77	Parks & Cemeteries operating costs- £85k – areas such as hired equipment, hired services and hired vehicles. Mostly offset by increased cemeteries income (see below)
Leisure	42	Mainly due to new leisure system costs which were not budgeted.

Type	Variance £'000	Comment
Income		
Parks & Cemeteries	(54)	Increased cemeteries income.
Leisure	(28)	Leisure Centres income ahead of target (as mentioned on page 1 this favourable variance would be approximately £200k higher if the Leisure VAT status had changed on 1 April 2023).

REPORT 1 BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT					
Period 6 - September 2023					
	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance	Annual Budget	Variance
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	105,814	106,600	(786)	211,800	(0.7)
110 Environmental Health	1,008,484	1,164,800	(156,316)	2,336,900	(13.4)
120 Community and Culture	983,991	1,170,400	(186,409)	2,495,000	(15.9)
140 Parks & Cemeteries	2,047,876	2,192,900	(145,024)	4,466,700	(6.6)
150 Leisure Services	1,119,299	1,198,700	(79,401)	2,692,400	(6.6)
Total	5,265,463	5,833,400	A (567,937)	12,202,800	(9.7)
REPORT 2 PAYROLL REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Payroll					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	84,733	84,400	333	168,400	0.4
110 Environmental Health	1,211,797	1,347,800	(136,003)	2,679,100	(10.1)
120 Community and Culture	785,772	912,100	(126,328)	1,768,300	(13.9)
140 Parks & Cemeteries	1,778,319	1,947,100	(168,781)	3,863,100	(8.7)
150 Leisure	2,173,247	2,266,900	(93,653)	4,576,300	(4.1)
Total	6,033,868	6,558,300	(524,432)	13,055,200	(8.0)
REPORT 3 GOODS & SERVICES REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Goods & Services					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	22,642	23,800	(1,158)	45,000	(4.9)
110 Environmental Health	92,242	111,600	(19,358)	265,200	(17.3)
120 Community and Culture	709,588	746,200	(36,612)	1,725,800	(4.9)
140 Parks & Cemeteries	545,634	468,300	77,334	1,062,600	16.5
150 Leisure	564,252	522,000	42,252	1,320,200	8.1
Total	1,934,357	1,871,900	62,457	4,418,800	3.3
REPORT 4 INCOME REPORT					
	£	£	£	£	%
Community & Wellbeing - Income					
100 Community & Wellbeing HQ	(1,560)	(1,600)	40	(1,600)	2.5
110 Environmental Health	(295,555)	(294,600)	(955)	(607,400)	(0.3)
120 Community and Culture	(511,369)	(487,900)	(23,469)	(999,100)	(4.8)
140 Parks & Cemeteries	(276,077)	(222,500)	(53,577)	(459,000)	(24.1)
150 Leisure	(1,618,200)	(1,590,200)	(28,000)	(3,204,100)	(1.8)
Totals	(2,702,761)	(2,596,800)	(105,961)	(5,271,200)	(4.1)

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

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

Councillor Boyle paid tribute to the leisure management and staff for their incredible work and great results during the current times of uncertainty. He admitted to being amazed at the reported VAT income and asked if that £200,000 figure for six months could therefore be projected as £400,000 over a 12-month period. The Head of Leisure indicated that the financial trend had continued over a further two months outside of the reporting period so suspected that could be the case.

Councillor Boyle asked for some clarity on the calculations of the figure, drawing comparisons to Serco's published figures which he said claimed to save £140,000 based on a £4million turnover. The officer added that it was now envisaged that the VAT benefits for Council run facilities would be even more favourable than expected but there would be a workshop at the end of January 2024 where Members could learn of the application of the VAT treatment and how it would affect the Ards leisure facilities financial performance.

The seconder, Councillor Kendall praised the reported leisure performance, recognising also that there had been staffing challenges which she had been aware of in her previous time on Council. Based on the £200,000 income figure, she queried if over five years there would be a £2m benefit to the rate payer in terms of service investment.

The officer explained how the existing figures had been reported with the VAT income taken out of the income received but it remained in the target, but it all depended on where that target was going next year. He referred to some of the challenges around staffing absence with a 14% absence rate partly as a result of the potential outsourcing exercise but also due to increased workloads and other pressures. He felt that the security of having an inhouse model with this continued level of income would provide stability and some of those issues would ease. He also explained that leisure had been waiting for the last three years for a transformation exercise which would include staff restructuring. In his view many staff in Leisure Services were on much lower scales and among the lowest paid in the Council. Fitness associates for example entered the Council on Scale 3 and did not receive pay increases unless they obtained further qualifications. He added that due to paying below the industry average, Leisure was failing to attract the right quality of staff with several unsuccessful recruitment campaigns over the last 12 months.

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

(Alderman Cummings joined the meeting – 7.42pm)

5. LOUGH NEAGH DERRY CITY & STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL NOTICE OF MOTION (FILE CW166)

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that the Chief Executive had received a letter from Derry City & Strabane District Council (DCSDC) dated 15 November 2023, see appendix 1.

The letter was in relation to a Notice of Motion agreed by DCSDC in September 2023.

The Chief Executive of DCSDC was asking if ANDBC would be willing to attend a meeting in relation to exploring the potential of legally recognised Rights of Nature for Lough Neagh and if there were any other existing forums that were dealing with Lough Neagh at which this matter could be explored.

Although ANDBC did not border Lough Neagh, the Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development had agreed to represent ANDBC at these meetings in case of any potential parallel issues concerning similar scenarios in the Ards and North Down Borough, and if there would therefore be any value in the Council being represented on such a forum going forward.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the Head of Environmental Health Protection and Development to attend the initial meeting to ascertain if there is any value in Ards and North Down being represented, and subsequent meetings, a report will be brought back to Committee for consideration.

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

6. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 AND Q2 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROTECTION & DEVELOPMENT (FILE CW22)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

The report for H1 (1 April 2023 – 30 September 2023) was attached.

Key points to note:

Two targets in relation to Health and safety and pollution control had not been met for this half of the year, it was anticipated that these targets would be met for the final reporting period.

Key achievements:

The general performance across the Environmental Health protection and Development Service had been good for the first half of the year with the majority of KPI’s being met or exceeded.

The work on the whole systems approach to obesity had progressed, moving into phase three of the project which would involve the development of a detailed and complex causal map with the support of an expert. A causal looks at the sub-system within the geographical area and consider all the potential influences over the demographics weight. It was likely that this part of the project would look at poverty, housing, assets, lifestyle, deprivation, infrastructure and education.

Work on becoming dementia friendly had been progressing with the SE Trust leading on a Dementia Friendly Partnership and action plan. A series of consultation exercises had been undertaken using Ards and North Down’s Big Game. On Monday, 12 June 2023 Ards and North Down Borough Council in partnership with Dementia NI, the PCSP and the PSNI hosted a special event to raise awareness of the Herbert Protocol in the Borough. The Herbert Protocol was a UK wide initiative to help trace those living with dementia if they got lost or went missing. The Council was working in partnership with Dementia NI and the Alzheimer’s Society to produce a short e-learning course for staff. The aim of the course was to raise awareness of the challenges faced by those living with dementia, raising awareness about how front line services could recognise potential signs of dementia, put forward suggestions on how staff could help support residents with dementia and signpost staff in need of advice and support within their own personal circumstance.

Emerging issues:

The new appraisal scheme opened at the end of September therefore it was not possible to meet this KPI in the first half of the year. Appraisals in the service were now well underway and it was anticipated that this target would be met by year end.

The project to upgrade the data base was being addressed centrally by digital services in line with a number of other services as an efficiency exercise rather than through a business case.

Action to be taken:

Further recruitment of Officers and administration staff was underway and would help to address the KPI'S which had not been met in the first part of the year, particularly around spending and response time targets.

RECOMMENDED that Council notes the report.

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

The proposer, Alderman Adair, praised the Environmental Health section in solving issues that other Government Departments were failing to address. He gave particular praise to an Environmental Health Officer, Hannah Ogle, for assistance provided to residents during recent flooding.

Councillor W Irvine was pleased with the report, and he appreciated the wide remit of the department. He queried the recruitment campaign to address the KPIs, as referred to in the report and the Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development confirmed that recruitment was ongoing and shortlisting was planned for the coming week. She expected appointments to be made to fill existing and anticipated vacancies in the early part of the new year.

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

7. CONSULTATION SMOKE HEAT & CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS & SECTION 10 ELECTRICAL SAFETY STANDARDS (FILE CW145)

(Appendix II – III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Council Environmental Health Officers are heavily engaged in the regulation of the private rented sector through the Council's statutory duties under the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 (as amended by the Private Tenancies Act and Housing Amendment Acts) as well as through statutory nuisance investigations. Council is also the enforcing authority for provisions to regulate landlord registration, security of tenancy deposits and licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

Members were updated at the Community & Wellbeing Committee Meeting in February 2023 regarding the implementation of Sections 1-6 of the Private Tenancies (NI) Act 2022, which came into effect on the 1 April 2023.

The introduction of the Private Tenancies (NI) Act 2022 Act brought about amendments to The Private Tenancies (NI) Order 2006, the main legislative framework for the regulation of private rented sector housing. The overarching objectives of the Private Tenancies Act were to make the private rented sector a safer and more secure housing option for a wider range of households, to ensure better regulation of the sector and offer greater protection to private renters.

Not all requirements of the Act were implemented in April 2023. The creation of further regulations was required to bring the remainder of the Act into effect. This was the case for Sections 8 and 10 pertaining to smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms and electrical safety.

The Department for Communities had launched two consultations on the out-workings of the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 in shaping the technical regulations relating to:

Section 8 – Smoke, heat, and carbon monoxide alarms.

<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/the-fire-smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarms-northern>

Section 10 – Electrical Safety Standards

<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/electrical-safety-standards-northern-ireland-202x>

The purpose of the consultations was to assess whether the regulations delivered a sound legislative framework (in context of boundaries in the 2022 Act) to improve health and safety standards in private rented properties, and that the accompanying Guidance Notes were easy to follow and provide the necessary information for all stakeholder groups.

Section 8 – Smoke, heat, and carbon monoxide alarms

The proposed Smoke, Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms Regulations (Northern Ireland) set the standards for the number and type of smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms to be installed in private rented properties and aim to reduce the risk of fire related incidents.

It was anticipated these Regulations would come into operation early next year and would apply to all private tenancies. There would be a lead in time of 2 months for landlords to comply.

It would be an offence for a private landlord to fail to comply with the duty to keep in repair and proper working order sufficient appliances for detecting smoke, heat and carbon monoxide.

Section 10 – Electrical Safety Standards

The proposed Electrical Safety Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) aimed to reduce the risks of death and injury due to electrical faults in private rental properties.

The regulations introduced the requirement for electrical safety standards to be met during the period the property was let and electrical inspections would be required to be completed by a qualified electrician at least every 5 years. The landlord needed to provide proof the testing had been carried out and if a repair/further investigation was required it needed to be completed within a specific timescale. It would be an offence for the landlord not to comply with their duties.

There was no indication of an implementation date yet. Once commenced, it was anticipated there would be a lead in time of 12 months for all tenancies to comply.

The Act created new offences for which the Council would have powers to issue fixed penalty notices. The fixed penalty payable in respect of an offence was an amount determined by the Council, being an amount not exceeding one-fifth of the maximum fine payable on summary conviction of that offence, which was a maximum of £500 for smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarm offence and £1000 for electrical safety offence.

Members would be provided with a further update prior to implementation of the new legislative powers to agree fixed penalty levels.

A proposed response to the technical matters of the consultations was set out in Appendix 1 & 2.

Financial and Resource Implications

The introduction of the Private Tenancies Act provided Councils with new enforcement powers to deal with tenancy issues in the private rented sector. This would increase the duties and demands on the Council's resource. The Department for Communities was aware of local authority concerns in terms of resources, however there was no financial support available currently to assist Councils with these additional powers. The proposed response to the consultation had requested the ability to charge for enforcement action with regards to electrical safety like that contained in Part II of the Private Tenancies (NI) Order.

RECOMMENDED that Council agree to the submission of the proposed response (Appendices 1 & 2) relating to technical matters of the Department for Communities consultation on Sections 8 and 10 of the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

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

Councillor Kendall felt that the response had been well thought through and she had found it reassuring that officers had identified gaps needed to protect private tenants and risks to their health. She was glad to see that the lack of funding to enforce this had been highlighted and she noted plenty of other similar examples across the Council.

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

8. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 AND Q2 COMMUNITY & CULTURE (FILE CW22)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

The report for April 2023 – September 2023 was attached.

Key achievements:

- The north Down Museum achieved accreditation status.
- There had been some key achievements including the Community Safety multi agency meetings that had been held, including the standing forums for Ards Blair Mayne, Aurora and multi-agency meetings in relation to ASB at

Helens Bay beach. These meetings had been extremely beneficial for the collective engagement of key stakeholders including the PSNI, Community Safety, Youth Services and Street Pastors, working together to reduce ASB.

- Increased engagement in a number of schools in the Borough with partner agencies in relation to asb issues.
- Community consultation and engagement in preparation for the PEACE PLUS programme had concluded and 891 people had been involved to date.
- A number of new candidates had been recruited to Youth Voice (AND Youth Council) and members would be invited to join them for an event in due course.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

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

9. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 & Q2 LEISURE SERVICES (FILE CW22)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

The report for April to September 2023 was attached

Key points to note:

- Recycling figures were above targets.
- Footfall across both Leisure and Community Halls sites was significantly higher than anticipated.
- Active aging programme had been very successful across both Serco and direct managed sites.

Key achievements:

- The service was being delivered at a 10% reduction against budget in anticipated net cost to the ratepayer.
- Quest quality award was retained at all 4 sites.
- Almost double the anticipated sport forum grants were awarded during this period.

Emerging issues:

- Staff attendance levels were below the corporate target.
- Community Halls demands had returned and surpassed pre covid levels.

Action to be taken:

- Resolve Leisure Staffing issues.
- Realign funding for sport forum awards.
- Identify funding for Annual Sport Awards
- Consider the disparity between booking fee and cost of provision for Community Centres.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

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

Councillor W Irvine requested an update on funding for the Sports Awards and the Head of Leisure advised that there was a more specific item later on the agenda where that would be provided.

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

10. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN SPORTS FORUM GRANTS (WG NOVEMBER 2023) (FILE SD149)

(Appendix IV – IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that on the 26th August 2015 Council delegated authority to the Ards and North Down Sports Forum, in order to allow it to administer sports grants funding on behalf of the Council. £45,000 had been allocated within the 2023/2024 revenue budget for this purpose.

The Council further authorised the Forum under delegated powers to award grants of up to £250. Grants above £250 still required Council approval. In addition, the Council requested that regular updates were reported to members.

During October 2023, the Forum received a total of 29 applications: 1 Coaching, 16 Equipment, 3 Schools/Sports Club Pathway and 9 Travel/Accommodation. A summary of the **28** successful applications were detailed in the attached Successful Coaching, Successful Equipment, Successful Schools/Club Pathway and Successful Travel & Accommodation Appendices.

For information, the annual budget and spend to date on grant categories was as follows:

	Annual Budget	Funding Awarded October 2023	Remaining Budget
Anniversary	£1,000	£0	£250.00
Coaching	£3,000	*£150.00	£1,453.75
Equipment	£14,000	*£9,303.83	-£6,984.77
Events	£6,000	£0	£1,468.00
Seeding	£500	£0	£55.01
Travel and Accommodation	£14,500	*£1,150.00	-£2,874.51
Discretionary	£1,000	£0	£1,000.00
Schools/Sports Club Pathway	£5,000	*£1,498.00	£3,002.00
*Goldcards proposed during the period October 2023 is 0 (15 Goldcards in total during 2023/24).			

*The proposed remaining budget for Coaching of **£1,453.75** was based on a proposed award of **£150** – for Noting.

*The proposed remaining award for Equipment of **-£6,984.77** was based on a proposed award of **£9,303.83** – for Approval/Noting.

*The proposed remaining budget for Travel and Accommodation of **-£2,874.51** was based on a proposed award of **£1,150.00** – for Noting and Withdrawn costs of **£450.00**.

*The proposed remaining budget for Schools/Club Pathway of **£3,002.00** was based on a proposed award of **£1,498.00** – for Approval.

The proposed funding for October is **£12,101.83** and the proposed remaining budget for 2023/24 was **-£2,630.52** (106% of the 2023/24 budget spent).

Funding for continuation of the Grants Programme

As noted above, the proposed funding relating to October 2023 Sports Forum Grants programme would see the programme overspent by £2,630.52 year to date. It is also noted that, with the grants programme due to run throughout the remainder of the financial year, further grant applications would see the level of overspend rise. Based on Quarter 4 figures from 2022/23, in which grant funding was 11.2% of the previous 3 quarters, it was forecast that a further £6,000 may have been applied for if the grants scheme continued to operate in 2023/24. This would mean a possible total shortfall of circa £8,600 in the Sports Forum Grants Scheme budget in 2023/24.

Officers had considered Programme financing and identified the following potential opportunities to recode the shortfall from other sport development budgets:

- Utilise underspend of £5,253.25 from the now closed Sports Development Capital Grants programme.
- Utilise forecast underspend in Sports Development staffing budget of £5,000.

Approval of the above would allow for the continuation of the Sports Forum Grants programme throughout the remainder of 2023/24 financial year.

Alternatively, if the above proposal was rejected, Officers would apply a reduction in funding percentage to pending applications from October 2023 and would close the programme, with the immediate cessation of any further grants in 2023/24.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves the utilisation of identified underspend towards eligible grant applications from October 2023 to March 2024 and therefore approves the attached applications for financial assistance for sporting purposes valued at above £250, and that the applications approved by the Forum (valued at below £250) are noted.

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

Proposing as Chair of the AND Sports Forum, Councillor Boyle wished to place on record his thanks to the Head of Leisure and those in the Sports Development team. He felt that there was a unique situation in terms of finance, not because of any mismanagement of finances, but because of increased interest and demand.

He welcomed that the Head of Leisure had been able to reconfigure existing finances to prevent the grants programme from closing for the remainder of the financial year. He encouraged Members to read through the attachments in order to appreciate the work of the programme.

He asked the Head of Leisure if he had taken onboard the additional funding required as part of the rate setting process for the upcoming financial year.

Thanking the Member for the comments about the Sports Development team, the Head of Leisure Services noted that the programme had been extremely successful

this year. He explained the progression pathways that the programme developed for clubs and individuals particularly for those at the very beginning of their journey to international success.

Word was getting out much better than it had done in the past and that had resulted in a 50% increase from clubs for capital and coaching development. He explained that the international elite categories had seen a significant increase.

The downside of that was allocating sufficient funding when it came to setting the rates and encouraged Members to remember this discussion as they moved through that process.

The seconder, Alderman Cummings, echoed those comments, and felt it was important to note that for this modest sum of money so much was achieved on a regular basis.

Councillor W Irvine requested an update on the annual Sports Awards and it was advised that the Sports Development team had been attracting sponsorship funding, with half of the required amount obtained and he would look to obtain the rest from elsewhere and from the extra income to leisure centres referred to earlier. He urged Members not to cut money for this next year in the rate setting process, adding that it was important the Council continued to support that success.

Councillor Douglas took the opportunity to praise the Comber Rec Youth football team which had received some funding and she wished the first team luck in their upcoming cup finals. They would be competing for the Steel and Sons Cup on Christmas morning and then in the Border Cup final on New Year's Day.

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

11. SOCCER DEVELOPMENT TRANSITION UPDATE (FILE SD150)
(Appendix X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would recall that a report on the future of Soccer Development was presented to Community and Wellbeing Committee in March 2023 with several recommendations. At that meeting, an amendment was agreed by Council as follows:

“That this Council allocates appropriate funding to deliver our Soccer Development programmes and throughout the incoming year it consults with all local clubs, the Irish Football Association, and the Education Authority to ease the transition from the Council's responsibility over to them for the following fiscal year and explores all revenue streams including funding to alleviate running costs going forward for all.”

In relation to this decision, Council Officers sought clarification from the proposer and seconder on the decision reached. Following further consultation with the proposer and seconder of the above amendment who confirmed that the intention was to continue with delivery of the programme for 2023/24 to allow Officers more time to consult with local clubs and the IFA to ease the transition period into a new model from April 2024.

Since March 2023, Officers had continued to plan and implement transition of Soccer Development to the schools, clubs and NGB's by engaging with a range of stakeholders including the IFA, clubs and education sector. This report aimed to provide members with an update on the ongoing work and details the proposals for future delivery of soccer within the Borough.

1. Transition Update & Review

Attached Appendix 1. detailed the current Soccer Development programme and proposed outcomes of the transition process.

In the sections below, an update was provided for each programme, detailing current performance, stakeholder communications and transition progression.

Afterschool's Programme:

Following the Council's report in April 2023, an online meeting with all schools was facilitated by the Council's Sports Development Officer to outline a new pricing policy in which the cost of the coaching was passed to the schools. The cost of after schools coaching was set at £40 per hour which was representative of the current cost of direct coach provision.

The objective set by the Soccer Development Officer for 2023/24 was to involve 20 schools in afterschool coaching. This would be split between mixed afterschool coaching and girls specific coaching. Currently, to date in 2023/24, there had been 12 schools that had taken up the programme, with six schools availing of afterschool programme (boys and girls) and six schools availing of girls only coaching.

It was proposed that delivery for afterschool's coaching would be undertaken directly by schools. This was a common delivery model and evidenced across a range of sports including hockey and athletics within the schools setting. It was planned to aid the transition of those schools who were currently provided for directly by the Council by providing an up-to-date database with all with all current coaches. By putting schools and coaches in direct contact and providing the links necessary, schools would be able to organise and deliver soccer afterschool's programmes directly, removing the requirement for Council involvement. This should also facilitate better linkages between the schools and local clubs which again was extremely important in pathway development for the children.

Market research had also revealed that there are several private operators delivering soccer afterschool’s sessions across the Borough currently and this delivery option should be considered as part of the transition in line with similar economic considerations in other sectors across the Borough.

Primary School’s League:

Following the Councils report in April 2023, Officers met with the primary schools league committee and had developed a three year transition plan to ease the transition to the schools taking over the league financially.

This transition plan started in September 2023 and would move forward with support from the Council’s Sports Development Team, facilitating the continued delivery of the League with schools delivering directly/independently by 2025/26.

Below was an outline of how the transition is taking place.

	Year 1 – 2023/24	Year 2 – 2024/25	Year 3 – 2025/26	Overview
Pitch/Facility Hire	100% paid from Sports Development	50% from Sports Development 50% from schools Cost as per 2024/25 Pricing Policy	0% from Sports Development 100% from Schools Recommendation to schools is to source an event sponsor.	Sports development financial commitment will extend to 100% facility costs in the first year (23/24), then drop to 50% in year two (24/25) and 0% from 25/26 going forward.
Coach/referee provision	Sports Development will provide one referee for the first year (23/24). The schools have requested a further two referees and this will come at their own cost.	Sports Development withdraw the referee support. Schools are required to provide all three referees.	As per Year 2	Schools are to provide two referees in the first year (23/24) and three in the following years. Sports Development will contact all current coaches/referees and put them in contact with

	Schools to directly recruit their own coaches/referees. Details of current pool of coaches provided.			the schools as a database for hiring coaches/referees.
Soccer Officer Support	Sports Development will lead on this year's programme by: *Making facility bookings *Contacting all schools *Fixture creation	Schools to lead on Programme Sports Development will provide any necessary guidance to schools on delivery of the Programme	Schools to lead on Programme. Sports Development will provide any necessary guidance to schools on delivery of the Programme.	

Previously, ANDBC covered all costs associated with this programme, including facility hire, coach/referee provision and administrative support. Currently, in year 1 of the transition plan (2023/24), ANDBC were paying the cost of facility hire and one referee/coach, with schools paying the cost of the remaining two coaches/referees.

Into year two, ANDBC would pay 50% of the facility hire cost, with schools paying 50% of facility cost and the cost of all coaches/referees. In year three schools lead on the programme, with all costs were transferred to the schools. Council's Sports Development Officers would continue to provide any necessary support and guidance required to aid in the delivery.

It was to be noted that currently, there had been no Council provision for primary schools leagues in Bangor and therefore those schools in this area were already providing for their soccer needs without subvention from Council.

Holiday Schemes

Previously, the Soccer Development team had delivered Soccer Schemes at Halloween, Easter and Summer holiday periods.

In 2023 the Easter scheme did not run due to uncertainty over the programme. It was understood that some local clubs organised and delivered their own very

successful schemes without competition from Council. These included Ards Academy, Portavogie FC Youth (in conjunction with Rangers FC Academy), Bangor FC (in conjunction with Supreme Sports) and Ballywalter Youth FC. The popularity and success of camps delivered by operators in the private sector could also be seen in the Borough. E.g. Local company Kickabout Kidz had a registration of 180 children across nine local pitches at their Easter 2023 camps.

The Councils summer skills weeks were held in the summer 2023 and a continuation to the trend of declining participation numbers had been noted. In 2022 there was a total of 364 registrations across seven schemes. In 2023 the number fell significantly again with a total of only 268 recorded. The drop in 96 children from the previous year was despite the leisure centres within the Ards not running summer schemes in 2023.

This decline in uptake was also evidenced in the Ballywalter summer holiday camp which had to be cancelled due to low numbers (seven registrations only) for a second year running. Provision for the children in the cancelled scheme was facilitated by offering a space in a scheme at different locations.

The Halloween scheme in 2023 was projected to attract 50 registrations, however, with just 21 children availing of the scheme, Sports development again noted a significant decrease in demand from 2022 registration figures.

It was theorised that the drop in demand for Council schemes was linked to the increasing availability of alternatives within the market and that further to this, the removal of Council schemes would have no net detrimental effect as demand could be fully met through the schemes offered by clubs, NGOs and private operators. Of note was the continued rise in the number of Soccer Clubs and private providers who were running soccer schemes across the holiday periods. In 2023, Non Council summer and easter schools were noted in many areas of the Borough, run both by football clubs including Ards FC Academy, Portavogie Youth, Abbey Villa, Greenwell Star Youth and Castle Juniors FC, and by private operators such as Kickabout Kidz, Galactico Soccer, Ultimate Soccer, Supreme Sports and First Touch Football.

In November 2023, Officers met with Rangers Academy who worked with football clubs in the summer of 2023 in Millisle and Portavogie to deliver football camps. It was hoped that Rangers Academy would be able to continue grow and develop their holiday camp provision in partnership with local football clubs. Planning to facilitate this was ongoing.

It should also be noted that Easter 2024 was in March, this financial year, and Sports Development planned not to run a soccer development scheme at that time.

Football Development Centres

There had been two football development centres run in 2023, with sessions taking place on a Friday from 3.30pm to 5pm. The first course (March to June 23) reached

its maximum registration numbers of 64. The second course (ongoing, September to December 23) had seen a reduction in demand to date with only 46 of the available 64 places taken.

In terms of the transition of this programme away from direct ANDBC delivery, preliminary discussion had been held with the IFA with the hope that IFA would take over this delivery in April 2024.

Market research had also demonstrated that demand for soccer development centres could also be met through private operators such as Galactico Soccer and Kickabout Kidz who currently offered development centres at various locations within the Borough (e.g. Bangor Aurora/Londonderry Park) across a range of age groups.

Disability Football for children and adults

The Adult Disability football programme was cancelled during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the lack of demand, this programme had not been restarted and subsequently, no additional planning was required to transition delivery. During the period of time since the Covid-19 closures, Sports Development had received no inquiries as to the programme restarting and had not received any complaints regarding its withdrawal. There were over 50 teams or clubs across the country that offered disability football. Within Ards and North Down, clubs such as Castle Juniors DFC (Bangor), Orchardville FC (Bangor), Ards Rangers and Ards FC (Newtownards) were working with the IFA to raise awareness and provide opportunities for participation within the club setting. Council would continue to support this more inclusive delivery initiative through the Clubs and determine this process to be a more sustainable beneficial model in line with I.F.A. inclusivity programmes.

The Children's Disability football programme had recently been re-introduced in November 2023 for the first time since 2020. Currently there were 11 children registered on the programme. The children's disability football programme was sponsored by Patton's Bakery. This sponsorship related to the entry fees of the children, which was £5 per head, per week. This money covered the cost of hall hire. Currently, Council paid the costs of a casual coach to facilitate each session.

It was proposed that Council maintained direct delivery of this scheme post transition, with coaching being carried out by the Sports Development staff in order to aid with financial viability. Children would be signposted to local inclusive clubs but for many children and their parents this first exposure to soccer was particularly challenging and Officers believed the Council was an appropriate delivery agent at this level.

Community Cup

The Community Cup was a cross community tournament for primary school children and including clubs from in Ards, Bangor and Belfast which was funded by Council's PSCP section.

Initial discussions had been held with PSCP and it had been indicated that continued funding was dependent on available budget in 2024/25. Should funding be available, it was intended to retain delivery of the Community Cup within the Sports Development department. It was hoped that availability of funding could be confirmed following the 2024/25 budget setting process. Should funding not be available, the IFA have indicated that they would be in a position to extend their current SSG programme on Saturday mornings throughout May and June to ensure continued provision for small sided games.

Borough Cup

In 2023 the entrance fee for the tournament was increased significantly to £100 in order to make the event financially viable. Nine teams took part in the tournament which ran across three weeks.

The Council's Sports Development section had proposed that this tournament could be made more financially viable, without the need for further significant price increases, by changing the format to a one day event from 2024 onwards. This change would allow the tournament to be maintained and delivered by Council, with proceeds from the event going towards the Mayors charity.

During recent discussions with Rangers Academy which took place in November 2023, the club had indicated that it would be keen to partner in this event moving forward, offering assistance and an opportunity to rebrand. With this event taking place annually, in June, Sports Development Officers plan to meet with officials from Rangers Academy again in coming months to further explore the possibility of this partnership through the development a service level agreement transition plan similar to that which was developed for the primary schools' league in conjunction with the primary schools committee.

2. IFA Restructure – Impact and Opportunity

The Irish FA Foundation, had recently undertaken a staff restructure, leading to the formation of six new departments operating in regional hub teams. The new structure would maximise and increase programming impact in schools, clubs and communities across Northern Ireland.

Strategically the Foundation would now become more aligned with the Irish FA's corporate strategy, A Roadmap for Football, with its work focusing on three of the seven pillars within it: participation, women's and girls' football and corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

Each regional hub team would have six team members who would focus on the key areas of Game Development, Club Development, Post Primary Development, Primary School Development, Community Engagement and Coach Education.

With the appointment of these new Officers, the IFA would be working to build capacity and develop each specific area. Of particular note was the introduction of a dedicated primary school Development Officer who would work to increase football opportunities and school/club links within the regional area. Initial meetings had been held with the IFA to identify additional opportunities for the Council's Sports Development section to continue to partner with the IFA to ensure soccer development within the entire Borough continued to flourish without the need for a dedicated Council Soccer Development section.

Leisure Officers would continue to liaise with the lead officer within the IFA for our regional hub to maximise the benefits provided to the Borough by the IFA restructure.

3. Sport Development Funding opportunities available to Clubs/Schools

Elected Members would be aware of the fantastic work carried out by the Ards and North Down Sports Forum, working with local clubs to administer and provide a full grants programme which enabled clubs to invest, grow and engage residents across the Borough. Several of these grants would be an essential aid to the proposed soccer transition plan as outlined above. An outline of the grants and opportunities they presented were given below:

- 1. A new School/club** pathway grant was introduced in 2023 to the Sports Forum Grants programme. This new funding pathway allowed for clubs to avail of £500 a year to enable them to provide coaching opportunities within local schools. The aim of the grant was to provide opportunities for the school children to become involved in sport and build strong pathways for progression and development into local clubs.
- 2. Event Grant** – The event grant was in place to allow clubs up to £1,000 to facilitate events in their club calendar. This had extended to enable club's to run summer camps and could be utilised in smaller amounts across the year for various other schemes.
- 3. Equipment Grant** – This grant allowed for clubs to purchase equipment up to the value of £1,000 to support current activities, schemes, and fundamental activities.

It was intended to seek additional grant funding through the Budget setting process to facilitate an increased demand on these funding opportunities in 2024/25.

RECOMMENDED that Council continue to support the Sport Development delivery programme for Soccer transition as detailed above.

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

Councillor S Irvine explained that he had brought this to Council last year during the rate setting process and was delighted that it contained everything that was requested and more. He welcomed that there was still support for schools in the 2024/25 season, the continuation of the Borough Cup and support for pupils with additional needs.

Councillor Boyle echoed those comments and was aware that the programme benefited every single primary school in the Borough. He welcomed what was a good news story overall and thanked Councillor S Irvine for resurrecting something that may have been lost.

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

12. LEISURE PRICING 2024-2025 (FILE LS/LA18)

(Appendix XI – XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that Council had recently agreed that annual price increases in line with inflation were brought to Committee for awareness and that only in the event of significant increase above this level was Council authorisation required.

This report brought to Members attention the price increase that would be applied by both Leisure Ards (appendix 1) and NCLT (appendix 3) for the coming year.

Appendix one detailed the process that would be applied to customers across the service at our directly managed sites at ABMWLC, Comber, Portaferry and Londonderry Park. As well as at our other outdoor tennis courts and bowling greens. Details of the price increase for Sport Development was also included. These prices detailed an approximate 6.7% increase in line with inflation at the time of calculating charges and writing this report, rounded to a more workable figure in terms of cash handling and /or facility subdivision, i.e., if a hall was divided into courts etc. Appendix two detailed the prices NCLT would be charging its customers from 1st January 2024. This was for information only as Elected Members would be aware that Council had no authority to set prices as per the current contract with NCLT. However, the majority of the proposals from NCLT were in line with Councils directly managed sites.

RECOMMENDED that Council:

1. Notes the price increases being applied by Serco from 1st January 2024.
2. Furthermore, Council notes the impact of the application of the inflationary price increases of approximately 6.7% being applied to charges across Leisure Ards directly managed sites from 1st April 2024.

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

The proposer, Councillor Boyle, explained that he understood pricing and why the Council needed to apply those changes. However he asked if the policy would retain the club discount. He recalled that had been a concern raised in the objections against the potential outsourcing of leisure services in the Ards area.

The Head of Leisure Services advised that the pricing represented the increase recommended by finance. Explaining the reasoning for that, he added that leisure was mindful of difficult financial times and competition across the sector. It was important to get the balance right as people could choose to go elsewhere. He added that only a third of prices were increasing and Serco too, in respect of North Down leisure facilities, had also been mindful of putting up their prices for similar reasons. He explained that the club discount was based on VAT benefits previously and if this item was approved a report would follow in the new year detailing how the club discount would be achieved based on these approved prices.

The seconder Councillor S Irvine echoed those comments, highlighting the importance of protecting the club discount.

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

13. COMMUNITY CENTRES & HALLS CHARGING POLICY 2024-2025 (FILE CW66)

(Appendix XIII – XIV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Ards and North Down Borough Council operated 21 Community Centres and Halls located throughout the Borough. These Centres and Halls facilitated a vast range of activities for customers, charities, Health Trusts, and Council departments. These activities are crucial in providing customers and residents of the Borough with opportunities to improve and maintain their health and wellbeing and could be directly aligned to several Council aims and objectives.

For example, the Centres and Halls provided facilities that all users could achieve the Opportunity, Pride, and Life objectives of the Council's 'Vision', illustrated in the Corporate Plan 2020-2024. Similarly, the Community Centres and Halls positively contributed towards all people in Ards and North Down being able to fulfil their lifelong potential, enjoy good health and wellbeing, and live in communities where they were respected, were safe, and felt secure (Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 in the Council's Big Plan 2017–2032).

Usage at the Centres and Halls had continued its upward trajectory after the Covid-19 pandemic, evidenced by positive 2023 KPI figures. The total hours booked figure for Q1 and Q2 was 41,593, significantly higher than anticipated. The Footfall Figure across all Centres and Halls over the same period was 75,692 and was currently 44% ahead of its target for the same period.

These figures illustrated the high usage of the Community Centres and Halls and how valuable these facilities were to customers, residents of the Borough, and Council.

The Community Centres and Halls management aimed to efficiently and effectively manage all available budgets, particularly given the Council's and ratepayer's financial pressures.

The 2022-2023 financial year performance was summarised below –

- Total income was £318,992 = £97,000 above income target
- Actual net expenditure was £518,375 = £105,026 or 16.8% below budget of £623,400

The above illustrated a successful budget performance in 2022-2023.

The net expenditure estimated for 2023-2024 was £666,700. Due to cost pressures for 2024-2025 budgets each section of Council was initially tasked with identifying up to 10% of savings which equates to £66,670 of savings from the Community Centres and Halls budget being developed for 2024-2025.

The Community Centres and Halls budget had been significantly reduced, in real terms over the past five years following the introduction of efficiency measures by the management team. However, in continuing to improve the quality of the offering of enhanced facilities, introduction of the access to Wi-Fi and a significant focus on marketing the service an increased demand, as detailed above had occurred. With the ever-increasing gap between income, based on charges, and costs it was an unfortunate situation in that the more the service was utilised the more the burden on the Council's budget and ultimately the ratepayer. With the prospect of the Community Centres and Halls budgets being cut annually this position was untenable. With a reduced budget this may have resulted in significant closures/ reduced service provision across the portfolio as staff hours would be more centrally aligned to bigger halls with multiple bookings during substantial periods of the 90+ hrs of operational availability Council currently provided.

One area to offset this pressure available to the management team was to increase charges by more than the 6.7% inflationary figures which were already taken account of before the application of the 10% proposed saving. This report proposed how that could be applied to the current service without, in the Officers view significantly detrimentally impacting on any specific demographic. This was affirmed when this proposal was equality screened and found to be compliant.

The management team would propose an above inflationary price rise being applied to the room bookings as detailed in Appendix 1 and 2 which detailed the average proposed price increase of 12.2%. It was envisaged that by applying these proposals the Council would more fairly and equitably apply charges to customers rather than

reducing services and/or increase the burden on the ratepayer. Over the course of the financial year, it was envisaged that the additional increase in charges would generate up to £38,000 of income which equated to approximately 5.67% of the net cost of the service and thereby made significant impact on the need to generate a potential saving of up to 10%.

Modernisation, transformation, and commercialisation processes had begun within the service with the aim of further increasing usage in each of the Centres and Halls in an attempt to ensure income targets were achieved. However, Appendix 1 illustrated that in the Centres with only a small room, higher usage resulted in an unsustainable payroll cost in comparison to the income received for the booking. For a broader context, an average room hire price was also illustrated and provides part of the rationale of this proposed revision of the charging policy. The variation in income from the suggested 6.7% increase and the proposed 12.2% price increase would make on 2024-2025 income and subsequent potential saving in net expenditure budget was also illustrated.

This charging increase, equal to £1 on all room and hall hire price per hour, was deemed the only feasible way of maintaining the current level of service provision within the much-valued Community Centres and Halls facilities on, in real terms, the reduced available expenditure budget.

It should be noted that some of the bigger Centres with multiple rooms and halls were more favourable in terms of income versus staff cost as these were still staffed by one Caretaker. Servicing more than one booking at a time.

Approval of this report would result in a more appropriately priced portfolio of Community Centres and Halls within the Borough without significantly impacting on its competitiveness within the marketplace. Additionally, approval of this report would contribute positively towards a 2024-2025 budget performance, rate setting process, and to the customers and residents of the Borough that used any of the Centres and Halls.

Members were asked to note, all prices needed to be divisible to facilitate pricing on the booking system and this accounted for part of the proposed percentage increase.

This report also detailed the proposed implementation of a new payment process for the Queens Hall (Appendix 2) which would assist greatly with the management of our bad debtors liability and meet our payment targets as detailed in previously approved corporate charging policy. In recognition of this no price increase was proposed for the actual hall booking unless bookings involving alcohol whereby it was proposed to increase this for the first time since 2015.

If approved, all user groups would be contacted to advise them of the new pricing policy details and a date for implementation, normally in line with the new seasons block booking process.

Summary

There were therefore two options detailed in this report regarding the proposed charging for Community Centres and Halls in 2024-2025.

Option 1: Implement the inflationary 6.7% increase rounded to facilitate cash handling and/or division for parts of hours bookings which would leave a potential £21,400 saving to be found from realignment of provision.

OR

Option 2: Implement the average 12.2% increase, £1 per hour to bookings as detailed in Appendix 2 and offset this level of savings without a potential detrimental impact on service provision.

Members should also have noted that the work on a specification for a transformation programme for the community centres service referred to on page 3 had been processed to a point but no further work had been done as the Head of Service reported that there were too many vacancies in the team and until that was resolved he could not focus on such a project. For example, currently there were temporary supervisors in place who also from time to time had to operate as caretakers. Over recent months and in the near future the Head of Service was focusing on the Council decision with regards to the leisure transformation requirements. It was hoped that the Community centres initiative would be developed further in 2024.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the Community Centres and Halls pricing policy proposal as summarised in option 2 above for implementation in the 2024-2025 financial year.

Proposed by Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that Council proceed with Option 1.

Proposing the alternative recommendation, Alderman Cummings noted that the estimated figure for Option 2 was based on an assumption that the Council would achieve the same level of bookings as before. He had noted over the previous year though that Members had received complaints about charging and he feared a significant increase would see a drawback from the previous figures.

Supportive of the proposal, Councillor W Irvine felt that a significant increase would be unfair and Council needed to ensure continued use of its facilities.

Councillor Kendall raised questions in relation to the Head of Leisure Services' involvement in the community centres transformation process but it was clarified that he was currently engaged in the leisure transformation requirements and not that of community halls. The Head of Leisure explained the significant upheaval that the recent exercise in leisure had caused. In terms of this report, he spoke of the

difficulties faced under the existing structure particularly in terms of staffing with two managers currently backfilling vacant casual attendant posts in relation to the opening and closing of community halls.

He explained that the current way was expensive and not what the community wanted. Council paid staff a basic rate for a one hour booking and he was not convinced it was the right way forward. There were four people working continuously around rota development and taking bookings, with staff required to be allocated to every booking and the process was far more complicated than it needed to be.

Councillor Hollywood spoke of the intended wellbeing benefits of the community halls in terms of opportunities and programmes that they offered. He felt that many areas were well catered for in that regard but believed that Kilcooley Community Centre was virtually derelict with very few programmes. He felt that given the size of the Kilcooley area and as an area of Neighbourhood Renewal, he asked how it squared with the Council's Corporate Plan, explaining that the community had been crying out for the centre to be utilised.

The Head of Leisure advised that Leisure Services provided the building but did not run the programmes. He encouraged Members to direct community groups to the centres but stressed that the Council only provided the facility. They were also marketed in the knowledge that for every booking there was a cost to the Council in terms of subsidy.

In relation to what he understood to be concerns around the condition of the centre, the officer advised that Council had invested heavily in the building since the formation of the existing Council and he would be happy to have a discussion with Councillor Hollywood about that.

Councillor S Irvine asked if there would be legal implications in allowing community groups to open and close the centres themselves and the officer advised that this was prevented through the Council's existing health and safety procedures which required a Council representative to be on site. He did though expect to see something in relation to that come out of the future transformation work to see if the community could be trained up to open the centre and cover.

Given the staffing situation referred to, Councillor S Irvine said he would welcome that approach. The Officer explained that the community asset transfer process was another option under consideration but it was complex. He suspected that as a compromise some centre management could be community led after that transformation process. In response to a further query from the Chair, the officer clarified that the community would be responsible for the asset under the terms of a CAT but Council would want to ensure a long-term commitment as short term transfers were expensive.

Alderman Adair asked about Wi-Fi availability at Portavogie Community Centre, noting that a group – the Jobs and Benefits Centre – had reported being unable to

access the service. The Officer advised that WI-FI had been installed in the centre as a result of external funding through the Belfast City Region Deal. He advised the Member to ask his contacts to get in touch with the community halls office directly rather than through elected members as that would allow any such issues to be dealt with promptly.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor W Irvine, that the Council proceeds with Option 1.

14. PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 AND Q2 PARKS & CEMETERIES (FILE CW22)

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

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually in September
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2023)

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

Reporting approach

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

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

The report for Parks & Cemeteries was attached.

Key achievements and points to note:

- Local Biodiversity Action Plan Agreed at Council
- Appointment of design team for the Ward Park Project
- A volunteer programme in Bangor Castle Walled Garden attracts eleven volunteers and we have a waiting list to join our programme.

- Green Flag Awards retained for Castle Park, Londonderry Park, Kiltonga Nature Reserve, Linear Park and Ballymenoch Park.
- Cemetery Post Box Scheme agreed for Clandeboye and Movilla cemeteries.
- Donaghadee represented Northern Ireland in the Small-Town category of the 2023 Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Britain in Bloom competition,
- Floodgates Park Business Plan created.
- Rewilding scheme extended to 90,000sqm.
- Schools Growing Club initiative was launched in September with six schools selected in Year One i.e: Towerview Primary (Bangor), Andrews Memorial Primary, (Comber), Loughries Primary (Newtownards), Holywood Primary School, St Patricks Primary (Portaferry) & St Marys Primary (Kircubbin).

Action to be taken:

- Launch of Local Biodiversity Action Plan organised for November and implementation programme announced with New Year Roadshow.
- Agreement on new Orchard at Holywood Nature Park, Kircubbin Pavilion & Laurel Bank Lane (Comber). Seven locations already planted up.
- Planning in place for a total of 15,000 trees to be planted this winter in multiple locations including Castle Park, Skipperstone Community Centre, Ballymenoch Park, Londonderry Park, Ballycran (Kircubbin).
- Planned programme of Winter Events including Tree Week and other STAND4TREES activities being planned.
- New Parks & Cemeteries Machinery Replacement & Utilisation Strategy agreed.
- Staff Business Planning Day being organised for December 1st with all staff involved in working on the Service Plan for 2024.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

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

Councillor Kendall welcomed the retainment of a Green Flag award for Ballymenoch Park and felt that Council had made great progress. She praised the trees strategy though she noted that there was a low rate of planting in some areas such as Bloomfield, and asked how the Council could ensure coverage in those areas.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that, in terms of tree coverage, it had been identified that the Borough was one of worst in the UK and Europe so had agreed to its Tree and Woodland Strategy to improve that rate. He explained that there had been notable positive changes since the implementation of the strategy in terms of what it had delivered to date with around 15,000 trees now being planted annually. He felt though that further investment through the rate setting process would be beneficial.

Councillor W Irvine noted that the cemetery post box scheme had been listed as a key achievement and he asked if there had been any feedback on that. The officer explained that post boxes had very recently been installed at Clandeboye and Movilla cemeteries but it was still too early to provide any feedback. He had noted positive media coverage of the scheme in other parts of the UK and he explained it was the intention to expand the scheme locally. Members had already asked that it be extended to further sites. A report would come back to the Committee with further details.

Councillor Douglas asked if there was any timescale for the planting of the orchards listed, notably at Laural Park Lane, Comber, and the Officer believed the planting would be complete for all orchards scheduled for 2023/24 by the end of March 2024.

Alderman Adair asked for any updates on urban trees in relation to a Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McIlveen and the Officer advised that a report was tabled in September 2023 and another would follow in April 2024 along with the annual Stand4Trees report. He was aware of a specific query by Alderman McIlveen and would be contacting him directly but the Council was not in a position to progress anything until after the rate setting process.

Alderman Adair asked about progress in relation to sand dune management work in Portavogie and the Officer advised that local biodiversity action plan appraisals had been completed and this referred to specific actions, that would guide the improvements that could be made. Theme 3 related to land management within that plan and consultancy advice recommended against doing that work within the Notice of Motion but Councils could look at other locations. It was important to get that right as it could have impacts along the coastline if it was not done in the right way or in the right places. Specialist advice was vital in that process. He pointed to issues in Newcastle where there had been previous problems as a result of well-intentioned activity.

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

15. CAMPAIGN PLEDGE: GO PEAT-FREE THIS SPRING (FILE PCA124)
(Appendix XV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that The purpose of this report was to propose a campaign 'Go Peat-Free this Spring'. Peat extraction was harmful to the environment and was destroying the UK and Ireland's countryside. Council did not purchase peat-based compost and actively prevents its use through our procurement processes. In addition, our Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP Action 55) states: Council would..."actively exclude all peat-based compost from council use and aiming for a ban on peat-based compost sales. Encourage other organisations and the community to adopt a peat free approach to growing."

Where Council had some containers already contain peat-based compost, we would top-up the compost levels in the towers, planters and troughs etc using only 100% peat-free product, resulting in a gradual shift to a completely peat-free operation.

The campaign 'Go Peat-Free this Spring' would be aimed at promoting Peat-Free Compost to our residents and highlighting the damage peat extraction was doing to our environment. Many of our most recognisable names in horticulture, such as Monty Don, The RHS and The National Trust, had already moved to peat-free growing.

This sample poster is for illustration purposes only



It was estimated that Peat was found in around half the bags of compost sold by garden centres. It was estimated that the retail gardening sector accounted for 70% of peat sold in the UK. Peat was sterile and had historically been the favoured growing compost for many gardeners. However, manufacturers had introduced 'Peat-Free' composts and where it still existed had reduced the amount of peat in bags of compost in recent years after pressure from environmental campaigners and the Government.

In England, Defra (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) had announced that sales of the amateur / retail bagged peat composts would be banned by 2024, and some peat-containing products would be banned from shelves in 2027, commercial horticulture growers would be permitted to use peat-based compost products until 2030. No ban was planned in Northern Ireland.

Peat, also known as turf, was an accumulation of partially decayed vegetation or organic matter. It was unique to natural areas called peatlands, bogs and mires. Many peat bogs were classed as sites of Special Scientific Interest. This was partly due to their ability to capture carbon dioxide (CO₂) but also because peat bogs were home to plants and wildlife that could not thrive in other environments. They were home to Britain's largest carnivorous plant. The Great Sundew and threatened birds including skylarks, curlews and snipe.

Peat formed at a rate of only 0.04 inches per year. A ten-metre-deep peat bed would take 9,000 years to form, peat extractors currently remove up to nine inches per year, and if this rate was maintained, a ten-metre bed could be completely cleared in fewer than 50 years. When peat was harvested, bogs were drained, and the top surface of the peat gradually stripped away. Not only did this destroy rare and endangered habitats and the flora and fauna that relied on them, but also allowed the peat to react with the air, releasing vast quantities of carbon dioxide.

It was estimated by Natural England that exposed peat soils could release up to 38 tonnes of carbon dioxide per hectare each year. Draining, harvesting, or burning peat releases hundreds of years of stored carbon into the atmosphere accounting for 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. In contrast, peat bogs in their natural state soak up around a tonne of carbon dioxide per hectare each year. The UK had 15% of all Europe's peatlands, and the creation of Britain's peat bogs removed 5.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locked it in the ground. Peat bogs covered just 3% of the earth's surface but stored 30% of the world's carbon. They were the world's largest carbon sink, storing more than all other types of vegetation combined.

RECOMMENDED that Council support the 'Go Peat-Free this Spring' Campaign.

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

Welcoming the report, Councillor Kendall asked if the Council now required any companies it procured to deliver services to be peat free and that was confirmed as a policy that was already in place. The Officer added that Council had not bought peat-based compost in many years. It was about pushing that message out to local gardeners and community groups as well, which had already worked well through this year's In Bloom campaign.

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

16. DISPLAY BED APPLICATIONS (FILE PCA5)

(Appendix XVI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that Council had an agreed policy for the use of Display Beds in the Borough, this policy required Officers to report to Council any applications received by external organisations.

The Council had received applications for use of multiple display beds, Officers had assessed the application and had determined that all requests met the criteria in the policy and were recommended for approval. The applications were deemed by Officers to not require equality screening.

The applications were as follows and the proposed designs of the displays were included in the attached Appendices. The Parks team would endeavour to replicate the designs as far as possible, however detail design may have altered to facilitate installation. If necessary, the Officer would liaise with the applicant if the installation may have had to be significantly different from that proposed.

Name of Group / Organisation	Display Bed applied for	Proposed dates of display	Reason for the display	Drafted Display image
North Down Samaritans	Bangor Post Office	22/07/2024 - 19/08/2024	Commemorate 50 Year Anniversary	See Appendix 1 Item 1
U3a Holywood District	Ballymenoch Park	01/01/2024 - 01/04/2024	Mark the 10 th year anniversary of the group	See Appendix 1 Item 2
Comber Bowling Club	Comber Town Square	01/04/2024 - 06/05/2024	To commemorate 100-year anniversary of the Bowling club.	See Appendix 1 Item 3

RLNI	Bangor Post Office & Newtownards Court SQ.	04/03/2024 - 04/04/2024	200 th Anniversary	See Appendix 1 Item 4 & 5
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RECOMMENDED that Council approves the above applications for the displays.

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

Responding to a query from the proposer, the Head of Parks and Cemeteries advised that there would be a floral display around each signage.

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

17. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(Councillor Chambers left the meeting having declared an interest in Item 17.1 – 8.28pm)

17.1 NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR CREIGHTON AND COUNCILLOR IRWIN

This Council recognises the importance of Bangor Sportsplex for athletics, football and community leisure facilities in the Borough and notes with concern the deteriorating conditions of the site rendering several pitches unusable, and therefore tasks council officers with producing a report regarding the future of Bangor Sportsplex, including addressing maintenance and structural issues and exploring options for the long-term provision of track and field athletics facilities in the Borough.

Proposed by Councillor Creighton, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that the notice of motion be adopted.

Outlining her proposal, Councillor Creighton praised her party colleagues including the Deputy Mayor and Connie Egan MLA for their work on the issue to date, explaining that she along with Ms Egan MLA had visited the Sportsplex and met with management and staff.

Councillor Creighton explained that Bangor Sportsplex had opened in 1997 with good transport links and parking. However, the facility had fallen into a state of disrepair with concerning issues over the running track.

She added that officers had mitigated against some of those issues but had still not managed to solve the problem. The hammer cage was no longer fit for purpose and there had been a significant reduction in the number of users post-Covid. There had also been a reduction in the opening hours of the gym which had not helped attendance figures.

The proposer felt that it was important for the Council to now set out a plan to return the Sportsplex to a first-class training facility. She spoke of the benefits that such a facility provided to mental and physical health and wellbeing and the importance of it for many existing and future athletes in the Borough.

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Irwin, rose to second the motion and referred to long standing issues with the facilities. The pitches were now closed and there was concern over the future of the running track. Those were well loved facilities for athletes, runners and footballers and she recalled training at the facility in the past when she used to play football. It was also important in that it could attract people from outside of the Borough, whether that be for use of the facilities or to spectate. For many visitors to the site being a young age, she felt that a visit to the Sportsplex was often their first impression of the Borough.

She recalled that the Committee had talked previously about the achievements of its sports people and Northern Ireland, and Ards and North Down in particular, continued to punch above its weight in producing elite athletes. To ensure future success though, Council needed to ensure investment in its sporting facilities.

Therefore, it was important that Council got a report back in order to obtain the full picture and current state of play at the site before it could take action and she hoped that Members would support the motion.

While Councillor W Irvine supported the thrust of the motion he was aware of issues of subsidence and a significant amount of money had been put in over the years. He sought clarity and the Director advised that those issues would be included in the report that the motion was requesting.

While supportive of the motion, Councillor Boyle asked for clarification if the Council had rejected spending money on the facility in previous rate setting processes. The Director advised that it had not rejected spending money, it was just one of many options that were considered but not progressed at that time. If monies had been included specifically for that they may not have been spent anyway due to the Council's policy on capital project prioritisation.

Members indicated support for the motion and the proposer had nothing further to add when given the opportunity to sum up.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Creighton, seconded by Councillor Irwin, that the notice of motion be adopted.

(Councillor Chambers returned to the meeting – 8.36pm)

17.2 NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR MCCRACKEN AND COUNCILLOR BLANEY

This Council recognises the importance of Bangor's early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council requests that officers bring back a report which evaluates how the physical link between two main sites, Bangor Abbey and the North Down Museum, could be improved, to include the renovation and potential remodelling of Bell's Walk, with consideration for improved wayfinding and lighting. The motion also requests that officers consider how Bangor Castle Gardens and The Walled Garden could be better incorporated into the walking route, and how the overall attraction could be packaged to create a more complete tourism and placemaking experience.

(Councillor McCracken joined the meeting – 8.38pm)

Proposed by Councillor McCracken, seconded by Councillor Ashe, that the notice of motion be adopted.

Outlining the notice motion, Councillor McCracken stated that the motion was about strengthening a sense of place for residents and to promote and encourage Council's offer for tourists.

A sense of place was rooted in our history and environment, he explained. Bangor's golden age of history was drawn from the foundation of the Abbey in the 6th century. Bangor became a great centre of learning known as "the light of the world" and missionaries from this city had incredible influence in continental Europe founding great monasteries like Luxeuil in France, St Gall in Switzerland, and Bobbio in Italy, which went on to become the largest in the world.

Bangor also became world famous for its music and the liturgical "Antiphony of Bangor" – written in this city - had pride of place in the Ambrosian Library in Milan. Bangor Abbey's role in intellectual history was profound. Anyone looking up the index of any history of Europe and the name of one of Bangor's most famous sons, St Columbanus, would feature time and time again. And of course, we continued to celebrate Columbanus locally through our place names, our school songs, and our festivals.

Some of that history was brought together about a decade ago via Bell's Walk, which had story boards and artistic totems along the pathway from the Abbey towards the Museum. While that was a good intervention at the time, there were some problems. First, the storyboards and totems were dirty and damaged. Second, the up-lighting at the Bangor Bell sculpture outside the Abbey was broken. That would be a wonderful feature if it was fixed. This motion called for a report to be brought to Council and the outworking of that may simply be to repair and restore what was already there.

However, he felt that the place-making could go much further. The two most important places to tell the story of Bangor was the Abbey and the Museum and the walk did not adequately connect them. He posed the question, how did we take people from the Abbey to the Bangor Bell sculpture, to St Malachi's Wall, to the start of Bell Walk to the museum. At present that was disconnected.

At the top of the hill it was not always clear to the visitor that Bell Walk continued across the entrance road to a further part of the walk. At the end of the Walk there was an old brick toilet. It was not entirely clear that the walk continued up steps and into the entrance to the Museum. So this physical link between the Abbey and the Museum could be improved with enhanced wayfinding, signage and lighting.

A further problem was the current walk skirts round Castle Gardens, which was a gem of the Park and we should seek to expand its enjoyment. At the edge of Castle Gardens was Cross Hill - where an ancient Irish Cross once stood. The views were spectacular, and the Gardens also held one of Bangor's most ancient artefacts - a stone sundial - probably more than 1,000 years old - from the original Abbey. He questioned how visitors could be connected to those amazing pieces of living history and not just storyboards. The motion asked officers to consider how Council could better integrate the Castle Gardens into the walk.

And finally, while the walk focused on the monastic foundations of Bangor, visitors would also experience Bangor's wonderful Victorian heritage, most notably in Bangor City Hall, where the museum was housed. He also wanted to explore through the motion how the current walk could be better linked to the Walled Garden, another Victorian gem of the City.

He added that the motion was not just about physical improvement, it was about promoting tourism. We needed to tell the story of our City to bring in visitors. He wondered how the Council included the Abbey into this piece, opening up outside hours of worship to tell more of its story perhaps. He questioned how Council could link this into the wider walking trail around St Columbanus - an international route 5000km long that was enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. Bangor and Castle Park was the very start of that experience, so how did Council capitalise on this and attract more tourists into the Borough? How did we package all of that and market the experience?

In closing, he explained that the motion was asking for officers to investigate those exciting possibilities in-depth and to produce a report. At one end the recommendation of that report it could simply be a restoration of an existing walkway that had fallen into disrepair. At the other end it could be a dynamic placemaking and tourism experience, that told the story of the City of Bangor, burnishing the civic pride of the people who lived there, and attracting visitors from home and abroad to experience the Borough and to support the wider heritage and hospitality offer.

The seconder, Councillor Ashe, echoed those sentiments and she too saw a fantastic opportunity, noting that the Columban Way went through a number of countries and brought many tourists to the Borough, and she felt it would be good to link other brilliant assets that the Borough already had. She took the opportunity to recognise the work of former elected member, Deborah Girvan who had been passionate about it.

Rising to support the motion, the Deputy Mayor explained that earlier this year she had attended events in St Gallen, Switzerland, for the official signing, on behalf of the Council, of the Columban Charter of Partnership and the celebration of Columbanus Day.

She explained just how much that trip had opened her eyes to the significance of St Columbanus across Europe and recalled receiving great recognition from other representatives at the signing when she explained she was attending from Bangor. This was a significant part of the Borough's history. The Deputy Mayor recalled meeting French visitors from the Friends of St Columbanus group, who had visited the Borough and were hosted by the current Mayor of Ards and North Down in Bangor City Hall. She added that the motion represented a huge opportunity and the Bell Walk was a significant part of that.

Adding his support to the motion, Councillor W Irvine spoke of the benefits it would bring for visitors in showing off some of Bangor's assets through Castle Park. It would greatly add to the Borough's tourism offer and he looked forward to the report coming back.

In summing up, Councillor McCracken thanked speakers for their support.

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

17.3 NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY ALDERMAN MCILVEEN AND COUNCILLOR KENNEDY

That this Council notes the importance of this Borough as the birthplace of the Ulster-Scots community from 1606 onwards and the role of those settlers in the development of the lands known as the Hamilton-Montgomery Estates which make up the majority of this Borough;

Notes the rich heritage of the Borough in relation to Ulster-Scots language and literature;

Notes that 19,685 people in the Borough registered a level of ability in the Ulster-Scots language in the most recent census, representing 12.4% of the population; Notes the significant potential of Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture as a catalyst for social and cultural development in the Borough;

Notes the thriving interest in the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture within the Borough;

Notes the Council's responsibility under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to take resolute action to promote Ulster-Scots;

Notes the recent recognition of the Ulster-Scots community as a National Minority of the United Kingdom under international law:

Notes the weakness of this Council's engagement with Ulster-Scots Language Week this year and in previous years;

And tasks officers to develop a budget to ensure and encourage participation in future Ulster-Scots Language Weeks; and to develop an action plan, with advice from the Ulster-Scots Agency, to develop all aspects of the Borough's rich Ulster-Scots heritage.

(Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Kennedy joined the meeting – 8.47pm)

Proposed by Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Kennedy, that the notice of motion be adopted.

Alderman McIlveen stated from the outset that he did not accept the proposed amendment from the Alliance Party that had been submitted in advance of the meeting. He felt that should be treated as an entirely new motion and asked the Alliance Party to reconsider its position and allow the original motion to proceed as presented.

Speaking to his own proposal, he added that the Notice of Motion represented the legacy, history and culture of 85% of the Borough's population as well as a specific week long community festival. The Alliance amendment that was proposed was a minority language strategy and should be considered as something very different. He was however pleased that the Alliance Party had supported his tabled motion within their proposed amendment.

The reason for bringing the motion had resulted from this Council being the only one of the nine counties of Ulster that had not taken part in the Ulster-Scots Language Week and secondly the minimal engagement in the event in preceding years.

This year Leid week had run from the 20th to 24th November and in late September he had been contacted by the Ulster-Scots Agency informally and it was mentioned that the Council had not responded to correspondence sent in June. On follow up with officers, Alderman McIlveen had been advised that the relevant officer had been absent during that period and he had been concerned that the Director did not take the issue on himself.

He chased up the issue until a response was submitted to the Ulster-Scots Agency in October and at that stage Alderman McIlveen had been informed that there was no budget available this year due to the 47% reduction in the Good Relations budget which was received externally. He had been dumbfounded by the reasoning given that all other Councils in Northern Ireland would have been affected by the same budget cuts, but Ards and North Down as the land of the Hamilton and Montgomery Settlement had allocated nothing from the Good Relations budget to Leid week.

He said that this was a Council area where 12.4% of its population had registered an ability to speak Ulster-Scots and an area where the main route between Ulster and Scotland was situated and where the legacy of those settlers could still be seen today. He referred to local landmarks at Market Cross at the top of Newtownards High Street and Bangor's Tower House which was built as a custom house in 1637 by Sir James Hamilton. Other examples included Ballywalter where White Church graveyard and the harbour had been built by Sir James Hamilton. Other sites of Ulster-Scots significance included restoration of Holywood Priory, Movilla Abbey, Kirkistown Castle, the Abbey at Greyabbey and Portaferry Castle. Those sites he explained would be lost now without Ulster-Scots interventions.

The proposer went on to name notable Ulster-Scots writers which included WG Lyttle, Andrew McKenzie, George Francis Savage-Armstrong and others that were either born or had written some of their most significant works in the Borough. He added that the majority of the Borough had been identified as one of the three core areas of Ulster-Scots in the assembled work of Professor. Robert J Gregg. The language was demonstrated through welcome signage and street and village signs throughout the Ards Peninsula.

Yet, this had been the Council which could not find any funding for Leid week in 2023. He pointed to comments made by the Mayor of Derry and Strabane stating the Ulster-Scots oral tradition was unique to that part of the world and could be heard in the everyday spoken language of people throughout the Council area and was a valued part of shared linguistic heritage there. Leid week had been seen as a unique opportunity to learn more about the rich history of the Ulster-Scots language and a range of art forms which took inspiration from the tradition. He quoted a policy officer in that Council area who had explained that the authority had been delighted to work with Ulster-Scots writers, poets and musicians and partners in the Ulster-Scots community to showcase the rich heritage of its tradition in all its forms. He referred to a further quote from the Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens who had highlighted the importance of Ulster-Scots in local culture, heritage and tradition and the importance of local people giving it a sense of belonging and place.

He spoke of the purpose of Leid Week and how it was not just about language but a celebration of culture, history and influence as well as the linguistic heritage of Ulster-Scots.

In closing, he had found it embarrassing that this Council out of all of the nine counties had not taken part. It could not just be looked at through the lens of budget cuts in this particular year but involvement over previous years had been exceptionally poor. He referred to last year's contribution which had involved a seniors group would join children from a Newtownards primary school to hear recitals of Ulster-Scots poems and discuss Ulster-Scots language together. In 2021 there had been a story-teller book launch, a biography of WG Lyttle who had lived and worked in the Borough otherwise he believed the Council would have

contributed nothing. He suspected that those contributions had not led the Council to 'break the bank' and understood that nothing was done by Council in 2019.

He pointed to events run by other Councils for Leid Week which had included walking tours, history talks, music performances, competitions and cultural evenings which were all publicly accessible. He felt that this Council could do so much better given the amount of money it poured into events – he had noted the agreement for St Columbanus in the previous motion.

In closing, he had noted a strange reluctance from this Borough to take part in Leid Week and his motion was calling for a fresh approach.

The seconder, Councillor Kennedy, provided further information on the historical links between the Borough and Scotland which went back to time immemorial, and he provided examples of those links flourishing well before the Ulster-Scots settlement in 1606. He referred to migrations from the 4th Century onwards and then to travels by St Columbanus. In 1385 a Royal Charter mentioned a chapel founded by John Kennedy of Dunure which had formerly been gifted from his ancestors to the Abbott and Cannons of Bangor in Ireland. The seal of the Abbot in Bangor showed St Comgall, the founder of Bangor Abbey, and the arms of the Abbot to whom the seal belonged which were the arms of the Kennedys of Cultra. It referred to the Reverend Father John Kennedy and the Abbot of Bangor was inscribed.

The Coronation of a Scots King of England in 1603 had led to the Hamilton and Montgomery settlement of this area and it was regarded after this an extension of the Scottish nation. In 2023 the names of Thompson, Johnson, Wilson, Brown, Campbell, Graham, Robinson, Smith, Stewart and Hamilton were the top 10 most common names in the area. He also added that the electoral register showed that 80% of residents of the Borough had Scottish surnames.

He referred to the literature of Billy Kay which stated that Ulster remained to this day one of the few major recognisably Scottish cultural communities beyond the borders of Scotland... settlements ran from the Ards Peninsula up through Antrim to the Lagen region of Londonderry. It claimed that religion, music and literature were very much an extension of the western lowlands of Scotland.

He referred to Scots being the official language of Scotland for around 400 years in the middle ages. When Britain was invaded by the Angles and the Saxons, the Saxons Germanic tongue developed into modern English south of the Humber while north of the Humber the Germanic speech of the Angles eventually become Scots. Alongside that English, lowland Scots was introduced on mass to this region following the Hamilton and Montgomery settlement. Scot and Ulster-Scots could be understood by English speakers because Scots and English both shared an old English ancestor. They had developed separately but were sister languages in the same way as Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, along with Spanish and Portuguese and Czech and Slovak.

The Ulster-Scots language had a very distinct literary heritage and explained its evolution through the 19th Century including works by WG Lyttle who was buried in the grounds of Bangor Abbey, and Bangor Abbey itself was rebuilt by the Ulster-Scots and Sir James Hamilton.

He spoke of the benefits of cultural engagement on health and mental wellbeing and learning and education. It was key to a sense of identity in terms of individuals and communities and the relationship between language and culture was deeply rooted. It was therefore to the eternal shame of the Council which he claimed had performed so pathetically in putting its shoulder to the wheel. It was something that he wanted to be rectified.

He closed by reciting words from a renowned Ulster-Scots poet James Munce.

Councillor W Irvine spoke to welcome the NOM and how the Ulster-Scots tradition and culture meant a great deal to many thousands across the Borough. It could be evidenced through the Pipe Band fraternity and Orange Lodges which demonstrated a strong appetite for it. He felt it was important to have a greater understanding of heritage and the many writers and poets who had contributed over the years.

Councillor Ashe indicated that she wished to proceed with a proposed amendment to the Notice of Motion which had been submitted in advance of the meeting in line with standing orders.

Councillor Ashe proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Moore, that this Council notes the importance of this Borough as the birthplace of the Ulster-Scots community from 1606 onwards and the role of those settlers in the development of the lands known as the Hamilton-Montgomery Estates which make up the majority of this Borough;

Notes the rich heritage of the Borough in relation to Ulster-Scots language and literature;

Notes that 19,685 people in the Borough registered a level of ability in the Ulster-Scots language in the most recent census, representing 12.4% of the population; Notes the significant potential of Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture as a catalyst for social and cultural development in the Borough;

Notes the thriving interest in the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture within the Borough;

Notes the Council's responsibility under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to take resolute action to promote Ulster-Scots;

In addition, supports the above motion and notes the Council's lack of a strategy not only for Ulster-Scots but the absence of any language strategy including Ulster-

Scots; Irish; newcomer languages; Sign languages; and languages and communications for people with disabilities.

Requests that Council officers prepare a report detailing the feasibility of creating an official language strategy for Council, similar to that already adopted by other council areas and which covers:

1. Ulster-Scots
2. Irish
3. newcomer languages
4. Sign Languages
5. languages and communications for people with disabilities

Speaking to the proposed amendment, Councillor Ashe explained that she had been disappointed with the lack of Ulster-Scots provision and she felt that it should be included. Her own family had strong Ulster-Scots links and she was disappointed to see that this Council had not participated in Leid week while others had.

The proposer said she was not trying to take anything away from the substantive motion but had just wanted to take it further. Having made enquires she had established that there was no language strategy in place within the Council and she felt it could become fragmented if further proposals for other language strategies were introduced at a later date.

Her request therefore was for a report to look at a single strategy for all other areas which was the approach of other Councils.

The seconder, Councillor Moore, rose to support the amendment, explaining that she had a great deal of affection for the Ulster-Scots language from her grandparents. She felt that the amendment would broaden and strengthen the original Notice of Motion and added that it was important for the Council to be as inclusive as possible.

Councillor Boyle rose to support the amendment. He respected that the Ulster-Scots language meant a lot to many people and he recalled its prevalence among visiting students back in the early 1970s, particularly by those who lived along the Antrim coast. He felt though that a language strategy needed to be more inclusive for the overall Council area and he felt that the amendment was enabling that. He had not recalled any previous concern or criticism about the Council in terms of promoting Ulster-Scots and he wondered why those enthusiasts of the language had not done more to promote it. He felt though that the original motion would be moving to a one-track policy and felt that the Alliance amendment was broader and more inclusive.

Summing up on the proposed amendment, Alderman McIlveen maintained that it distracted from the substantive motion. He felt that Councillor Boyle's claims of not recalling anything done in the past, suggested that he had been living in a bubble. Alderman McIlveen referred to efforts he had made in the past including during his time as Mayor where he had brought a number of initiatives forward.

The point of the original motion was to focus on celebrating culture and heritage in this period of one week that the Council seemed to miss out on. Amendments were meant to be smaller not bigger, and what that was asking for should really be a debate in its own right rather than an amendment. He was happy to debate the language strategy issue at another time as there may have been other things that need to be included in it. Council for example was working around becoming dementia friendly, jam cards and sign language and that required additional time.

This was simply to debate something that the Council had not been involved in.

On being put to the meeting with 6 voting FOR, 9 voting AGAINST, 0 ABSTAINING and 0 ABSENT, the proposed amendment FELL.

RECESS: (The meeting went into recess at 9.13pm and resumed at 9.27pm)

The Chair returned to the substantive Notice of Motion and the proposer, Alderman McIlveen, in summing up, thanked all speakers for giving their support to the Notice of Motion, reminding them that it had been included in its entirety within the fallen amendment.

The Committee indicated its agreement to the substantive motion.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Councillor Kennedy, that the notice of motion be adopted.

(Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Kennedy left the meeting – 9.28pm)

18. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Cummings, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, that the public/press be excluded from the meeting.

19. PEACEPLUS PARTNERSHIP MINUTES (FILE MINUTES) (Appendix XVII – XIX)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – Exemption relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

A report was presented to Community & Wellbeing detailing the confidential minutes of the PEACEPLUS Partnership meetings on 26th October 2023 and 9th and 16th November 2023

The report recommended that Council note the minutes.

The recommendation was agreed.

(Councillor Moore left the meeting having declared an interest in Item 20 – 9.45pm)

20. EXTENSION OF ADVICE SERVICE CONTRACT BY ONE YEAR (FILE CDW20)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – Exemption relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

A report was presented to Community & Wellbeing detailing the tender extension for the Advice Service.

The report recommended that Council extend the contract to March 2025.

The recommendation was agreed.

(Councillor Moore returned to the meeting and Councillor Chambers withdrew from the meeting having declared an interest in Item 21 – 9.46pm)

21. NORTHERN COMMUNITY LEISURE TRUST QUARTER 2 2023-2024 (FILE CW51)

(Appendix XX)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

A report was presented to Community & Wellbeing detailing NCLTs quarter 2 activity and performance.

The report recommended that Council noted the report.

The recommendation was agreed.

(Councillor Chambers returned to the meeting – 9.49pm)

22. RESPONSE TO NOTICE OF MOTION - CEMETERY MAINTENANCE (FILE PCA123)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 2. - Exemption: likely to reveal the identity of an individual

A report was presented to Community & Wellbeing detailing the response to the questions raised by a Notice of Motion.

It was recommended that Council acknowledges the challenges on the Councils Cemetery Service and supports ongoing efforts to deliver improvements in service delivery and quality as described in the report.

AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL WAS AGREED that Council Task officers to bring forward a report on tangible options to improve the maintenance of our cemeteries.

23. TENDER FOR SPORTS TURF DRAINAGE SCHEME AT CROMELLIN PARK, DONAGHADEE (PCA81)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – Exemption relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

A report was presented to Community & Wellbeing detailing the result of a procurement process for a sports turf drainage scheme.

The report recommended that Council appoint Haffey Sports Grounds in line with procurement process.

The recommendation was agreed.

24. SPORTS PITCH TENDER EXTENSION 2024 (FILE PCA81)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – Exemption relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

A report was presented to Community & Wellbeing detailing a tender extension proposal for Sports Pitches

The report recommended that Council extend the contract with Irwin Sports Grounds for 2024 with the requested price increase.

The recommendation was agreed.

25. FLORAL CONTAINER TENDER EXTENSION 2024 (FILE PCA82)

****IN CONFIDENCE****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 3 – Exemption relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person

A report was presented to Community & Wellbeing detailing a tender extension for Floral Containers

The report recommended that Council extend the contract for 12 months with Hannas Nursery to 31st December 2024 with the requested price increase.

The recommendation was agreed.

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

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

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.56pm.

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	20 December 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	05 October 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	National Association of Councillors NI - Environment/Positive Action Conference - 12-14 January 2024
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Booking Form

The Council has received an invitation from the National Association of Councillors inviting Members and Council Officers to our Conference at The Little Haven Hotel, South Shields, England. The conference will be held on 12 to 14 January 2024.

The NAC write that 'as we face a Climate Emergency and we will be looking at positive projects carried out by local authorities in the north east of England and in particular Tyneside. Delegates will learn about schemes that have just been carried out such as The Viking Energy Network Jarrow and The Holborn Renewable Energy Network. Delegates will also look at the Implementation of waste reforms.

A range of speakers who were heavily involved in driving environmental schemes forward will be in attendance and we will be discussing how these schemes are working and what the practicalities are including the political ramifications. This will be followed by a question and answer sessions.

Not Applicable

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The conference will be of use to members from all local authorities'.
The booking form can be found at appendix 1. The workshops are free of charge to attend. The costs incurred would be the delegate fee of £350 plus, travel and subsistence.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers whether it wishes to nominate a Member(s) to attend the Conference and incur travel and subsistence costs.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNCILLORS

CONFERENCE

Environment / Positive Action Conference

The Little Haven Hotel, South Shields

12th-14th January 2024

Delegate Booking Form

Name of Delegate.....

Organisation

Delegate's Email

Telephone Number.....

Authorising Signature.....Order No if reqd.....

Printed Name.....

Position.....Organisation.....

INVOICE, email address for invoice.....

To Register – Complete the delegate details above, and either: -Email a copy of this form to Generalsecretary@nationalassociationofcouncillors.org

or Post form to NAC Bookings, Council Offices, 6 Goatbeck Terrace, Langley Moor, Co. Durham DH7 6JJ

Delegate Fees: £350 plus VAT – Metropolitan, County, Unitary, Borough & District Councils

£295 plus VAT - Town, Parish and Community Councils

Accommodation is available for delegates at the Conference Hotel at the special NAC Conference Delegate rate of £85 plus VAT per night. The accommodation fee is payable by delegate on arrival at the hotel unless otherwise indicated on the booking form.

Delegate Accommodation Friday & Saturdays nights YES / NO

Local Authority to be billed direct for accommodation YES / NO

Please note that double and family rooms are also available (prices available on request)

Booking Condition: Please note that a charge is payable on any bookings cancelled. These charges will be kept to a minimum and will be in accordance with cost incurred by the NAC.

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	20 December 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community & Culture
Date of Report	07 December 2023
File Reference	PEACV-1
Legislation	The Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Peaceplus Partnership
Attachments	

At the Community and Wellbeing meeting held on 22nd March 2022 a report was tabled outlining the model for the delivery of PeacePlus and requesting that the new Partnership be granted delegated authority from Council to develop and deliver an Action Plan. This was agreed by Council on 30th March 2022.

The PeacePlus Partnership has undergone a co design process to develop a Plan for submission to SEUPB for funding of approximately £5.6m. Two out of the three themes involved in the plan have been agreed in detail to date by the partnership.

Following a review of documentation received from SEUPB and from discussions with other Councils it has been determined that AND is the only Council which has granted delegated authority to its PeacePlus Partnership for the entire design and decisions on delivery of the programme.

For example – Belfast PeacePlus Partnership completed the co design process and the passed the list of capital concepts to a Council officer subgroup to make decisions in relation to that strand of their action plan. This approach mitigates the

Not Applicable

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risk to Council of the Partnership taking a decision which could result in significant overspends on capital projects. It also deals with potential conflicts of interest of PeacePlus Partnership members.

Therefore, In order to avoid partnership decisions that may result in overspending, (which is a risk for Council and not the partnership), and conflicts of interest coming into play that may result in queries over decisions made being raised, officers believe that Council should make final decisions in this regard. While it is possible for Council to delegate a decision making function to the Partnership, Council will retain ultimate liability for any decisions the Partnership makes on its behalf. Furthermore, given the potential for decisions for be challenged and thus the importance of a robust decision making process, it is considered that from a risk perspective it would be best if decision making reverted back to the Council and the delegated authority previously granted to the Partnership was withdrawn.

It is therefore considered appropriate that Council rescinds such delegated authority to the Peaceplus Partnership from 1st January 2024, and that Partnership recommendations will be brought to Council for approval in relation to the proposals to SEUPB and the development and implementation of the Peaceplus Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council rescinds delegated authority from the PeacePlus Partnership from 1st January 2024 in order to mitigate risks to Council.

Unclassified

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

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	20 December 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	23 October 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Changes to conducting Committee and Council meetings and changes to the Standing Orders
Attachments	

Background

At recent meetings of the Party Group Leaders and the Independent and Small Member Party Group, a number of potential changes to address the length and frequency of Council, Committee and other meetings were discussed.

A number of 'good practice' actions were considered for discussion, including that:

- Officers review the number, frequency and efficacy of Working Groups, Sub-Committees and Workshops outside of the Standing Committees.
- Officers review the Council (where appropriate) and Committee meeting agenda format, taking reports requiring decision/action first, with reports 'to note' grouped together later in the agenda. For Council meetings, the aim would be to overall reduce number of reports taken to directly to Council and;
- Officers to re-issue guidance to all Members on the appropriate use of Any Other Notified Business.

Not Applicable

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In line with Article 5 of the Council's Constitution on the role of the Chairperson, it was considered useful to remind the Chair to be more robust in enforcing the Standing Orders and controlling inputs that are not relevant to the item being debated. In order to ensure appropriate support is given to the Chair to do, Officers should maintain a good understanding of the Standing Orders.

It was also considered helpful to review the Scheme of Delegation to give more responsibility to the Corporate Leadership Team. Council currently agrees the annual Service Plans and budgets. Directors are focussed on their delivery, returning to Council on exception for example, for scrutiny of performance or abnormality or if key decisions and approvals are required. A report on a recommended update of the Scheme of Delegation will be brought back to Council at a later stage. A request for a list of delegated decisions taken would not be practical at this time.

Changes to Standing Orders

In addition to the above, two changes are recommended to be made to the Standing Orders. The Standing Order as it is currently written (Standing Orders, version 9, December 2021) are outlined below, with changes to the text marked in red:

Standing Order 20.15, Duration of Speeches

- "Except with the permission of the Council, a Member, in introducing a Motion, shall not speak for more than ~~ten~~ **five** minutes and in replying, for more than ~~five~~ **three** minutes. Other speakers shall be allowed one interaction which last no longer than ~~five~~ **three** minutes. **The duration of speeches is not inclusive of the Officer's response**".

Standing Order 11, Attendance of Members at Committees

To address the number of questions raised at Council on reports previously taken to Committee, it is recommended that Members be given dispensation to request at Council that a report be taken back to the Committee where Members who are not members of the Committee will be, at the discretion of the Chair, permitted to speak but not vote. Members should note the risk of referring reports back to Committee which, if many, could impact the length of Committee meetings.

The changes are recommended as follows:

- "Any Elected Member may attend a Committee meeting of which he/she is not a Member, ~~but may not take a Council seat within the main meeting area and instead should sit in the public gallery if and~~ **subject to permission of the Chairman of the Committee, shall be given dispensation to speak on a matter that has been referred back to the Committee for consideration, but shall not, unless he/she is a Member of the Committee, vote in any division or propose any resolution or amendment. A matter may only be referred back to the Committee once. Items considered by the Planning Committee may not be referred back by an Elected Member who is not a Member of the Planning Committee.** If the public and press are excluded from the meeting the Member is not required to leave the room but rather be bound by the restrictions imposed at that part of the meeting.

Not Applicable

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Standing Order 17.1, Motions

The changes are proposed as follows:

- Notice of every motion, other than a motion which under Standing Order 17.2 may be moved without notice, shall be given in writing, signed by at least two Members of the Council giving the notice, to the Chief Executive not later than at least five working days before the next meeting of the Council. Each motion must have a proposer and seconder. The motion must be clear in meaning otherwise it shall be rejected until such time as it is resubmitted in clear language. **Prior to lodging a notice of motion, members should take the opportunity to engage with the relevant Director on current action being taken and options available to have the subject matter addressed. This may assist members in formulating the terms of notice of motion. The motion must be submitted and not later than five working days before the meeting.**

Standing Order 17.1.7 –

- If the subject matter of any motion of which notice has been properly given comes within the remit of any Committee it shall, upon being moved and seconded, stand referred without discussion to that Committee, or to such other Committee as the Council may determine, for consideration and report. The Presiding Chairperson may, if they consider it urgent and necessary to the dispatch of business, allow the motion to be dealt with at the meeting at which it is brought forward. **Where such a motion is deemed urgent, the Presiding Chairperson shall give notice of this decision to the Members at least one day in advance of the meeting at which that motion is to be heard.**

Stand Down Standing Orders

Members should be aware when making these decisions, that under Standing Order 29 – Suspension and Amendment of Standing Orders - that any motion to, add to, vary or revoke the Standing Orders will, when proposed and seconded, stand adjourned and be referred without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council and any resultant amendment will be ratified at the meeting.

Any motion under this Standing Order to suspend the Standing Orders shall require the support of a qualified majority vote and suspension can only be for the duration of the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council agrees to adopt the 'good practice' changes in this report and further considers the recommended changes to the Standing Orders as set out and agrees that they are stood down without debate for one month, being brought back to the Council meeting in January 2024.

Unclassified

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ITEM 13**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Exemption Reason	Not Applicable
Council/Committee	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting	20 December 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	11 December 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Notice of Motion Status Report
Attachments	Notice of Motion Status Report

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. Please note that as each motion is dealt with it will be removed from the report.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes the report.

NOM REF	DATE RECEIVED	NOTICE	SUBMITTED BY	COUNCIL MEETING DATE	COMMITTEE REFERRED TO	OUTCOME OF COMMITTEE WHERE NOM DEBATED	MONTH IT WILL BE REPORTED BACK TO COMMITTEE	OTHER ACTION TO BE TAKEN
-	31/05/15	Rory McIlroy recognition	Councillor Muir	Jun-15	Corporate Services Committee – October 2015	Agreed	TBC	Further Report to follow in March 2024.
	21/01/19	Shelter at slipway in Donaghadee	Councillor Brooks & Cllr Smith	Jan-19	Environment Committee	Agreed	TBC	Officers awaiting feedback from potential funder
-	25/09/19	Report on feasibility of holding annual remembrance service for those lost to suicide	Councillor Martin	Oct-19	Corporate Services – November 2019	Agreed	TBC	Further Report to follow, awaiting proposer feedback .
NOM118	16/01/20	Closing of a public right of way at Andrew Shorefield, Groomsport	Alderman Keery	Jan-20	Corporate Committee – February 2020	Agreed	TBC	Report at Nov 2023 CSC. NOM closed. NOM to be removed from tracker from Dec 2023
	20/10/20	"I would like to task officers to produce a report to consider what could be a more environmentally friendly and benefit the wellbeing of the community for the use of the disused putting green on the Commons and play park at Hunts park in Donaghadee . Following the success of the Dog park in Bangor and the demand for a Dementia garden, both should be considered as options in the report. The process should involve consultation with the local community."	Councillor Brooks	Oct-20	Community & Wellbeing Committee – December 2020	Agreed	TBC	Officers to liaise with Regeneration and consideration of Masterplan and also take into account play strategy local consultation when it takes place in Donaghadee and bring back a report thereafter.
	10/05/21	That officers are tasked to bring back a Report on how the Council might approach a Climate Change Action Plan and perhaps including - but not limited to - a review of all Council long-term investment, a Borough-wide engagement via an Innovation Lab, a Conference of Ideas, and values-based recommendations for next steps.	Councillors Walker & Egan	Jun-21	Environment Committee – October 2021 (deferred from September Committee)	Agreed	TBC	Various strands of work taking place across different departments on development of Council Climate Action Plan - led within Corporate Services Directorate.
	31.12.21	Coastal and Storm Damage to Ballywalter Harbour, repair costs and reinstatement costs	Councillors Adair and Edmund	Jan-22	Environment February 2022	Agreed	TBC	Report to be brought back to a future meeting

	13.04.22	Environmental damage caused by modern day packaging	Councillors McRandal and Douglas	Apr-22	Environment Committee – June 2022	Agreed		Report to be brought back to a future meeting
	17.05.22	2028 Centenary of the internationally renowned Ards TT races. Asking Council how best to commemorate this important sporting anniversary.	Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Kennedy	May- 22	Community and Wellbeing June 2022 - Place & Prosperity	Agreed	Reported to November 2023 P&P, agreed and ratified by Council	NoM transferred to P&P Committee.
	19.05.2022	Business case for redesign of the parallel sports pitches and facilities at Park Way, Comber	Councillors Cummings and Johnson	Jun-22	Community and Wellbeing Committee – September 2022 –		TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future Committee
NOM164	20.06.2022	Review of health and safety process re community groups	Councillors MacArthur, Brooks, T Smith and Kennedy	Jun-22	Corporate Services Committee - deferred to October 2022	Agreed	TBC	Further report to be brought back after the workshop which is to take place in January 2024.
NOM165	20.06.2022	Report exploring the possibility of introducing a policy that shows commitment to supporting the wellbeing of our workforce by ensuring appropriate support is available to anyone undergoing IVF.	Councillor Greer and Councillor McKee	Jun-22	Corporate Services Committee – deferred to October 2022	Agreed	TBC	Further Report to follow during 2024.
	21.06.2022	Engagement with relevant community stakeholders to ascertain community need and desires in respect of the Queen's Leisure Complex	Councillors Kendall, McRandal and McClean	Jun-22	Community and Wellbeing Committee – September 2022 – deferred to October 2022		TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future Committee
NOM181	5.07.2022	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 Received from Councillor Cathcart - 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.	Alderman Irvine & Keery	Jul-22	Environment Committee - September 2022	Amended and agreed	TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future Committee once advice from the Cabinet Office is received.
NOM167	24.08.2022	That this council withdraws all funding to any sporting organisations with any political objectives or named references to terrorism in their constitution, club names, stadiums or competitions, and tasks officers to bring back a report outlining the specific relevant council policy.	Cllrs Cooper, T Smith and Councillor Irvine	Aug-22	Corporate Committee – deferred to October 2022	Amended and agreed	TBC	NoM Transferred to C&W Committee. C&W Officers considering report to be brought to future Committee
	22.08.22	Street Clutter Audit for the Borough	Councillor Dunlop and Councillor Douglas	Sep-22	Environment Committee – October 2022	Agreed	Reported to October 2022 EC Committee	Report to be brought back to a future meeting

	21.09.22	Humane control of Pigeons in Conway Square, Newtownards	Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Sep-22	Environment Committee 2022	Agreed	Reported to October 2022 ENV Committee	Signage has been erected in Conway Square
	16.11.22	That Council officers open discussions with Historic Environment Division regarding the return of the 13th century 'Movilla Stones' to the Borough and the provision of a suitable site for these to be located. Officers are also tasked with promoting these extremely important archaeological artefacts in the local community and local schools when the stones have been returned.	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Cummings	Nov-22	Community & Wellbeing - December 2022	Agreed	March and June C&W Committee	Officers to discuss further with HED and report to future C&WC when final arrangements for return of the stones is agreed.
NOM 172	09.12.22	That this Council adopts the White Ribbon Pledge to ' <i>Never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls</i> ', agrees to sign the Pledge, and tasks Officers to bring back a report outlining how we can amalgamate existing relevant policies, undertake the Listen, Learn, Lead programme within the Council, and identify effective routes to encourage other agencies and organisations in our Borough to engage with the White Ribbon Project.	Councillors Douglas & Walker	Dec-22	Corporate Services Committee – January 2023 Community and Wellbeing Committee - TBC	Agreed	TBC	14/3 it has been agreed that this NOM will transfer to PCSP/C&W. Officers considering with a report to a future C&W Committee
	13.12.22	That this Council expresses concern with the number of residential and commercial bins left on public footways in the Borough long after the bin collection date. Bins left on public footways are not only unsightly, they can lead to hygiene and contamination issues, as well as safety concerns, forcing pedestrians onto the road due to the blocking of a footway. This Council notes its own lack of enforcement powers to tackle this issue and expresses concern at the Department for Infrastructure's reluctance to use its own enforcement powers. Accordingly, this Council agrees to write to the Department for Infrastructure asking the Department to engage with Councils with the aim of creating appropriate enforcement powers to tackle this issue. Council Officers, will in the meantime, bring back a report to the appropriate committee detailing action that the Council can take under current powers to try address the issue of bins left on public footways.	Councillors Cathcart and MacArthur	Dec-22	Environment Committee – January 2023	Agreed	June Committee	Alternative proposal agreed at June Committee. Update report to be brought to a future meeting (date to be confirmed) Letters sent to DfI and PSNI 12/10/23 - Acknowledgement rec'd from PSNI 13.10.23
	08.12.22	This Council acknowledges the environmental and health benefits associated with the recent increase in cycling and declares Ards & North Down a cycling friendly borough. The Council also recognises that people who cycle are among the most vulnerable road users, and tasks officers with producing a report detailing ways in which we can help improve safety. The report should include possible sources of funding, potential partnerships, and ways in which we can promote good relations between users of different forms of transport	Alderman Wilson & Councillor Douglas (Postponed from Dec Council to Jan Council)	Jan-23	Community and Wellbeing Committee – February 2023		June C&W Committee	Further report to future C&WC including the report to recommend declaration.

		Building on the practice of other council areas, that this council tasks officers to liaise with DfI Roads as a matter of urgency to offer its assistance in providing self-service grit piles for residents and to post locations of such grit piles on the council website	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Cathcart	Jan-23	Environment Committee – February 2023	Agreed	November	Agreed to provide self-help grit boxes to be located at community centres
	08.01.2023	That this Council writes to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure expressing concern that the provision of a footpath at Shore Road Ballyhalbert is currently not considered a priority by the Department following the completion of a feasibility study which demonstrated need. That the Council highlights the road safety concerns raised by residents for pedestrians using the Shore Road from the village to the residential developments including Park Homes and St Andrew's. That Council requests that the Department for Infrastructure makes the installation of a footpath a priority and commits to deliver the scheme as a matter of urgency.	Councillors Adair & Edmund	Jan-23	Place & Prosperity – February 2023	Agreed and ratified at Council 5.7.23	TBC - still awaiting response from DfI Perm Sec	Perm Sec's of DfI ltr of 10.8.23 reported to Sept P&P where it was agreed that that Council writes to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure expressing disappointment at the lack of understanding in the response... CEx issued letter 3.11.23, response to be reported to P&P when received.
	18.01.2023	The prolonged cold weather spells just before Christmas and last week resulted in icy, slippery, and dangerous footpaths and car parks in the Borough's City and town centres. It is not acceptable that in such circumstances the Council does not have a plan or the resources or facilities to grit these areas to enable residents to walk safely to and from the main shopping areas or fall when they step out of their cars onto ice. It is proposed that officers bring back a report with costs to outline what steps can be taken to ensure that Council car parks and footpaths in the City and town centres are gritted when the weather is forecast to have heavy snowfall or prolonged freezing weather conditions.	Councillors Morgan and McRandal	Jan-23	Environment Committee – February 2023	Agreed	October	Agreed that officers bring back a report detailing the legal advice that backs up this risk assessment and that this report is brought back to the Committee and a review is undertaken of other NI Council policies on Council owned carparks during freezing weather conditions. This should include analysis of how gritting of car parks and footpaths is delivered by any Councils that do so.
	18.01.2023	That Council, subject to consultation with addressees on the road, considers changing the name of that stretch of the A21 in Newtownards which runs from Portaferry Road to the junction with upper Greenwell Street, Newtownards currently named New Road to Viscount Castlereagh Avenue as a mark of the life and legacy of Robert Stewart, 2 nd Marquess of Londonderry, who was known by the courtesy title of Viscount Castlereagh during most of his life, in the 200 th year of his passing.	Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Feb-23	Environment Committee March 2023	Agreed	TBC	Report to be brought to future meeting
	08.02.2023	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. football. A report to be brought back to Council following said discussions.	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery	Feb-23	Community and Wellbeing Committee March 2023	Agreed	TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future Committee
NOM180	14.02.2023	This Council rename the square at Portavogie War Memorial Queen Elizabeth Square in memory of our late Sovereign Queen Elizabeth II.	Councillor Adair and Councillor Edmund	Feb-23	Corporate Services March 2023		TBC	Officers considering next steps for further report to be brought back once advice from Cabinet Office is

	20.3.2023	That this Council explores the possibility of supporting the Bookstart Early Years Pilot across Ards and North Down. A report is brought back detailing information about the programme, how it could be supported across the Borough, including cost and potential delivery partners.	Councillors Gilmour & Cathcart	Mar-23	Community & Wellbeing Committee 21/06/2023	Agreed - subject to ratification by June Council	TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future C&W Committee
TBC	20.3.2023	That this Council recognises the issues and concerns detailed in the letter sent to the Chief Executive by The Kircubbin Harbour Action Group and agrees to write to the Permanent Secretaries of the Departments of Infrastructure and Communities, asking them to provide details of the responsibility they have in ensuring the public safety of the harbour and listing any details of dealings their departments have had with the owner.	Councillors Thompson & Adair	Mar-23	Place and Prosperity Committee June 2023	Agreed and ratified at Council 5.7.23. Discussed at P&P 7.12.23 - Amended and agreed that Council defer a decision on the Kircubbin Harbour report to February 2024	Feb 2024 P&P	CEx issued ltrs to Perm Secretaries of DfI and DfC 2.8.23 - Kircubbin HAG to consider response. P&P 7.12.24 agreed that Council defer a decision on the Kircubbin Harbour report to February 2024
573	09.06.2023	That this Council requests officers to bring back a report with full costings and budgetary options outlining pragmatic solutions to tackling anti-social behaviour in the Bank's Lane car park, Ballyholme including the restricting of access to the car park at night. In addition, officers should clarify ownership of the Bank's Lane as part of the solution.	Alderman K Douglas and Councillor Cathcart supported by Cllr W Irvine, Cllr Blaney, Cllr McKimm and Cllr McCracken	Council July 2023	Heard at Council - 05.07.2023	Heard and Agreed at Council meeting 05.07.2023	November	Amendment Agreed. That this Council approves Option 1 as set out in this report for the installation of hydraulically operated bollards at Bank Lane Car Park, straddling the project over two financial years. Furthermore, the Car Park Capital Budget for 24/25 is reviewed during the estimates process to determine whether additional capital budget could be allocated.
575	31.07.2023	That this council notes that the number of households with homelessness status on the social housing waiting list across NI has increased from 12,431 to 26,310 households between 31 March 2013 and 31 March 2023, an increase of 111.7%; notes the enormous strain the homelessness system is under with the number of households in temporary accommodation at unprecedented levels; agrees that this council has a role to play in preventing homelessness in this borough alongside other organisations and bodies in the Public, Statutory and Voluntary sectors; calls on this Council to assess how it contributes to homelessness prevention through carrying out an audit of its services; and requests that Officers bring back a report detailing the homelessness prevention work currently supported as well as how the Council's community planning function can further support homelessness prevention work in the local area	Councillors Creighton and Moore	Council - August 2023	Community & Wellbeing Committee- September 2023	Agreed - ratified at September Council	TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future C&W Committee

576	01.08.2023	That this Council recognises the significant public concern created by the feud between rival organised crime groups within Ards and North Down. This feud which began in March 2023 has led to violence, criminal damage, and communities living in fear. We ask that Council contact representatives of the Talking Paramilitarism Programme including The Executive Office and Department of Justice seeking their shared engagement with Council and elected representatives focusing solutions to address this issue, and to reduce the prospect of a similar occurrence in the future. Further to this we ask the Communities in Transition Programme to broaden its remit across the Borough to help create a culture of lawfulness, and strengthen community resilience against organised crime and coercive control.	Councillors Smart & P Smith	Council - August 2023	Heard at Council August & Agreed			
577	02.08.2023	This Council condemns without reservation the threats made to District Judge Mark Hamill and the attack on Newtownards Courthouse as an attack on the rule of law which is the basis of a democratic and free society. Furthermore, this Council affirms its full support for the PSNI in investigating and bringing to justice those who have committed criminal acts within this Borough and encourages everyone to assist the legitimate authorities in this endeavour.	Aldermen McIlveen & Armstrong Cotter, Councillor Kennedy	Council - August 2023	Heard at Council August & Agreed			
		That Council task officers to bring back a report on the costing to install signage identifying the townlands of Ballyblack and Kirkistown and that officers are tasked to bring forward proposals to incorporate townland signage across our Borough.	Alderman Adair, Councillors Edmund & Kerr	Council - August 2023	Environment Committee - September 2023	Agreed - ratified by September Council	To be confirmed	
581	18.09.2023	That Council notes the increasing complaints regarding the poor condition and appearance of our cemeteries across the Borough and tasks officers to bring back a report on options to improve the maintenance of our cemeteries which are places of special significance to those who have lost loved ones.	Alderman Adair, Councillor Douglas and Alderman McIlveen	27-Sep-23	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Agreed subject to ratification at October Council	December C&W Committee	

NOM 185	31.08.2023	Education should be accessible to all who seek it and embedding a culture of lifelong learning in our society is essential to enabling people to realise their potential. Part-time flexible learning is crucial to meeting the skills needed to build a modern, inclusive and green economy. Part-time students are a unique demographic, they are more likely to have disabilities, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, have caring responsibilities, such as children or elderly relatives, and in general, be part of a 'hard to reach' group who missed out on full-time study. Lifelong learning, including non-formal education, addresses social issues, strengthens communities and builds civic engagement. It is the most effective tool for meeting social policy objectives and creating positive social change. Recognises that lifelong learning must become a meaningful and developed policy area with tangible actions and outcomes, underpinned by the wealth of best practice and innovation from across the UK and Ireland. This Council therefore resolves to: · To work with the Lifelong Learning Alliance to develop a Lifelong Learning campaign, to inform and raise public awareness of how lifelong learning transforms lives and communities. Engage with MLAs and MPs to prioritise funding for formal and informal part-time education when the Executive is formed. Encourage MLAs to form an All-Party Group on Lifelong Learning to support and evidence and best-practice informed approach to policy making, in collaboration with adult education bodies to form a voice for Lifelong Learning in the Assembly when an Executive is formed	Councillor Moore and Councillor Creighton	Sep-23	Corporate Services- October 2023	Agreed to recommend	Update report to Corporate February 2024	Letters sent to MLA's & MP's for Strangford and NDown and other Councils
NOM 186	06.09.2023	That this Council, recognising its commitment as a responsible employer, and that staff are paid the current Living Wage, tasks officers to explore becoming 'Living Wage' accredited with the UK Living Wage Foundation, as well as ensuring any regularly contracted employees and workers, including those who are employed externally to deliver Council services, are paid the living wage hourly rate. It also explores becoming Living Hours and Living Pensions accredited too.	Councillor Woods and Councillor McKee	Sep-23	Corporate Services- October 2023	Agreed to recommend	TBC	Accreditation to be sought by HR.
		That Council recognise the value of our Beaches and coastal environment to our residents and tourists alike note the new DEARA regulations for the cleaning and maintenance of our beaches and task officers to bring forward a report on cleaning and maintaining our beaches on a proactive basis in line with the new DEARA regulations to ensure our beaches continue to be a clean, safe, attractive and well-managed coastal environments.	Alderman Adair, Councillor Edmund and Councillor Kerr	Oct-23	Environment Committee - November 2023 - Community & Wellbeing Committee	Agreed subject to ratification at November Council	TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future C&W Committee
		That this council asks officers to include the repainting of the traditionally styled bus shelter (owned by council), located in Main Street Grey Abbey, in the 2024/25 maintenance budget. Furthermore Council seeks an officer's report on the feasibility of council painting the decorative Grey Abbey lamp posts (in the ownership of DFI). This is a feature of the historic village, and we understand the current shabby condition impacts not only residents of the village, but the wider tourism and regeneration potential of this scenic conservation area.	Councillor Wray and Alderman Smith	Oct-23	Environment Committee - November 2023	Agreed subject to ratification at November Council		
NOM 187	16.10.23	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.	Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Martin	Oct-23	Corporate Services November 2023	Agreed	TBC	Report to February 2024 committee .

NOM 592	27.10.23	This Council recognises the importance of Bangor Sportsplex for athletics, football and community leisure facilities in the Borough and notes with concern the deteriorating conditions of the site rendering several pitches unusable, and therefore tasks council officers with producing a report regarding the future of Bangor Sportsplex, including addressing maintenance and structural issues and exploring options for the long term provision of track and field athletics facilities in the Borough.	Councillor Creighton and Councillor Irwin	29.11.23	C&W December			
	16.11.23	That this Council amends its flag policy to include the flying of the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round.	Councillor S Irvine, Councillor W Irvine and Alderman Brooks	29.11.23	Corporate December			
NOM 595	16.11.23	This Council recognises the importance of Bangor's early Christian heritage in the story of our city, and its role in local tourism strategies. This Council requests that officers bring back a report which evaluates how the physical link between two main sites, Bangor Abbey and the North Down Museum, could be improved, to include the renovation and potential remodelling of Bell's Walk, with consideration for improved wayfinding and lighting. The motion also requests that officers consider how Bangor Castle Gardens and The Walled Garden could be better incorporated into the walking route, and how the overall attraction could be packaged to create a more complete tourism and placemaking experience.	Councillor McCracken and Councillor Blaney	29.11.23	C&W December			
596	20.11.23	Ulster Scots - tasking Officers to develop a budget to ensure and encourage participation in future Ulster Scots Language weeks; develop and action plan, with advice from the Ulster-Scots Agency, to develop all aspects of the Borough's rich Ulster Heritage	Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Kennedy	29.11.23	C&W December			
597	20.11.23	Arts cuts to funding - That this Council calls for a reversal in cuts to the arts and agrees to join as a signatory to Equity NI's latest open letter to the Permanent Secretary of DfC. Call for the restoration of a reformed Executive and Assembly to take decisions which could future proof the arts sector and protect funding in the future.	Councillor Wray and Councillor Smart	29.11.23	C&W January			
598	20.11.23	That this Council continues discussions with the Education Authority concerning the redevelopment of the play area fronting Victoria Primary School, Ballyhalbert (which is a shared facility between the school and public) and tasks officers to source external funding streams to enhance recreation & sports facilities for the village and surrounding area. Further, Council notes the poor condition of Ballyhalbert children's play park and tasks officers to bring forward a report on enhancing and improving the play park to meet the needs of local children.	Alderman Adair and Councillor Edmund	29.11.23	C&W January			

599	21.11.23	<p>“That this Council recognises the invaluable work undertaken by community/voluntary groups and organisations in this Borough in identifying and tackling the needs of communities and residents. The Council therefore, commits to undertaking a root and branch review of community development funding, arts and heritage, sports development and all other funding streams to ensure that it provides the most efficient, effective and responsive service to our community, thus maximising impact, accessibility and equitable allocation of resources. The review should examine the following 4 categories: (see further wording on agenda)</p>	<p>Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Gilmour</p>	29.11.23	<p>C&W January</p>			
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In September, the Institute of Public Health (IPH) and Tobacco Free Research Institute (TFRI) hosted a webinar to launch the findings of a new report, "[Children and gambling - evidence to inform regulation and responses in Ireland](#)".

The report examined gambling prevalence among Irish teenagers (15-16-year-olds) based on a secondary analysis of 2019 data from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), conducted by IPH and TFRI.

The report found that 22.9% of 16-year-olds in Ireland reported gambling for money in the previous year, but this rate was higher among boys at 28.2% compared to 17.9% for girls.

This short video summarises the key takeaway messages from the webinar launch, which considered the report findings, policy implications, and future research.

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Further to our email yesterday, a copy of the accompanying press release is below. If you use social media, some key messages have been tweeted here: <https://twitter.com/mediasay> and the Commissioners have released short videos about the Report on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/@IndependentReportingCommission>

SIXTH REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REPORTING COMMISSION

The Independent Reporting Commission (the IRC) has today published its Sixth Report on progress towards ending paramilitary activity.

The Commission was established in 2017 to report annually on progress towards ending paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland. The Commission is governed by an international treaty between the UK and Irish Governments which reflected the terms of the Fresh Start Agreement concluded by the two Governments and the Northern Ireland parties in 2015.

Commenting on the findings and recommendations in the Sixth Report, the Commissioners said:

“Paramilitarism represents a continuing threat to individuals and society and must continue to be given sufficient attention and focus to ensure that it becomes a thing entirely of the past.

“We characterise 2023 as “mixed” in terms of paramilitarism. The security situation data showed levels broadly in line with the last few years, although the recent increase in shootings is a concern.

“There were some shocking incidents during the year involving both Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries. These included the attempted murder of Detective Chief Inspector John Caldwell (which was instrumental in the raising of the Threat Level in Northern Ireland-related Terrorism from “substantial” to “severe”) and a number of incidents occurring under the banner of Loyalist paramilitarism, including a high-profile drug gang feud, which served to underline how quickly situations can escalate. Coercive control continues to be an unacceptable feature of life in many communities where the paramilitaries operate.

Commenting on evidence of progress being made, the Commissioners added:

“There is increasing evidence that the work undertaken by the Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme (“the Programme”) is bearing real fruit.

“We welcome an increasing focus on collaborative working by all of the entities involved, with a relatively new structure at the top chaired by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, ensuring strategic leadership on a joined-up basis at a senior level, and there are strong examples of inter-agency collaboration at working level. Evaluation and data are showing that various projects are making a tangible difference in individual lives, communities, and services provided, and we see good evidence of joined-up and collaborative partnerships.

“We believe that there are growing indications that the cumulative impact of collective law enforcement efforts, including on the part of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force, is having an

impact on the groups and their leaderships. Prevention, collaboration and partnership work, including neighbourhood policing, must continue to be adequately resourced and funded. We acknowledge and welcome the commitment of the senior leadership team at the PSNI to this approach.

The Commissioners highlighted the political and economic challenges impacting on progress, and the continuing need for commitment to this work:

“A lot of good work has been delivered and there is much more to be done. We encourage a wide conversation about how we can strengthen and deepen efforts to tackle paramilitarism.

“Instability at political level has not helped. There are no grounds for complacency. Rather, the need for a sustained focus on tackling and ending paramilitarism remains essential.

“Policing and criminal justice measures are essential in bringing paramilitarism to an end, but they are not enough in themselves and need to be situated within a wider, more holistic approach that includes tackling the deep and systemic socio-economic conditions which are linked to the continuing existence of paramilitarism and which particularly affect certain communities. We welcome the fact that that is the direction of travel of the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme and encourage the continuation of that approach.

“It is vital that appropriate funding is provided not only for dedicated work to tackle paramilitarism, but also for transformational work to address the socio-economic context and for related core service delivery.

“We recommend an ambitious new Programme for Government, which both restates a collective commitment to tackling paramilitarism, and sets ambitious economic and social policy goals, including for education and poverty, which will help address the socio-economic conditions which are linked to the continuing existence of paramilitarism.

“The effect of the cost-of-living crisis is disproportionately felt in those communities already struggling in socio-economic terms, which are often communities where paramilitary influence tends to be at its strongest. We call on the Government to give continued special consideration to the needs of communities where paramilitaries mainly operate in measures addressing the cost-of-living crisis in Northern Ireland.

The Commissioners repeated their recommendation for an agreed formal process of Group Transition, involving direct engagement with the paramilitary groups themselves, to bring about disbandment.

“In our Fifth Report we proposed an intermediate step in the form of the appointment by the two Governments of an Independent Person, who would scope and prepare the ground for a possible process of engagement, with a view to bringing about Group Transition to disbandment. We appreciate the engagement to date with the two governments on our Recommendation, and the fact that they are giving it positive consideration; we urge them to progress the implementation of this Recommendation as soon as possible.

In conclusion, the Commissioners said:

“A core goal of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was ensuring that the future was based on exclusively peaceful, democratic politics and that paramilitarism would become a thing entirely of the past. We believe that just as risks had to be taken to achieve peace in the 1990s, and dialogue underpinned those endeavours, so today it is worth taking further risks in order to achieve the goal of ending paramilitarism once and for all..

“As 2023 draws to a close, and while nothing is guaranteed, we believe that the opportunity to deliver the promise of a definitive end to paramilitarism exists in a very real way. Achieving the goal of tackling paramilitarism will require political leadership from every quarter. The task now is to ensure that every opportunity to meaningfully tackle paramilitarism is taken to the full.”

From: IRCommission Enquiries <enquiries@IRCommission.org>

Sent: Monday, December 4, 2023 3:16 PM

Subject: IRC Sixth Report - planned publication tomorrow, Tuesday 5 December 1pm

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.

We are contacting you to advise you that the Independent Reporting Commission will publish its Sixth Report on Tuesday 5 December.

The Report will be available to view at www.ircommission.org/publications at 1pm tomorrow, and we will email you a PDF as well. If you would like a hard copy of the Report then please let us know.

Best wishes,
IRC Staff Team

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