

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/C/

Minutes of Council Meeting held on Monday 7 October 2024 at 6.00pm in Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick

In the Chair: Councillor P Byrne

In attendance in Chamber:

Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor J Brennan
Councillor W Clarke	Councillor L Devlin
Councillor C Enright	Councillor K Feehan
Councillor A Finnegan	Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor M Gibbons	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor V Harte
Councillor J Jackson	Councillor G Kearns
Councillor C King	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor A Lewis
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor A Mathers
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor S O'Hare
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor S Murphy
Councillor A Quinn	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Rice	Councillor M Ruane
Councillor G Sharvin	Councillor D Taylor
Councillor J Truesdale	Councillor H Young

In attendance via Teams: Councillor R Howell (unable to take part in discussions)

Officials in attendance: Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services
Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability and Environment
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active and Healthy Communities
Ms S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Mrs D Starkey, Democratic Services Officer

C/148/2024

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Andrews, Campbell, Finn, Howie, McEvoy, K Murphy and Tinnelly.

The Chairperson advised that a request for an emergency notice of motion had been received which would require a suspension of Standing Order 16.1 by a qualified majority vote, which would require 80% of those Members present and voting. He advised that this would be dealt with when the motions were being discussed.

The Chairperson welcomed Corey Brownfoot and his family to the meeting who were in attendance following an invitation from Councillor Alan Lewis. Members were advised Corey, unfortunately, had been the victim of an incident of bullying however, Corey was not going to let this incident affect him and had committed to walk with the Chairperson in the St Patricks Day parade in Downpatrick.

The Chairperson expressed condolences on behalf of Council to the family of Daniel Greer, who had sadly passed away following a long battle at 16 years of age.

C/152/2024 **SPECIAL COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 27 AUGUST 2024**

Read: Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 27 August 2024 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held on 27 August 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Kearns, seconded by Councillor Hanlon.**

C/153/2024 **SPECIAL COUNCIL MINUTES FOR ADOPTION AND SIGNING OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Read: Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 23 September 2024 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of the Special Council Meeting held on 23 September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Harte.**

COMMITTEE MINUTES FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION

C/154/2024 **MINUTES OF ECONOMY, REGENERATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Read: Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 September 2024 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism Committee Meeting held on 9 September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted on the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor.**

C/155/2024 **MINUTES OF STRATEGY POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Read: Minutes of Strategy Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 12 September 2024 (copy circulated).

Agreed: **The Minutes of Strategy, Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held on 12 September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Quinn.**

C/156/2024

**MINUTES OF ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Read: Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 16 September 2024 (copy circulated).

Agreed: The Minutes of Active and Healthy Communities Committee Meeting held on 16 September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Finnegan, seconded by Councillor Magennis.

C/157/2024

**MINUTES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2024**

Read: Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 September 2024 (copy circulated).

Agreed: The Minutes of Sustainability and Environment Committee Meeting held on 18 September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and adopted, on the proposal of Councillor Young, seconded by Councillor Brennan.

C/158/2024

CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

Read: Report dated 7 October 2024 from Mrs Ward, Chief Executive, regarding an update on correspondence received for the attention of Council.

Correspondence from the Department for Communities in response to Notice of Motion, Winter Fuel Payment, Anti-Poverty and Fuel Poverty Shortages (C/147/2024)

On behalf of her party, Councillor Finnegan welcomed the Minister's response, which echoed Council's frustration with Labour government for its decision to limit Winter Fuel payments and whilst the commitment to develop the Anti-Poverty Strategy was appreciated she said there was a need to concentrate and act to protect the most vulnerable in society.

Councillor Finnegan stated the Affordable Warmth Scheme referred to by the Minister, which was introduced to tackle fuel poverty, was stretched to its limits due to underfunding and that had rendered the Scheme non targeted and slow in delivering much needed assistance. She said it was crucial the Minister focused on delivery to protect those who narrowly miss out on the Winter Fuel Payment and pressure must be applied on the British Government to ensure that people here could live in warm and safe homes.

Councillor Sharvin spoke of concerns at the response and how it was unlikely the Fuel Poverty Strategy would be ready before March 2026 and questioned what the most vulnerable were to do within that period of time, particularly those that would not benefit from the Winter Fuel Payment.

In response to a query from Councillor Sharvin it was confirmed all Executive Parties had been written to and to date this was the only response that had been received.

Correspondence from NI Water in relation to Economic Constraints (C/143/2024)

Councillor Hanna strongly voiced his disappointment at the response from the NI Water and referred to the 1,300 units within Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area that were to be impacted as detailed within the correspondence. He voiced his concern as a Planning Committee Member and the impact these constraints had for the Local Development Plan making the Plan irrelevant.

Councillor Hanna spoke of how in Annalong sewers could not cope due to overdevelopment and how there were problems with rainfall and overflow. He stated it was unacceptable that NI Water could not give an indication how to move forward with such problems, where excrement was overflowing in places including a Council owned harbour and that was unacceptable.

Mrs Ward advised every Council in Northern Ireland was saying the same and assured Members that Council would continue to work with and liaise with NI Water.

Councillor Feehan echoed Councillor Hanna's frustration and concerns and made reference to a statement from NI Water in 2023 in which it was stated that in the Price Control 21 period (2021/22 – 2026/27) the Newry Mourne and Down District Council area would benefit from approximately £109million of capital investment in upgrading water and wastewater assets.

Councillor Feehan proposed Council write to NI Water to request a breakdown of how much of the £109 million Capital Investment had been spent to date (as it was now halfway through that period), when the remainder was going to be spent and if the full £109million was to be spent would that address all the issues raised within the correspondence received or was additional capital required.

Councillor Hanna seconded Councillor Feehan's proposal.

Agreed: **It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Hanna that Council write to NI Water to request a breakdown of how much of the £109 million Capital Investment had been spent to date (as it was now halfway through that period), when the remainder was going to be spent and if the full £109million was to be spent would that address all the issues raised within the correspondence received or was additional capital required.**

Correspondence from the Department for Communities in relation to Public Consultation Summary Report: Section 10 Regulations, Private Tenancies Act (NI)

In welcoming that private landlords needed a qualified electrician to provide inspections and Reports, Councillor D Murphy said clarity was needed on if there would be sanctions on landlords to carry out necessary work.

Mrs Ward advised clarification would be sought on what sanctions there would be if there was failure to comply and an update report would be presented to the Sustainability and Environment Committee.

Noted: **An update report to be presented to the Sustainability and Environment Committee regarding clarification on what sanctions there would be if there was failure to comply with Section 10 Regulations (Electrical Safety Standard), Private Tenancies Act (NI) 2022.**

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor McAteer to note the correspondence report and the following correspondence:

- **Correspondence from the Department for Communities in relation to Public Consultation Summary Report: Section 10 Regulations, Private Tenancies Act (NI)**
- **Correspondence from the Department for Communities in response to Notice of Motion, Winter Fuel Payment, Anti-Poverty and Fuel Poverty Shortages (C/147/2024)**
- **Correspondence from NI Water in relation to Economic Constraints (C/143/2024)**

C/159/2024 **NOTICE OF MOTION – PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Truesdale:

"That this Council welcomes publication of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) by the NI Executive; agrees that the PfG should include a standalone Mission on Peace and Peacebuilding; further agrees that peacebuilding, reconciliation, equality and inclusion are vital to achieving the key ambitions in the Programme for Government; notes that political instability and societal division are major barriers to growing Northern Ireland's economy, improving public services, tackling poverty and supporting communities; and agrees to write to the First and deputy First Minister to call for the inclusion of a Mission on Peace and Peacebuilding in the Programme for Government before the PfG public consultation deadline on 4 November 2024".

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Lee-Surginor.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Truesdale stated there were important objectives and priorities within the Draft Programme for Government however, believed, as a Party, that there was a significant gap in the lack of a dedicated mission on peace and peace building. She stated this would ensure the reconciliation, diversity, equality and inclusion were embedded in everything the Executive did.

Councillor Truesdale outlined that division was costing Northern Ireland millions of pounds each year and directly depleted the resources that the country had to tackle waiting lists, provide social housing reform, deliver special educational needs provision, increase police numbers and deliver many of the other objectives contained within the Programme for Government. She stated the economic growth depended on values, peaceful communities and political stability.

Following lengthy discussions and confusion expressed by Members as to the meaning behind the motion, Councillor Truesdale agreed to withdraw the motion and explore the matter through NILGA instead.

Agreed: **The motion was withdrawn by Councillor Truesdale.**

C/160/2024 **NOTICE OF MOTION – SIGN LANGUAGE**

The following Motion was received from Councillor Devlin:

"Noting with regret the recent decision taken by BBC Northern Ireland to remove sign language from its lunchtime news bulletin, and the decision to move this feature solely to its digital edition, this Council stands in solidarity with members of our deaf community, will write to the Director of

BBC Northern Ireland calling for the reinstatement of sign language to the lunchtime bulletin, and will also write to the Minister for Communities seeking an update on the development of the awaited Sign Language Bill, so as to enshrine the right of deaf people to access services in one's own language into law."

The Motion was seconded by Councillor McAteer.

In presenting the motion, Councillor Devlin spoke of how the deaf community in Northern Ireland faced various unique challenges that highlighted the necessity for tailored support and services. She stated the decision by BBC NI to withdraw sign language from their lunchtime news broadcast sent a really poor message to those who were deaf or hearing impaired and relied on sign language to communicate with others.

Councillor Devlin spoke of how at a recent party conference she had spoken with a representative of the National Deaf Children's Society about the impact this decision had on not only those who were deaf but their wider families. She highlighted that approximately 6% of the population here were deaf with British Sign Language their primary language and yet they could not access the TV news at the same time as others. This segment was only 90 seconds, a very small proportion of the day and Councillor Devlin believed this decision should be reversed.

Councillor Devlin pointed out the Communities Minister was yet to publish the long awaited Sign Language Bill which would enshrine the rights of deaf people to access services in one's own language. Social integration and community engagement were vital and addressing these needs through targeted policies and community initiatives would enhance the quality of life for deaf individuals in Northern Ireland.

Councillor Devlin said she believed the community deserved their needs to be met by Government and this began in their ability to access the news in their own language as well as the publication of the overdue Sign Language Bill.

Councillor McAteer joined Councillor Devlin by saying that what was being witnessed once again was diminution of services to those less well off in terms of disabilities in Northern Ireland.

He spoke of his disappointment that the media was driven by commercial terms and how the BBC should be obliged to support minorities and in a more respectful manner. He pointed out that there was no consultation on this and the escape clause of the news being signed on the digital platform was not acceptable as this was not available for everybody. Councillor McAteer said it was essential that Council write to the BBC to ensure that this be looked at again.

Councillors Taylor, Sharvin, Hanna, Hanlon and Truesdale all spoke in support of the motion on behalf of their respective parties and voiced their dismay at the decision taken by the BBC.

Councillor Truesdale proposed an amendment that Council also write to the Director General at the BBC. Councillor Devlin agreed to Councillor Truesdale's amendment.

Councillor Devlin thanked Members for their support for the Motion and looked forward to responses back from the various bodies and hoped that it would make a difference.

The Motion was unanimously agreed.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Devlin, seconded by Councillor McAteer to note with regret the recent decision taken by BBC Northern Ireland to remove sign language from its lunchtime news bulletin, and the decision to move this feature solely to its digital edition, this Council stands in solidarity with members of our deaf community, will write to the Director of BBC Northern Ireland and the Director General

at BBC calling for the reinstatement of sign language to the lunchtime bulletin, and will also write to the Minister for Communities seeking an update on the development of the awaited Sign Language Bill, so as to enshrine the right of deaf people to access services in one's own language into law.

EMERGENCY NOTICE OF MOTION

The Chairperson advised an Emergency Notice of Motion had been received, the wording of which had been emailed to all Councillors and to enable it to be heard, it would be necessary to suspend Standing Order 16.1 for which a qualified majority vote was required. (80% of Members present and voting).

It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Galbraith to suspend Standing Order 16.1 at this point of the meeting to allow the tabling of the emergency Notice of Motion received by the Chairperson from Councillor Feehan.

The Chairperson put the matter to a recorded a vote, the results of which were as follows: (copy attached)

FOR:	27
AGAINST:	6
ABSTENTIONS:	0

It was agreed by a qualified majority vote to suspend Standing Orders 16.1.1 (copy attached)

C/161/2024

EMERGENCY NOTICE OF MOTION – NILGOSC BONDS

The following Motion was received from Councillor Feehan:

“This Council notes that Northern Ireland Local Government pension provider NILGOSC purchased government bonds from the Israeli government which are being used by the Tel Aviv administration to fund its operations both within Israel and other territories.

As the pension provider for all local council workers, the Education Authority, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, NI Libraries and many others including schools, it is a shock to many of the 176,000 members of this pension scheme that it is directly funding the Netanyahu-led government. Given the widespread horror felt by people of all political backgrounds at the targeting of civilians and children by the Israeli government in the war in Gaza the use of workers' and public sector money in a loan to the Israeli government is unacceptable. Newry Mourne and Down District Council expresses its deep concern at the decision to purchase these bonds and calls on NILGOSC to dispose of them immediately.”

The Motion was seconded by Councillor Galbraith.

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Feehan spoke of his shock when it was reported in the press that these bonds formed part of an investment portfolio, as he was sure were too the tens of thousands of other workers that were paying their pension contributions into the fund.

Councillor Feehan continued that the bonds in essence acted as an investment loan to the Israeli Government that had overseen the death of more than 42,000 Palestinians, more than half of whom were women and children over the past year.

Councillor Feehan stated NILGOSC said they had a fiduciary duty which allowed them to defend the purchase which essentially sees the North's public sector workers, its public employees and employers contributing to the Tel Aviv administration.

Councillor King spoke in support of the motion and referred to Sinn Féin recently tabling an Ethical Procurement Policy Motion proposing that no Council awards any contracts or utilises services provided by companies involved in breaching human rights and international law. This Initiative came at a time when corporations were profiting from protracted armed conflict and systematic violations of human rights.

Councillor King continued that his party deplored any business that should profit from these conflicts or violations of human rights or that local councils would be in any way, potentially directly or indirectly, complicit with such profiteering. He stated this policy needed to be reviewed and implemented as a matter of priority and encourage companies to meet their human rights, obligations and empower Councils to meet international human rights principles and guidelines.

Councillors Hanna, Taylor, Jackson and Reilly advised they would not be supporting the Motion and spoke of their disappointment that it had been brought on the anniversary of the Massacre and when Israelis and families were mourning and remembering their loved ones as well as those still held in captivity.

Councillor Taylor said that the scheme was one which if not compelled to remain within it and if someone had concerns or wished to take a principle stand on it they could remove themselves from it at any stage without tying every Councillor into it as they had different views on the Middle East political situation.

Councillor Jackson stated he felt this was grandstanding at its finest and that NILGOSC was under a fiducial duty not to invest or invest for political reasons. He stated that the small holding of Israeli government bonds represented less than 0.007% of the total fund and that disposing of these investments purely out of hatred for Israel would not be legal. Councillor Jackson also spoke of how it could generate significant uncertainty for pension scheme owners themselves.

Councillor Reilly spoke of his heartbreak at the sight of children, regardless of what side they were on, suffering and being killed as part of deliberate acts of violence.

In reply, Councillor Sharvin asked Councillors to be mindful that this was the first Council meeting since the information had been shared and it was not to be insensitive in any way as the SDLP as a party had called out what it was a horrific incident to occur this time a year ago.

Councillor Truesdale on behalf of her party thanked Councillor Feehan for bringing the Motion however expressed concern that immediate divestment could immediately place pensions in jeopardy.

Councillor Truesdale proposed an amendment to the motion, the wording of which was circulated to Members to read as follows:

“This Council notes that Northern Ireland Local Government pension provider NILGOSC purchased government bonds from the Israeli government which are being used by the Tel Aviv administration to fund its operations both within Israel and other territories. As the pension provider for all local council workers, the Education Authority, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, NI Libraries and many others including schools, it is a shock to many of the 176,000 members of this pension scheme that it is directly funding the Netanyahu-led government. Given the widespread horror felt by people of all political backgrounds at the targeting of civilians and children by the Israeli government in the war in Gaza the use of workers' and public sector money in a loan to the Israeli government is unacceptable. Newry Mourne and Down District Council expresses its deep concern at the decision to purchase these bonds and

calls on NILGOSC to dispose of them immediately and engage with pension holders about disposal of the bonds and work to develop an ethical investments framework to consider for all future investment”.

Councillor Feehan accepted Councillor Truesdale’s amendment.

Councillor Feehan wished to make it clear that he unequivocally condemned the actions of Hamas on the 7 October 2023 and was against all violence in all of its forms, against all innocent people.

The Chairperson put Councillor Feehan’s amended Motion to a vote by a show of hands, the results of which were as follows:

FOR: 27
AGAINST: 6
ABSTENTIONS: 0

The Motion was carried.

Agreed: It was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Galbraith that Council notes that Northern Ireland Local Government pension provider NILGOSC purchased government bonds from the Israeli government which are being used by the Tel Aviv administration to fund its operations both within Israel and other territories. As the pension provider for all local council workers, the Education Authority, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, NI Libraries and many others including schools, it is a shock to many of the 176,000 members of this pension scheme that it is directly funding the Netanyahu-led government. Given the widespread horror felt by people of all political backgrounds at the targeting of civilians and children by the Israeli government in the war in Gaza the use of workers' and public sector money in a loan to the Israeli government is unacceptable. Newry Mourne and Down District Council expresses its deep concern at the decision to purchase these bonds and calls on NILGOSC to dispose of them immediately and engage with pension holders about disposal of the bonds and work to develop an ethical investments framework to consider for all future investment.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 19.32pm.

For confirmation at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 4 November 2024.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Chief Executive

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORDED VOTE

DATE: 7th October 2024

VENUE: Downshire Civic Centre

MEETING: Council

SUBJECT OF VOTE: **Suspension of Standing Order 16.1 to hear Councillor Feehan's Motion**

COUNCILLOR	FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
T Andrews				1
C Bowsie		1		
J Brennan	1			
P Byrne	2			
P Campbell				2
W Clarke	3			
L Devlin	4			
C Enright	5			
K Feehan	6			
D Finn				3
A Finnegan	7			
C Galbraith	8			
M Gibbons	9			
O Hanlon	10			
G Hanna		2		
V Harte	11			
R Howell				4
T Kelly				5
J Jackson		3		
G Kearns	12			
C King	13			
M Larkin	14			
D Lee-Surginor	15			
A Lewis		4		
O Magennis	16			
A Mathers	17			
D McAteer	18			
L McEvoy				6
D Murphy	19			
K Murphy				7
S Murphy	20			
S O'Hare	21			
A Quinn	22			
H Reilly		5		
M Rice	23			
M Ruane	24			
G Sharvin	25			
D Taylor		6		
J Tinnelly				8
J Truesdale	26			
H Young	27			
TOTALS	27	6		8