

NEWRY MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting
held on Monday 15 April 2024 at 6.00pm in the Boardroom, Monaghan Row.**

Chairperson: Councillor M Ruane

**Committee Members
in attendance:**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor P Campbell	Councillor W Clarke
Councillor K Feehan	Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor G Hanna	Councillor G Kearns
Councillor A McMurray	Councillor S Murphy
Councillor A Quinn	Councillor J Tinnelly
Councillor J Truesdale	

Officials in attendance: Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mr J McGilly, Assistant Director of Regeneration
Ms M Boyle, Head of Tourism Development and Visitor Experience
Ms A McVeigh, Head of Regeneration and Business Development
Ms S Burns, Head of Programmes
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer
Mrs N Stranney, Democratic Services Officer

ERT/033/2024: APOLOGIES / CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillor King.

ERT/034/2024: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Campbell declared an interest in item 7 – Financial assistance Call 1.

ERT/035/2024: ACTION SHEET ECONOMY, REGENERATION & TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING MONDAY 11 MARCH 2024

Read: Action Sheet arising out of the Minutes of the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on Monday 11 March 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

ERT/025/2024 – Councillor Campbell queried an update on the breakdown of the Peace Plus reserve list as requested previously. Ms Burns advised that she would forward the requested information to the Member.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Andrews, seconded by Councillor Campbell, it was agreed to note the Action Sheet arising from the Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee Meeting held on Monday 11 March 2024.**

NOTICES OF MOTION

ERT/036/2024: NOTICE OF MOTION C/059/2024 – DEMOCRATIC IMPROVEMENTS IN COUNCIL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism, regarding Democratic Improvements in Council Financial Assistance Programme. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Bowsie noted his dissatisfaction with the report and reiterated his suggested improvement points again.

He advised that he had raised the issues contained within his motion for a period of a year, and believed his next option was to table a notice of motion at Council. He advised that he believed that officers had made decisions on his motion, prior to any elected member having spoken or voted on the motion.

Councillor Bowsie queried some responses contained within the report as follows:

- How it was possible that 99% applicants were surveyed as being satisfied given a 42% drop in funding?
- Were Council concerned that the judgement criteria remain the same, given a £20,000 decrease in funding?
- How could the appeals panel be independent, given they also work for the same organisation? Could an independent person be appointed?
- Why could an applicant not appeal a decision if it transpired that Council Officers were at fault when considering the application?
- Could the application questions be amended to be clearer to applicants?
- Why could Members not be more involved in the consideration of funding approval and oversight of the application process?

Councillor Bowsie then proposed an amendment to the report, seconded by Councillor Hanna, to add a fourth recommendation as follows:

“This Council requests a report to be brought back to committee to include options on ways to resolve the democratic shortcomings as outlined in the original notice of motion.”

Prior to the debate continuing, the Chairperson highlighted that Councillor Bowsie’s motion had been actioned following the same guidelines as all motions referred to Committee from Council.

Mr Mallon confirmed that the officer’s report contained factual information to inform the debate at the Committee meeting that officers had made recommendations for consideration.

Councillor Truesdale spoke in support of the motion, highlighted her experience with other UK funders and stressed her belief that Council’s process was cumbersome and inefficient. She highlighted that members had no detail on how a decision was reached on an application. She expressed her concerns at the lack of right of appeal at stage one and queried the ability of workshops to build capacity and be available to assist with the completion of applications. She supported Councillor Bowsie’s call for Councillors to have more information in relation to the outcome of applications. She then suggested a paper be brought back to committee following a review of processes.

Councillor Tinnelly queried how an independent appeals panel member could be identified, and what weight would be given to their decisions during the application process. He confirmed his

belief that Councillors should remain removed from the process as it was set up to negate any perceived bias.

Councillor Clarke reiterated Councillor Tinnelly's comment that Councillors remain removed from the process. He agreed there was the need to address shortfalls in certain areas, however stated an appeal process at stage 1 would not be beneficial if the application had not been completed correctly. He stressed that a mechanism was required if applicants were unsuccessful at that stage.

Councillor McMurray supported the belief that Councillors remain blind to the application process. He queried if the process was internally reviewed and refined at any stage to allow for ongoing improvements to be made. He agreed that capacity building needed to be included across all departments involved in the process.

Mr Mallon confirmed that policies, procedures, and processes were continually being reviewed with amendments as required.

In conclusion, Councillor Bowsie stated that an independent panel member should have been included as an option to be debated, and advised that they could be appointed from an external body that was familiar with an appeals process. He welcomed the capacity building plan but highlighted his motion arose from problems with existing applications.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor Hanna, the following was agreed:

- **To note the content of the report.**
- **That members agree that Council have implemented a consistent Financial Assistance process since Council adopted the policy at AHC on 21 March 2019 and Full Council on 1 April 2019.**
- **Members agree that further capacity building is undertaken to work with groups in areas where applications are low in number.**
- **That the policy and procedure of the financial assistance is reviewed, and a paper brought back to committee.**

FOR DECISION

ERT/037/2024: SMALL SETTLEMENTS SCHEME

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Jonathan McGilly, Assistant Director, Regeneration, regarding Revitalisation Schemes in Annalong, Dundrum, Hilltown, Killyleagh and Killough/Strangford, Meigh and Newtownhamilton. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr McGilly detailed the progress of the small settlement scheme and noted that Council was in the process of identifying underspend, which, if available, would be allocated to phase two of the Rostrevor Public Realm scheme.

Councillor Tinnelly expressed his concern over a potential impact of a delay on the lead in time for granite, stating he believed it to currently be 3-4 months from order to delivery. He queried the lack of a figure within the report, and stated that it was unclear what percentage of phase 2 any underspend would cover. He proposed an amendment to the wording of section 3.2 of the Officer's Report, that "*subject to confirmation of funding availability proceed with all elements of Rostrevor EI Scheme Phase 2*" and noted that it was his understanding that Council would cover a shortfall in any of these schemes, once any underspend had been reallocated, following a notice of motion agreed at full Council.

Mr Mc Gilly advised that it was not currently possible to confirm the level of funding as there were still elements of the scheme to be delivered, stating the purpose of the report was to ensure maximum spend within the overall envelope of funding and it was not feasible to go outside of the agreed funding contract.

Mr Mallon added that if any additional capital investment was required, it would have to follow normal governance procedures to allocate the fund. He reiterated that the proposal was to ensure that all the funding allocated was spent in full.

Following a query from Councillor Ruane, Mr McGilly advised that over the next few months an accurate figure would be available with regards to underspend as a number of schemes were due to be completed.

Following a query from Councillor Andrews, Councillor Ruane confirmed that any underspend within a particular area must still be spent on that scheme, it could not be allocated to other projects within the area.

Councillor Hanna noted that the Annalong Revitalisation Project was still incomplete, and highlighted some difficulty contacting the officer involved. Mr McGilly advised he would follow up with the Member following the meeting.

- AGREED:** **On the proposal of Councillor Hanna, seconded by Councillor Tinnelly, the following was agreed:**
- **To accept the DFC/DFI/DEARA Letter of Offer Extension until the 30 June 2024 (4 EI Schemes) and 30 September 2024 (7 Revitalisation Schemes).**
 - **That subject to confirmation of funding availability, proceed with elements of Rostrevor EI Scheme Phase 2.**

ERT/038/2024: TOURISM ACCOMMODATION GRANT FUND

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Michelle Boyle, Head of Tourism, Product Development & Visitor Experience, regarding Tourist Accommodation Funding Call. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Boyle outlined the report and proposed revised criteria.

Councillor Campbell queried the revision from 30 beds to 15 from the original proposal, and asked whether the fund was an annually recurring fund, or a one off spend.

Ms Boyle noted the reduction in required beds was taken following engagement from local businesses regarding demand and a minimum of 15 beds was required to achieve hotel status. She confirmed that the call for funding was open but would be reviewed after 12 months.

Councillor Clarke proposed the report stating that it was an excellent initiative and would boost tourism and construction within the district. He advised that this fund would also help boost attendance at major festivals and events, as accommodation was a necessity for some.

Councillor Andrews queried whether any efforts had been made by officers regarding hotel provision for Rowallane area. Mr Mallon advised that it was an open call across the District that anyone could apply for, subject to meeting the criteria as outlined.

Following a query from Councillor Hanna, Ms Boyle advised that the requirement had to be 15 beds within one establishment, and that this could be either a new development

or an extension of an existing establishment.

Following a query from Councillor Tinnelly, Ms Boyle advised that the final draw down of the funding was subject to the establishment having achieved hotel grading from Tourism NI, and subject to approval of planning permission.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Andrews, it was agreed to proceed with the Financial Assistance capital grant programme as outlined in section 2.1.**

FOR INFORMATION

ERT/039/2024: **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE CALL 1**

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Tourism, regarding Financial Assistance Call 1 2024 – 2025 Schemes. **(Copy circulated)**

Having declared an interest in this item, Councillor Campbell left the chamber for discussion on this item – 06.47pm

Ms Burns advised that due to the number of applicants they had to be scored and ranked, with some placed on a reserve list. She noted that those on the reserve list would be contacted, subject to budget, through the year.

Councillor Bowsie expressed his disappointment that only 6 of the successful applications were from the Rowallane area and stated that he could not support the recommendations.

Ms Burns advised there were plans to work with the DEA coordinators to look at capacity issues within Rowallane. She noted that 29 applications had been received from Rowallane.

Ms Burns advised that there were 14 successful applicants from Rowallane, with some having been placed on the reserve list, due to both budget constraints and quality of application.

Following dissent with the chamber, the Chairperson put the recommendations to a show of hands vote, with the results as follows:

For	10
Against	0
Abstentions	3

The motion was declared carried.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor S Murphy, the following was agreed:**

- **To approve the attached appendices for revenue projects and issue letter of offers post Council ratification and Call-in.**
- **Pre-letter of offer conditions met prior to issue of full letter of offer issued and where this is not satisfied budget to be re-allocated.**

ERT/040/2024: TOURISM STRATEGY 2024-2029

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Ms M Boyle, Head of Tourism, Product Development and Visitor Experience, regarding the consultation analyses and approve the Tourism Strategy 2024-2029. **(Copy circulated)**

Ms Boyle presented the report, and noted that this was compiled following a 12 week consultation and feedback from the industry database of tourism businesses.

Councillor Feehan commended the report and noted his thanks to all officers involved. He proposed an additional recommendation, that “Council facilitates a tourism workshop in Newry with tourism providers and tourism stakeholders to share and discuss the strategy in detail, prior to the public launch of the 2024-2029 strategy.” This was seconded by Councillor Andrews.

Mr Mallon noted that Council holds a number of themed industry days throughout the year. He suggested the tourism strategy could be discussed as one of the themes. Councillor Feehan was content with this.

Councillor Truesdale raised the following concerns regarding the strategy:

- She noted a poor response rate and queried how the consultations could be improved.
- She noted the valuable comments in Appendix 1 and highlighted that there were no supportive gondola comments.
- She noted a lack of detail about how the strategy would be implemented.
- She highlighted concerns surrounding roads, car parking facilities and rubbish within the areas.

Councillor Hanna reiterated Councillor Truesdale’s comments, with the exception of the gondola project. He noted his Party’s work in contributing to the Tourism Strategy and his belief that this had not been reflected within the strategy and stated that his Party would not support the recommendations.

Councillor Clarke thanked everyone involved in compiling the strategy. He noted in particular the outdoor activity tourism and highlighted the increasing number of people now utilising the outdoor spaces. He stated that while the document was a high-level strategy and would not provide details on its implementation, it was important to ensure that the basic facilities were right for visitors arriving.

Councillor Campbell queried the title of Mourne, Gullion and Strangford, and noted that two were Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) while one was a village and strayed into another Council area. He further noted that he had suggested Mourne, Gullion and Lecale and queried if there had been any consideration given to changing this.

Ms Boyle noted that this was the brand that had been consulted on and tested in the market.

Mr Mallon noted this had been debated through a number of workshops, and the consensus was that Mourne, Gullion and Strangford was the preferred option.

Following dissent within the chamber, the recommendations of the report were put to the floor for a show of hands vote, with the results as follows:

For	12
Against	2
Abstentions	0

The motion was declared carried.

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Andrews, it was agreed to note the consultation analyses recommendations in Appendix 1 and to Approve the Tourism Strategy 2024 – 2029 as Appendix 2.

ITEMS RESTRICTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PART 1 OF SCHEDULE 6 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Campbell, seconded by Councillor Andrews, it was agreed to exclude the public and press from the meeting during discussion on the following matters which related to exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information).

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor Campbell, it was agreed

The Chairperson advised the following had been agreed while in closed session.

ERT/041/2024: SIGNAGE TENDER 2024

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Jonathan McGilly, Assistant Director, Regeneration, regarding Tender for Street Nameplates. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor S Murphy, it was agreed to consider the contents of the report and approve the business case proposal (Appendix 1) to tender for street nameplates

ERT/042/2024: TOURISM EVENTS PROCUREMENT

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Ms M Boyle, Head of Tourism, Product Development and Visitor Experience, regarding procurement of a supplier for Tourism Events **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Kearns, seconded by Councillor Campbell, it was agreed to note the contents of the report.

FOR NOTING

ERT/043/2024: BUILDING CONTROL 6 MONTHLY REPORT

Read: Building Control 6 Monthly Report 01 September 2023 – 29 February 2024 **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Campbell, it was agreed to note the Building Control 6 Monthly Report 01 September – 29 February 2024.

ERT/044/2024: CARLINGFORD LOUGH GREENWAY UPDATE

Read: Report dated 15 April 2024 from Jonathan McGilly, Assistant Director, Regeneration, regarding Carlingford Lough Greenway Update **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Campbell, it was agreed to note the letter of offer now received from the shared Islands Fund totalling €1.5 million and to note the update on completed scheme procurement and current programme.**

ERT/045/2024: LICENSING 6 MONTHLY REPORT

Read: Licensing 6 Monthly Report dated 01 September 2023 – 31 March 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Feehan, seconded by Councillor Campbell, it was agreed to note the Licensing 6 Monthly Report dated 01 September 2023 – 31 March 2024.**

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 07.10pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Tuesday 7 May 2024.

Signed: **Councillor M Ruane**
Chairperson
Economy, Regeneration & Tourism Committee

Signed: **Mr C Mallon**
Director Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
