

NEWRY MOURNE AND DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of Strategy Policy & Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 14 November 2024 at 6.00pm in the Council Chamber, Downshire Civic Centre

In the Chair: Councillor T Howie

In Attendance in Chamber:

Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor W Clarke
Councillor C Enright	Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor C King	Councillor D McAteer
Councillor S O'Hare	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Rice	Councillor G Sharvin

Committee Members in Attendance via Teams:

Councillor P Byrne	Councillor A Quinn
--------------------	--------------------

Non-Committee Members In Attendance: Councillor T Andrews

Officials in Attendance in Chamber:

Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services
Ms C Mallon, Director Economy, Regeneration & Tourism
Mrs S Murphy, Director of Sustainability & Environment
Mr A Patterson, Director of Active & Healthy Communities
Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer
Mrs N Stranney, Democratic services Officer

SPR/173/2024: APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Mathers and Taylor, and from Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive.

SPR/174/2024: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

SPR/175/2024 ACTION SHEET ARISING FROM STRATEGY, POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 17 OCTOBER 2024

Read: Action Sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting held 17 October 2024 **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Rice, seconded by Councillor O'Hare, it was agreed to approve the action sheet of Strategy, Policy & Resources Committee meeting of 17 October 2024.**

FOR CONSIDERATION

SPR/176/2024

MID-YEAR ASSESSMENT – PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024-2025

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Improvement, regarding Mid-Year Assessment – Performance Improvement Plan 2024-2025. **(Copy circulated)**

Mr Byrne outlined the overview of Council’s progress in implementing the Performance Improvement Plan for 2024 – 2025 between April and September 2024, highlighting that the information may be subject to change following the verification of year end data.

Councillor Reilly expressed his shock at 10% target being met with regard to dog fouling and littering enforcement, stating that it was not nearly sufficient enough for such a large geographical area. He stated that Council needed to be issuing more fixed penalty notices, stressing that officers should be more proactive in identifying illegal dumpers and dog fouling, and to start bringing criminal cases forth if required.

Councillor Hanlon echoed Councillor Reilly’s sentiments, stating that while she did not know what the solution was, she stressed that more needed to be done to increase enforcement action to address the littering and fouling issues.

Councillor Enright noted that Council should compare enforcement statistics with other Councils, suggesting Ards and North Down Council as one with a high level of enforcement activity.

On a point of clarity, Councillor Hanlon stated that a private company was in use regarding enforcement action on dog fouling and therefore any comparison would not be fair for Council.

Councillor Sharvin noted that an educational plan regarding dog fouling was particularly important, stating that education campaigns had a positive impact on the issue being highlighted, and further stated that a league table would be a better comparison tool.

Mrs Murphy acknowledged that there had been a significant reduction in the fixed penalty notices issued against the annual target, taking account of the change in staffing within the enforcement team and reminded Members that the department was working through a recruitment initiative following approval of a recent restructure. She highlighted that one of the new roles included an education and enforcement manager who would be responsible for bringing forward an education campaign and enforcement plan to deal with the issues highlighted. She further advised that resources were currently being directed to administering the legislative changes that had recently come into effect regarding XL Bully breed dogs.

Councillor Howie then brought Members attention to a recent Notice of Motion that had been tabled at last month’s Sustainability and Environment Committee, commending the work that had gone into the report and the positive discussions within the Chamber regarding that, further highlighting that an online reporting tool was being considered by the Directorate.

Councillor Byrne acknowledged that some targets were being met but stressed that Council could not stop aiming to improve, further acknowledging that it was difficult to catch and

report an instance of dog fouling and requested that street cleanliness be addressed to help tackle the issue.

Councillor Clarke supported the education and awareness campaign already mentioned, highlighting the importance of gaining community buy in alongside an awareness and accountability campaign, referencing the success of previous campaigns on the same issue. He then queried what action had been taken on consulting with fast food outlets regarding littering and the option of using less packaging.

Mrs Murphy advised that there was ongoing engagement with fast food outlets and reiterated that the ongoing work was linked to specific roles with the recently approved Sustainability & Environment structure that was currently being implemented.

Mrs Murphy asked Members to forward reports of fouling to the relevant officer as these helped officers address problematic areas, and further encouraged Members to consider the recommendations that arose from the Notice of Motion that had been tabled at Committee last month.

Councillor Hanlon queried the decrease in leisure membership, stating that she was aware people were paying for private gyms and queried what market research and customer feedback was being carried out in order to help attract new members.

Mr Patterson acknowledged the need to increase the number and variety of classes within the leisure centres, noting that some feedback had been received regarding this, and a report was due to be tabled at the Active and Healthy Communities Committee in the coming months with a proposed new programme. He further advised that the next quarter would focus on a satisfaction survey to help drive ideas for the new year and highlighted that Newry Leisure Centre re-opening in the new year would help drive activity.

Councillor Clarke queried the decrease in activity at the Tropicana site and what the reasons for this were, to which Mr Patterson advised that the weather over the summer period did not help to boost numbers and stressed that he was mindful to look at progressing the redevelopment of the Newcastle Centre with a report being tabled in the coming months regarding this.

Councillor McAteer referenced the planning statistics, noting that he was aware of the ongoing discussions and plans regarding improving those, but stated that he felt that more needed to be done to address the issue, suggesting liaising with the public and exploring outsourcing opportunities to address the delay.

Councillor Clarke echoed these comments, further stating that applicants were contacting Councillors and querying whether they had oversight of Council activity, stressing that delays resulted in escalating costs due to construction prices which could lead to job losses as planned works were not carried out due to lack of timely planning approvals.

Councillor Byrne noted that these issues were discussed each time a Planning item was tabled and stressed that Council was aware of the issues and despite an ongoing recruitment campaign the issues persisted, further stressing that it was time to explore options to resource long term and encouraged officers to think outside the box for solutions to help tackle the issue.

Mr Mallon acknowledged the challenging environment and labour market regarding planning staff, highlighting that there was competition for employees across all 11 Councils and also Councils in the South, with the District being a border Council. He highlighted that Council

was continuing to look at options, noting that engagement had been initiated with the Department regarding long term planning for resources into Planning Departments across all Councils. He further noted that engagement events had been conducted with the public, agents, applicants and developers and further events were planned for the new year.

Councillor Sharvin then queried the activity relating to Go Succeed, stating that the new jobs promoted through business start activity was lower than expected and whether Council was seeing challenges that needed further consideration, or whether it was the nature of the objective and the target would be met by the end of the year.

Mr Mallon confirmed that 69 jobs had been created, which represented 49% of the statutory target and confirmed that Council would be continuing to work to achieve the target by the end of the year.

Councillor O'Hare requested further information regarding the number of trees still to be planted and whether the target was an aspirational or realistic target.

Mrs Murphy referenced the Tree Planting Strategy, noting that the target was realistic, but she would respond to the Member outside the meeting regarding specific plans.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Clarke, the Mid-Year Assessment of the Performance Improvement Plan 2024 - 25 was agreed.**

SPR/177/2024

MID-YEAR ASSESSMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE – CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE BUSINESS PLANS 2024-2025

Read: Report from Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive, and Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Mid-Year Assessments of Chief Executive – Corporate Services Directorate Business Plans 2024 – 2025. **(Copy circulated)**

Mrs Kelly outlined the report, advising that it was the mid-year assessment of the two Directorate Business Plans, commending the work carried out by Officers over the summer to present the information in a user-friendly format.

Councillor Sharvin queried the 95% target set against Corporate Objective *CS1: Provide an efficient and professional Compliance function meeting statutory obligations*, and whether this was a statutory target and were there any penalties for not meeting the target, such as financial or reputational impact.

Mrs Kelly stated that any delays to requests, or if Council was unable to fulfil a request, were communicated to the relevant individuals, but she believed that as the target was set by Council there were no fines in place for not meeting the target.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, the Mid-Year Assessment of the Chief Executive – Corporate Services Directorate Business Plan 2024 - 25 was agreed.**

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

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Clarke, 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 Enright, seconded by Councillor Hanlon, it was agreed the Committee come out of closed session.

The Chairperson advised the following had been agreed whilst in closed session:

SPR/178/2024 **FUNDING APPROVAL – PUBLIC REALM SCHEME, DOWNPATRICK**

Read: Report from Mr C Mallon, Director of Economy, Regeneration & Tourism, regarding Funding Approval – Public Realm Scheme, Downpatrick. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to approve the recommendations as outlined in the Officer's Report.

SPR/179/2024 **CONTRACTOR APPOINTMENT, DOWNPATRICK**

Read: Report from Mr C Boyd, Assistant Director of Capital, Estates & Procurement, regarding Contractor Appointment, Downpatrick. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Hanlon, seconded by Councillor Sharvin, it was agreed to appoint the preferred bidder as identified in Appendix 1 and to approve the recommendations as outlined in the Officer's Report.

SPR/180/2024 **SALE OF LAND - NEWCASTLE**

Read: Report from Mr P Rooney, Acting Head of Legal Administration, regarding Sale of Land - Newcastle. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor Clarke, it was agreed to progress

the proposed sales at market value to the adjoining house owners for plots of land as outlined in the Officer's Report, subject to valuation by Council's valuer and discharge of associated Valuation and Legal costs by each purchaser.

SPR/181/2024

SALE OF LAND - KILKEEL

Read:

Report from Mr P Rooney, Acting Head of Legal Administration, regarding Sale of Land - Kilkeel. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Bowsie, Members agreed to the sale of the lands shaded green within the Officer's Report to the party detailed for the market value to be determined by Council's Valuer.

SPR/182/2024

SINGLE TENDER ACTION – FINANCE & PAYROLL SYSTEMS

Read:

Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Single Tender Action – Finance and Payroll Systems. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Howie, the following was approved:

- **The Financial Systems STA to ensure continuity of financial systems.**
- **The Payroll Systems STA to ensure continuity of Council's payroll processes.**

Costs for both are already included within Council's revenue budgets.

SPR/183/2024

SINGLE TENDER ACTION – HEALTH PLAN FOR EMPLOYEES

Read:

Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Single Tender Action – Health Plan for Employees. **(Copy Circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the recommendations as outlined within the Officer's Report.

SPR/184/2024

SINGLE TENDER ACTION – TIME & ATTENDANCE SYSTEM

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding Single Tender Action – Time and Attendance System. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Sharvin, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to approve the recommendations as outlined within the Officer’s Report.**

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

SPR/185/2024

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

Read: Report from Mr G Byrne, Assistant Director of Finance & Performance, regarding Management Accounts. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Bowsie, seconded by Councillor McAteer, it was agreed to note the quarter 2 2024/25 Management Accounts.**

Councillor Reilly left the meeting at this stage – 7.22pm

SPR/186/2024

MINUTES OF NEWRY CITY CENTRE REGENERATION MEETING HELD 10 OCTOBER 2024

Read: Minutes from Newry City Centre Regeneration Meeting held 10 October 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Clarke, seconded by Councillor King, it was agreed to note the minutes.**

FOR NOTING

SPR/187/2024

IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM ON SERVICE DELIVERY AND COST EFFECTIVENESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Read: Report from Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services, regarding the Impact of Local Government Reform on Service Delivery and Cost Effectiveness in Northern Ireland. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Bowsie referenced the Planning section of the report, noting that it had previously been acknowledged it was in need of assistance, and queried what Council’s position on the amalgamation of Councils and whether there had been improved efficiencies within the Planning Department.

Mr Mallon advised that the position of Council on efficiencies within the Planning Department would be for Council to determine.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to note Report that has been published on the DfC Website.**

SPR/188/2024

**MINUTES OF MOURNE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY
PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING HELD 28 AUGUST 2024**

Read: Minutes from Mourne Mountain Gateway Programme Board Meeting held 28 August 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

Councillor Hanlon queried the layout of the minutes for noting and requested clarity on the comments noted on the minutes and further sought clarity on the individual referenced within the document.

Mr Mallon advised that the minutes had been shared with Programme Board Members following the meeting of 28 August 2024, with the noted comments received from a Member who noted her disagreement with the published minutes. He advised that they had been tabled at this Committee as minutes not agreed for noting in the current format to identify the areas of disagreement.

Following requests for clarity from Councillors Bowsie, McAteer and Hanlon as to whom the "I" referred to within the noted disagreements, Mr Mallon confirmed that the individual was Councillor Truesdale.

Councillor Enright stated that Councillor Truesdale did not feel that her comments were accurately reflected within the minutes and had highlighted her proposed amendments within the minutes.

Councillor Byrne requested that moving forward, should there be dissent regarding the minutes that they be tabled as minutes not agreed and should any Member wish to speak on that, that they do so at the relevant meeting.

Councillor McAteer echoed Councillor Byrne's sentiments, further advising that anyone not at that particular meeting would likely not understand the highlighted annotations as they were referencing detail that other Members may not be fully aware of.

AGREED: **On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to note the minutes.**

SPR/189/2024

**MINUTES OF MOURNE MOUNTAIN GATEWAY
PROGRAMME BOARD MEETING HELD 17 OCTOBER
2024**

Read: Minutes from Mourne Mountain Gateway Programme Board Meeting held 17 October 2024. **(Copy circulated)**

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Byrne, it was agreed to note the minutes.

There being no further business, the Meeting concluded at 7.35pm

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 2 December 2024.

Signed: Councillor Tierna Howie
Chairperson

Signed: Josephine Kelly
Director of Corporate Services