



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE ROUND TOWER CHAMBER, ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE
ON TUESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2026 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor H Magill
- Members Present (In person)** : Aldermen – L Clarke and M Cosgrove
Councillors – S Cosgrove, H Cushinan, P Dunlop and N Kelly
- Members Present (Remote)** : Alderman P Bradley
Councillors – M Goodman, A McAuley, T McGrann and A O’Lone
- Officers Present (In person)** : Director of Finance & Governance – S Cole
Deputy Director of Governance – L Johnston
Deputy Director of Finance – J Balmer
Head of Finance – R Murray
Head of Organisation Development – L Millar
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson
Member Services Officer – C McGrandle

CHAIRPERSON’S REMARKS

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the February Meeting of the Policy and Governance Committee and reminded all present of recording requirements.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor V McWilliam
Councillor B Webb

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 4.2 – Councillor T McGrann

3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 FI/FA/7 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27 TO 2028/29

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide updates and obtain approvals on the Council's future financial planning (and treasury management activities) as required by the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

2. Background

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2011

Under the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Prudential Code, the Council was required to have regard to a number of reports and to approve a range of indicators and strategies prior to the prescribed date for striking the rates, 15 February 2026.

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27 TO 2028/29

The Prudential Code required Council to develop three-year revenue forecasts and three-year capital expenditure plans. These were shown in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2028/29, a copy of which was circulated.

Following a Member's request for further information, the Director of Finance and Governance agreed to provide Members with a breakdown of staffing levels within each department, together with long term absence.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Dunlop and agreed that

the Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2028/29 be approved.

ACTION BY: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

3.2 FI/FA/8 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide updates and obtain approvals on the Council's future financial planning (and treasury management activities) as required by the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

2. Background

The Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and the Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 required Council, in carrying out its capital finance functions, to have regard to the current editions of the CIPFA Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes and the Prudential Code.

The Council was therefore required to set out its Treasury Management Policy and Strategy and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy setting out Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments.

The above policy and strategy were circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

- a) the Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 be approved and
- b) the Annual Investment Strategy 2026/27 be approved

ACTION BY: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

3.3 FI/FA/5 CAPITAL STRATEGY

1. Purpose

The Prudential Code required Council to develop a Capital Strategy which would provide a high-level overview of the long-term context of capital expenditure and investment decisions and their associated risks and rewards along with an overview of how risk would be managed for future financial sustainability.

A copy of the Capital strategy was circulated.

In response to a Member's query, the Deputy Director of Finance provided clarification in relation to investments and borrowings and that these were possible policy options available to Council, as opposed to current financial intentions.

Proposed by Alderman Mark Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Capital Strategy 2026/27 be approved.

ACTION BY: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

3.4 FI/FA/9 REPORT BY THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER ON THE ROBUSTNESS OF THE ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to ensure robustness of the estimates and adequacy of reserves for the next financial year.

2. Background

Section 4 and 6 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 required that Council have regard to a report, a copy of which was circulated, from the Chief Financial Officer on the robustness of the estimates and adequacy of reserves.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Chief Financial Officer on the Robustness of the Estimates and Adequacy of the Reserves be approved.

ACTION BY: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

3.5 CP/GEN/049 GRANT FUNDING POLICY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the review of the Grant Funding Policy (circulated).

2. Introduction/background

In January 2025, Council approved a New Grant Funding Policy which aimed to set out the principles, criteria and governance processes for funding for external bodies.

The Grant Funding Policy was to be reviewed annually.

3. Key Issues

The review identified a number of minor amendments as being required. The changes were summarised as follows:

- Updated appeal process (appendix 3)

- Additional Proportionate/risk based framework
- Addition of term 'other financially regulated institutions' within the general condition of fundings section

4. Summary

These amendments had been made to the draft Policy (circulated). The reviewed policy had been approved by CLT. A Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Proofing exercise on the Grant Funding Policy was completed and were circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

the review of the Grant Funding Policy be approved.

ACTION BY: Anna Boyle, Funding Hub Manager

4 ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 9

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the financial performance for the Directorates reporting to the Policy and Governance Committee and for the whole Council for Period 9.

2. Introduction/Background

As agreed, quarterly budget reports would be presented to the relevant Committee. All financial reports would be available to all Members.

3. Summary

As at period 9:

The Finance and Governance Directorate had a favourable variance of 226k, or 6.9%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

The Organisation Development Directorate had a favourable variance of £155k, or 8.2%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

Overall, the Council had a favourable variance of £1.0m or 2.0% against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

A report on the financial performance, employee costs, highest areas of expenditure and income, and the financial performance by Head of Service was circulated for Members' information.

This report also included the overall financial performance of the Council, including a summary of the financial performance of each Directorate.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

Having declared an interest in Item 4.2, Councillor McGrann left remotely and returned once the item had finished.

4.2 CCS/EDP/025 DUAL LANGUAGE STREET SIGN APPLICATIONS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to note the Dual Language Street Sign applications as follows:

Stage 1

- No applications at stage 1 be noted.

Stage 2

- No applications at stage 2 be noted.

Stage 3

- Arthur Crescent, Newtownabbey, BT36 7AL be noted.

2. Background

In accordance with the Dual Language Street Sign Policy, adopted by Council on 30 May 2022 (circulated), the following update outlines the current status of applications received.

3. Application Update

STAGE 1: PETITION VERIFICATION - there were no applications at Stage 1.

STAGE 2: RESIDENTS CANVASS – there were no applications at Stage 2.

STAGE 3: STREET SIGN INSTALLATION

One application had been progressed to Stage 3.

1. ARTHUR CRESCENT, NEWTOWNABBEY, BT36 7AL

The occupiers of the above street had been canvassed and the threshold of two thirds or more in favour of the erection of a second language street sign had been met, as required within the approved Policy.

Maps and costs were circulated for information.

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

the Dual Language Street Sign applications at:

Stage 1

- No applications at stage 1 be noted.

Stage 2

- No applications at stage 2 be noted.

Stage 3

- Arthur Crescent, Newtownabbey, BT36 7AL be noted.

NO ACTION

4.3 CCS/EDP/028 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CONFERENCE 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to ask Members to hold the date for the Council's upcoming Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Conference, scheduled for Wednesday 27 May 2026.

2. Main Report

Planning was underway for Council's first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference. The event would take place on Wednesday 27 May 2026 in Theatre at the Mill.

Further details, including the conference programme and calendar invitations, were to be shared in due course.

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan
Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

Members held the date for Council's upcoming Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Conference, scheduled for Wednesday 27 May 2026.

NO ACTION

5 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Members were advised that any Other Relevant Business (AORB) would be taken at this point.

- 5.1 In response to a Member's query regarding the Capital Plan, the Director of Finance and Governance confirmed that, as a number of projects had gone through an external review, they would now be brought through the relevant Committees for approval in the coming months to ensure appropriate Governance.

NO ACTION

- 5.2 In response to a Member's query, the Director of Finance and Governance confirmed that the estimates included capital projects which were discussed at the Corporate Workshop held in January 2026. She reiterated that the Capital Plan was continually subject to change and could be amended, with Council approval.

NO ACTION

The Chairperson extended her thanks on behalf of the Members to Sandra Cole for her hard work and dedication throughout the years as the Director of Finance and Governance and for her help and guidance whilst overseeing the Policy and Governance Committee. She and Members passed on their best wishes for the future and wished her good health and much happiness for her retirement.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 6.50pm.

MAYOR

Council Minutes have been redacted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation, and legal advice.