



**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 MARCH AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor B Webb
- Members Present (In person)** : Alderman L Clarke
Councillors – H Cushinan, P Dunlop, N Kelly, H Magill and V McWilliam
- Members Present (Remote)** : Alderman P Bradley
Councillors - A McAuley and T McGrann
- Officers Present (In person)** : Director of Finance – J Balmer
Director of Organisation Development (Interim) – L Johnston
Head of Finance – R Murray
Head of Organisation Development – L Millar
Head of Human Resources – J Clarke
Head of Internal Audit – P Caulcutt
ICT Business Support Officer (Interim) – D Graham
Member Services Officer – C McGrandle

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

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

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor J Burbank
Councillor S Cosgrove
Councillor A O'Lone

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 5.6 – Councillor T McGrann

3 INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF

The Chairperson invited John Balmer and Liz Johnston to brief Members on their new roles within Council. John Balmer confirmed his new role as Director of Finance following the approved restructure of the Finance and Governance Section and Liz Johnston advised of her temporary overseeing role as Director of Organisation Development (Interim), pending the recruitment of the new Director of People and Organisational Transformation.

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 CCS/EDP/028 CONSULTATION ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND DISABILITY STRATEGY 2025-2035

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the consultation response on the Northern Ireland Disability Strategy 2025-2035.

2. Background

The Northern Ireland Disability Strategy 2025-2035 was a 10-year plan designed to improve the lives of Deaf and Disabled people by tackling inequalities, promoting inclusion, and ensuring rights were protected.

The Department for Communities had led the development of this Strategy on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, with input from other departments. It had been created in partnership with Deaf and Disabled people and representative organisations.

According to the 2021 Census, 24.3% of the Northern Ireland population had a limiting long-term health problem or disability, and therefore one in four people were Deaf or Disabled.

This Disability Strategy 2025-2035 aimed to challenge the barriers which Deaf and Disabled people experience and sets out the Executive's ambition to create a fully accessible and inclusive society.

The Strategy was structured around eight outcomes, which were supported by an associated Action Plan. The outcomes would seek to ensure that Deaf and Disabled people could:

- Effectively exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms and participate in society on an equal basis, free from discrimination.
- Access our built environment, facilities and transport on an equal basis.
- Access our public services, government information and communications on an equal basis.
- Access and participate in culture, leisure activities and sport on an equal basis.
- Live independently in the community with choice and control, with a sufficient and sustainable standard of living.
- Have access to quality health and social care on an equal basis and without discrimination.
- Access, sustain and progress within quality employment in an inclusive labour market.
- Deaf and Disabled children and young people could exercise their rights and reach their full educational, social and developmental potential.

The associated action plan would be monitored, reviewed and updated annually with published progress reports which would be agreed by the Executive. A mid-point review would allow the Strategy to be monitored and reactive to emerging issues and needs.

The NI Executive would invite feedback via a consultation process, which would conclude on Friday, 20 March 2026.

A copy of the Northern Ireland Disability Strategy 2025-2035 was circulated for information.

3. Consultation Response

Council welcomed the Northern Ireland Disability Strategy 2025-2035, which set out a programme of work in order to address barriers which would inhibit the full participation and inclusion of Deaf and Disabled people in society, however, it would benefit from clarity regarding the role and resourcing for local government in implementation.

A draft consultation response was circulated for approval.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor McGrann and agreed that

the consultation response on the Northern Ireland Disability Strategy 2025-2035 be approved.

ACTION BY: Claire Webb, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer

4.2 FI/AUD/03 RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the revised Risk Management Policy.

2. Background

In March 2023, the Policy and Governance Committee approved the Risk Management Policy.

3. Key Points

In accordance with the Council's Policy Framework and Schedule, the Risk Management Policy had been reviewed and updated.

The Policy was aligned with the revised HM Treasury's Guidance on the Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts (published 2025).

The updates to the Policy included referencing the Risk Control Framework and provided clarification of the Council's Risk Appetite.

A copy of the updated Policy was circulated, with amendments highlighted in red for information.

4. Screening Requirements

The Policy had been screened (circulated) for the need for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) and a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA), and relevant screening forms were circulated for information.

The screening of each had concluded that impact assessments were not recommended.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

the revised Risk Management Policy be approved.

ACTION BY: Paul Caulcutt, Head of Internal Audit

4.3 PT/CI/066 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2025/26, PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT QUARTER 3

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2025/26, Quarter 3 Performance Progress Report.

2. Background

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 put in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2025/26 was approved in June 2025. This set out a range of robust performance targets, along with identified improvement objectives and several Statutory Performance Targets.

4. Performance Progress Reports

Third Quarter Performance Progress Report was circulated for Members' information.

5. Governance

Quarterly performance progress reports would be reported to relevant Committees.

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Quarter 3 Performance Progress Report be approved.

ACTION BY: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

4.4 **PT/CI/072 MJ AWARDS CEREMONY 2026**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the outcome of the Council's submissions to the MJ Awards 2026 and seek approval for attendance at the Awards Ceremony in London on Friday 19 June 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

The MJ Awards acknowledge the tremendous efforts of those in local government, dedicating themselves to supporting local communities, facing challenges but never giving up in the face of adversity.

The MJ Awards were an inspiring event, with people coming together to witness each other's achievements and gain the recognition that their hard work had made a difference in the communities they serve.

3. Award Finalists

Following consideration by the judging panel, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council had been confirmed as finalists in the following MJ Awards categories:

- Best Council Services Team: Environmental Health, Health & Wellbeing Team

- Local Government Finance Team
- Transforming Lives: Leisure, Health Intervention Team

Category winners would be announced at the MJ Awards Ceremony on Friday 19 June 2026, at the Park Plaza Hotel, Westminster Bridge, London.

4. Financial Implications

In recognition of this excellent performance, it was proposed that Members considered reserving a table of ten, at a cost of £3,999 + VAT. Flights and accommodation would be arranged separately at additional cost. All expenses associated with attending the event would be met from existing budgets.

5. Attendance

It was proposed that the Mayor, Chairs of Policy and Governance and Operations Committees, or their nominees, attend along with relevant Officers as an approved duty.

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

- a) a table of ten be reserved at the MJ Awards Ceremony in London on Friday 19 June 2026**
- b) the Mayor, Chairs of Policy and Governance and Operations Committee, or their nominees, attend along with relevant Officers as an approved duty.**

ACTION BY: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 FI/FIN/9 PROMPT PAYMENT PERFORMANCE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the update on the Council's quarter three prompt payment performance.

2. Introduction/Background

The Department for Communities (DfC) issued revised guidance (Local Government Circular 19/2016) on prompt payments and the recording of invoice payments in November 2016. This guidance requested Councils to record specific performance targets of 10 working days and 30 calendar days and continue a cycle of quarterly reporting on prompt payment performance by Councils to the DfC and its publication on their website.

3. Prompt Payment Performance

Council's prompt payment performance for the period 1 October to 31 December 2025 was set out below:

During the above period, the Council paid 5,644 invoices totalling £17,050,396.

Council paid 5,082 invoices within the 30 calendar days target (90%).

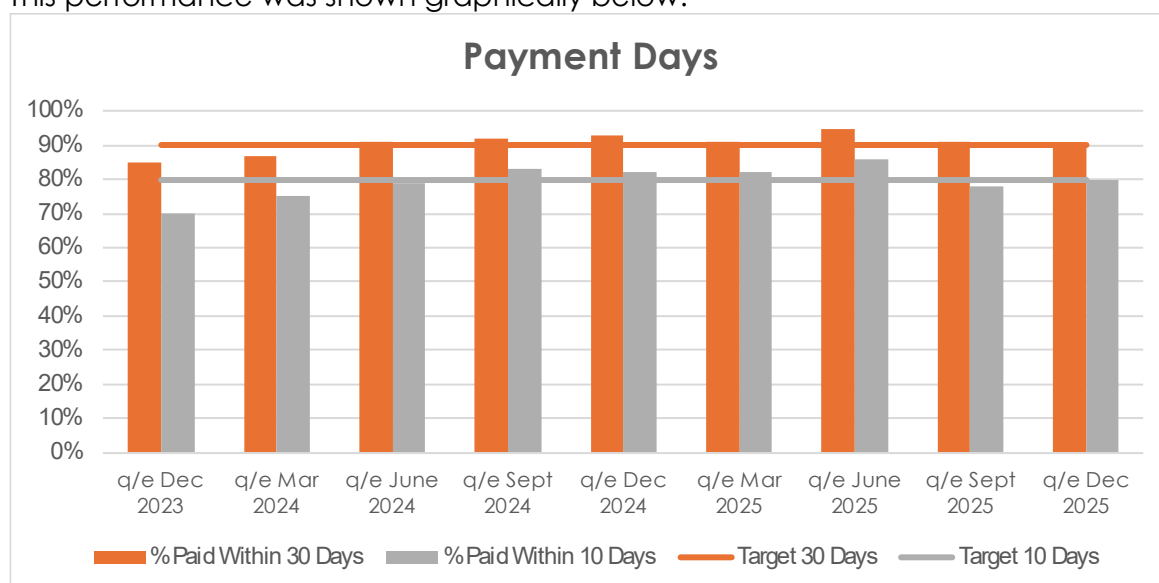
Council paid 4,495 invoices within the 10 working days target (80%).

Council paid 562 invoices outside of the 30 days target (10%).

This compared to previous quarterly results over the past two years as below:

Period	Total Number of Invoices Paid	% Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 10 Days
Target		90%	80%
q/e 31 December 2023	7,074	85%	70%
q/e 31 March 2024	5,776	87%	75%
q/e 30 June 2024	5,533	91%	79%
q/e 30 September 2024	4,871	92%	83%
q/e 31 December 2024	4,849	93%	82%
q/e 31 March 2025	6,787	91%	82%
q/e 30 June 2025	4,891	95%	86%
q/e 30 September 2025	4,992	91%	78%
q/e 31 December 2025	5,644	90%	80%

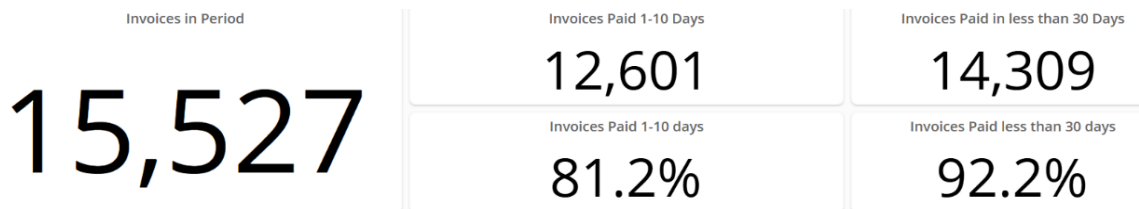
This performance was shown graphically below:



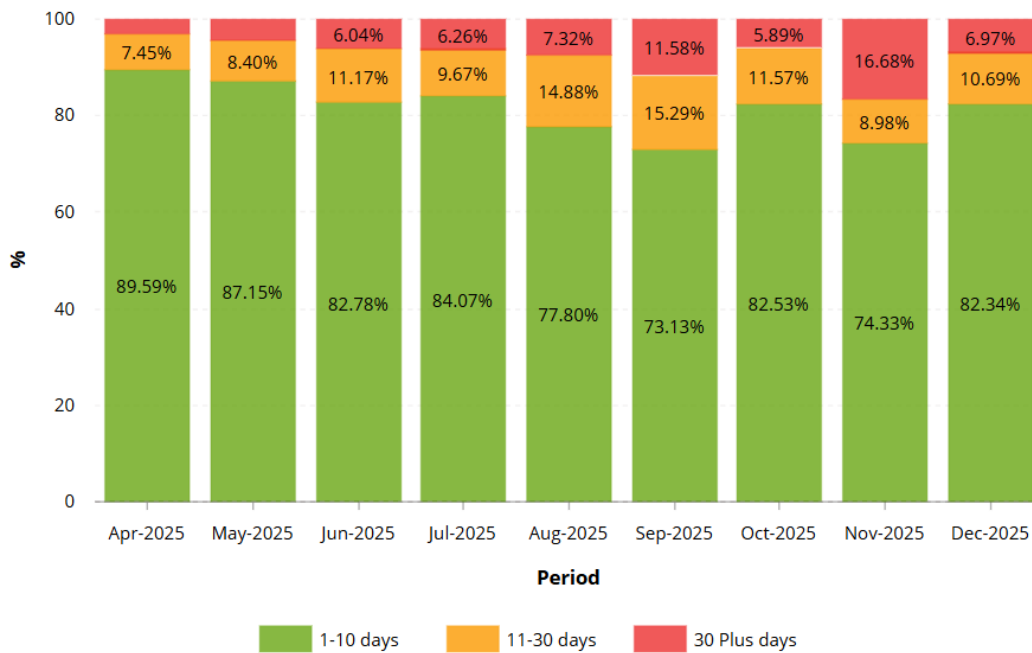
After being just below the target for payment within 10 days, at 78%, for quarter ending September 2025, the 10- day target was met during the quarter ending December 2025 at 80%.

The 10-day target was achieved for five out of the past six quarters and the 30-day target was achieved for the past seven consecutive quarters.

Overall, both targets had been achieved for the whole financial year to the end of December with 81% of invoices paid within 10 days and 92% within 30 days.



The monthly performance for the financial year to date is shown overleaf:



Staff within the Finance section continued to work with all departments across the Council and with the software provider to ensure that the targets continue to be met and improved as much as possible.

Service improvements had included:

- Additional reporting capability to monitor performance
- Staff training/refresher sessions
- Process review for high volume suppliers
- Introduction of a new process to scan invoices and send to Council officers for action or to return invoices to the supplier for more information.

The prompt payment performance for Councils in Northern Ireland would be published quarterly by the Department for Communities (DfC). The prompt payment performance for the quarter ended September 2025 was (circulated); the Council's performance for Quarter 3 of 2025/26 against the average performance for the other Councils for the latest available quarter was set out in the table below:

Council	% Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 10 Days
Antrim & Newtownabbey BC (Quarter 3 25/26)	90%	80%
All Councils (Quarter 2 25/26)	93%	70%

4. Supplier Balances

	December 2025	September 2025
	£	£
Creditors Control Account	853,355	1,021,590
% of quarterly spend	5.00%	7.37%

The outstanding amount due to suppliers would fluctuate markedly depending on the timing of payment, invoice value and timelines of verification.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

the Council's quarterly prompt payment performance report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.2 **FC/FA/8 ANNUAL REVIEW OF PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide a review of the Council's Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management activities for Quarter 3 of the 2025/26 financial year for noting.

2. Introduction

Council measure and manage its capital expenditure, borrowings and investment activities, with reference to the CIPFA Prudential Code. This report provided an update on these activities that took place during April to December 2025.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

Council approved the Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 to 2027/2028 and the Treasury Management Strategies for 2025/26 in February 2025.

Under the Prudential Code and the Code of Practice on Treasury Management in the Public Services the Council was required to monitor and review its prudential indicators. The key objective was to ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of the Council were affordable, prudent and sustainable and that treasury management decisions were taken in accordance with good professional practice.

The Council's Treasury Management Policy would require quarterly and annual reports on treasury management activities.

This report compared the approved Prudential Indicators for 2025/26 with the quarterly position and the quarterly report on the Council's borrowing and investment activities for 2025/26.

A copy of the Quarter 3 report was circulated for information.

Proposed by Councillor McAuley
Seconded by Councillor McWilliam and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.3 **HR/HR/051 ACCESSNI COMPLIANCE AUDIT**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the outcome of the AccessNI Compliance Audit.

2. Audit Outcome

The compliance audit of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council was conducted by the AccessNI Compliance Unit on 27 January 2026.

The audit reviewed compliance with the AccessNI Code of Practice and confirmed that the Council was sufficiently compliant, with no recommendations made.

Key strengths noted included a strong understanding of legislation, robust identity and application checking processes, clear governance and record keeping arrangements, resulting in a successful audit outcome and confirmation that the organisation remains suitable to receive disclosure information.

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the AccessNI Compliance Audit report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.4 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE QUARTER 3, OCTOBER 2025 – DECEMBER 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the Quarter 3 Managing Attendance Update for the period October 2025 to December 2025 and associated Action Plan for 2025/26.

2. Managing Attendance Update Summary

The Council's 2025/26 annual target for absence was 14 days lost per employee.

Absence at the end of Quarter 3 2025/26 was 12.26 days per employee which was above the target of 10.51 days per employee.

A comprehensive action plan was in place to manage absence, with further details provided in the circulated Managing Absence Report and Attendance Management Action Plan.

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan

Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

the Quarter 3 Managing Attendance update for the period October 2025 to December 2025, and associated report and Action Plan for 2025/26 be noted.

NO ACTION

5.5 CCS/CS/011 CUSTOMER SERVICES QUARTER 3, 2025/26

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to note the Quarter 3 Customer Services report for the period October to December 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2025/26 set out the performance improvement objective; *'We will provide best-in-class services for our residents and make them feel valued and engaged. By fostering trust, engagement and increased satisfaction, we are committed to elevating the customer service experience.'*

Four indicators were set as measures of success and the Customer Services Report for Quarter 3 2025/26 circulated, provided an update on performance.

In addition, there was an update on key consultations to serve the Plan, and the performance of the Complaints Handling Procedure, during the period October to December 2025.

In response to a Member's query regarding waste harmonisation complaints received in the later part of 2025, the Head of Organisation Development confirmed complaints received by Customer Services had been resolved and agreed to follow up with the Waste team to confirm all complaints were now closed.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that
the Quarter 3 Customer Services report for the period October to December 2025 be noted.

ACTION BY: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

5.6 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

- **Longlands Walk, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NQ be noted.**
- **Longlands Park, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NG be noted.**

Stage 2

- **No applications at stage 2 be noted.**

Stage 3

- **No applications at stage 3 be noted.**

2. Introduction/Background

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

3. Application Update

STAGE 1: PETITION VERIFICATION - there were two applications at Stage 1.

1. **LONGLANDS WALK, NEWTOWNABBAY, BT36 7NQ**
2. **LONGLANDS PARK, NEWTOWNABBAY, BT36 7NG**

Two new applications had been received for the above streets and were pending verification of the petition at Electoral Office NI. An update would be provided in the next report.

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

STAGE 3: STREET SIGN INSTALLATION – there were no applications at Stage 3.

Maps and costs were circulated for information.

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

Dual Language Street Sign applications at:

Stage 1

- **Longlands Walk, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NQ be noted.**
- **Longlands Park, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NG be noted.**

Stage 2

- **No applications at stage 2 be noted.**

Stage 3

- **No applications at stage 3 be noted.**

NO ACTION

5.7 CCS/EDP/7 QUARTERLY SECTION 75 AND RURAL SCREENING

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the quarterly section 75 and rural screenings which had taken place within the period of November 2025 and January 2026.

2. Background

In line with the Council's Equality Scheme, it was agreed to provide quarterly updates on the screening of policies under Section 75. Within the Scheme, the Council made a commitment to apply screening methodology to all new and revised policies. Where necessary and appropriate, these new policies would be subject to further equality impact assessment.

3. Section 75 and Rural Screenings

The policies noted below had been screened between November 2025 and January 2026.

POLICY	SCREENING DECISION
Internal Audit Strategy 2026-2030 consultation	1
Social Media Policy for Employees	1

Review of the Prohibition or Restriction of Use of Public Roads for Special Events policy	1
Temporary Festive Recycling Centre Arrangements	1
Review of Legacy Councils Dog Control Orders	1
Dementia Safeguarding Scheme	1
Positive Ageing Month 2025	1
Review of Entertainment Licensing Policy	1
Winter Woolies Update	1
International Men's Day Event	1
Surveillance Camera Policy	1
Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2026/27	1

- (1) Screened with no mitigation
- (2) Screened with mitigation
- (3) Screened and EQIA required

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam
 Seconded by Councillor Cushinan and agreed that

the quarterly screening report for November 2025 to January 2026 be noted.

NO ACTION

5.8 HR/SG/002 DOMESTIC ABUSE (SAFE LEAVE) ACT (NI) 2022

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note an update on the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (NI) 2022.

2. Previous decision of Council

In November 2025, a motion concerning the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 was approved.

Officers committed to reviewing the provisions of the 2022 Act and to prepare a report for Members' consideration.

3. Background

The Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 "makes provision for an entitlement to paid safe leave for victims of domestic abuse; and for connected purposes".

The Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 provided for an entitlement of at least 10 days paid safe leave per leave year for victims of domestic abuse.

Although the Act was passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2022, it had not yet come into operation, as the necessary secondary regulations,

including provisions on definitions, notice requirements and payment arrangements, had not been finalised.

The Economy Minister had reaffirmed a commitment to commence the legislation, with implementation anticipated by May 2027. While there was no confirmed commencement date, many employers would be preparing for its introduction.

4. Interim Arrangements

Officers were proactively preparing a draft Domestic and Sexual Abuse Policy which would be submitted to Members for approval in due course.

In the interim, pending the commencement of the relevant legislation and supporting regulations, the Council would consider any requests for domestic abuse-related leave on a case-by-case basis.

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan
Seconded by Councillor Dunlop and agreed that

the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (NI) 2022 update be noted.

NO ACTION

6 **ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS (AORB)**

There was no AORB raised.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan
Seconded by Councillor Dunlop and agreed

that the following Committee business be taken In Confidence and the livestream and audio recording would cease.

7 **ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE**

7.1 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/PRO/GEN/030 **PROCUREMENT PIPELINE**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Elected Members with an update on the Procurement Exercises that had been completed in the financial year to date and those that were expected to be undertaken in the next few months.

2. Background

The primary objective of the Council's Procurement Procedures was to ensure that the Council obtains best value for the money spent on goods and services, having due regard to the needs of the organisation and service.

The value of the anticipated spend would determine whether quotations, or a full tender would be required.

If the anticipated spend was over £50,000 then a formal tendering process must be followed.

3. Summary

The Procurement team, within the Finance department, had completed 44 procurement exercises from April 2025 to date, with a further 16 anticipated to be completed prior to the end of the financial year in March 2026.

There were also 3 other tenders which were anticipated to be awarded for the contract to start on 1 April 2026.

The record of the Procurements in progress or planned (referred to as the Procurement Pipeline) circulated would be regularly updated and enabled staff to ensure that they could schedule work demands as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

7.2 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/PRO/GEN/044 **PROCUREMENT SPEND ANALYSIS**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to present an analysis of Council's non-payroll spend for the period April to September 2025 especially with regard to,

- **Good governance,**
- **Procurement opportunities,**
- **Contribution to the local economy.**

2. Procurement Spend Analysis

The report circulated was presented under the following headings:

- Background
- Contracted Spend
- Efficiency opportunities
- Local economic spend
- Actions

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Alderman Clarke
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed

that the remainder of Committee business be taken in Open Session.

The Chairperson advised that audio-recording would recommence at this point.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 6.46 pm.

MAYOR