



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD
AT MOSSLEY MILL ON MONDAY 30 MARCH 2026 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Mayor (Councillor L Kirkpatrick)
- Members Present** : Aldermen – L Boyle, P Bradley, T Campbell, L Clarke, P Michael, S Ross and J Smyth
- : Councillors – A Bennington, M Brady, J Burbank, M Cooper, S Cosgrove, R Foster, J Gilmour, R Kinnear, R Lynch, H Magill, B Mallon, A McAuley, E McLaughlin, V McWilliam, S Ward and B Webb
- Members Present (Remotely)** : Aldermen – M Cosgrove and M Magill
- : Councillors – H Cushinan, P Dunlop, S Flanagan, M Goodman, AM Logue, T McGrann, M Ní Chonghaile, L O'Hagan, A O'Lone, M Stewart and S Wilson
- In Attendance (In person)** : Kevin Bloomfield, NIHMO Manager, Belfast City Council
- Officers Present** : Chief Executive - R Baker
Director of Economic Development and Planning – M McAlister
Director of Community and Culture – U Fay
Director of Organisation Development (Interim) – L Johnston
Director of Finance – J Balmer
Head of Environment Health and Wellbeing – C Kelly
Borough Lawyer (Legal, Land Governance and Policy) – P Casey
ICT Business Support Officer – D Graham
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson
PA to Mayor and Deputy Mayor – L Molyneaux
Member Services Manager – A Duffy

1 BIBLE READING, PRAYER AND WELCOME

The Mayor welcomed all present to the meeting and advised Members of the audio recording procedures.

The meeting opened with a Bible reading and prayer by Reverend John Gilkinson.

Alderman Boyle and Councillors Burbank, Kinnear, McAuley, and McLaughlin joined the meeting at this point.

MAYOR'S REMARKS

The Mayor congratulated Councillor Brady and his new wife on their recent marriage.

2 APOLOGIES

Alderman - J McGrath
Councillors - J Archibald-Brown and N Kelly

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 12.1 – Councillor M Cooper

4 MINUTES OF THE ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING

Moved by Alderman Smyth
Seconded by Councillor Foster and

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Meeting of Monday 23 February 2026 be taken as read and signed as correct.

5 MINUTES OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

Moved by Alderman Smyth
Seconded by Councillor O'Hagan and

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Operations Committee Meeting of Monday 2 March 2026 be approved and adopted.

6 MINUTES OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

Moved by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Magill and

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Policy and Governance Committee Meeting of Tuesday 3 March 2026 be approved and adopted.

7 MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Moved by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Brady and

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Community Development Committee Meeting of Monday 9 March 2026 approved and adopted.

8 MINTUES OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Moved by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Economic Development Committee Meeting of Tuesday 10 March 2026 be approved and adopted.

9(a) MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING, PART 1

Moved by Councillor Kinnear
Seconded by Councillor Flanagan and

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee Meeting of Monday 16 March 2026 Part 1 be taken as read and signed as correct.

9(b) MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING, PART 2

Moved by Councillor Kinnear
Seconded by Councillor Flanagan and

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee Meeting of Monday 16 March 2026 Part 2 be approved and adopted.

10 MINUTES OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE MEETING

Moved by Councillor Bennington
Seconded by Councillor Wilson and

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Special Council Meeting of Wednesday 18 March 2026 be approved and adopted.

11 NOTICE OF MOTION

Proposed by Councillor Burbank
Seconded by Alderman Boyle

“Blocking of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency

This Council is concerned at the environmental damage being caused in the Borough, and the wider community, such as in Lough Neagh and Belfast Lough and strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an Independent

Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) by the DUP in the Assembly and Executive.

Condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the wider environmental degradation but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards.

Notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained within the New Decade, New Approach Deal.

Agrees that it is undemocratic for an IEPA to be unilaterally vetoed by one party which represents a minority in the Assembly as a whole.

Due to the blocking of the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) in the Assembly and Executive, and potential further blocking of matters of high importance to this Borough, requests the Chief Executive write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to impress upon him that this Council believes in a process of institutional reform, in consultation with the Irish Government and local Parties, to remove blockages and vetoes from the system of Government in Stormont, and that this Council is of the belief that the Secretary of State should take meaningful steps to ensure that the commitments of New Decade, New Approach are implemented."

Members agreed the principle of enhancing environmental accountability however some Members expressed concerns about aspects of the motion which included:

- Costings associated with a new Environmental Protection Agency
- There were already a range of Environmental bodies in place
- The need for another level of bureaucracy
- The feasibility of staffing another agency

On the above motion being put to the meeting 17 Members voted in favour, 20 against and 0 abstentions.

RESOLVED - The motion was declared not carried.

12 ITEMS FOR DECISION

12.1 P/PLAN/1 NIHE - REVIEW OF NEW BUILD GRANT SUPPORT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' instructions in relation to the Review of New Build Grant Support for new build social housing.

2. Introduction/Background

In October 2025, Minister Lyons announced separate reviews of grant support and design standards. On 13 March 2026 the Council received correspondence from the Housing Executive, Strategic Housing Authority

(circulated) advising that the NIHE were supporting Department for Communities (DfC) in the review of grant support for new build social housing. They indicate that this work would help ensure the Social Housing Development Programme (SHPD) could be delivered effectively and sustainably in the years ahead.

3. Key Issues (or the relevant titles for the main body of the report)

A number of recurrent issues had been identified including:

- a. Volatility in Total Cost Indicators
- b. Ongoing uncertainty and implications for programme planning
- c. Inconsistencies between land-led and housing association-led schemes
- d. The need for a more transparent and modernised grant scheme
- e. Better support for borrowing capacity
- f. Better support to enable long term delivery

The review aimed to address these issues and to strengthen alignment with the Housing Supply Strategy while creating a more stable and predictable funding environment for housing associations and other delivery partners.

The Council had been invited to engage in the review process to inform their work.

Written submissions in relation to several key areas are requested by 3 April 2026, however an extension had been granted until the 24 April 2026. These include the reform of the current grant support framework, consideration of alternative or comparative funding approaches, and financial and economic factors influencing delivery. They have also invited views on the role of public land as a delivery lever, the assumptions underpinning grant support and the interaction between grant support, rent setting and affordability.

4. Summary

Written submissions were invited by the NIHE on the review of new Build Grant Support.

Moved by Alderman Smyth
Seconded by Councillor Brady and

RESOLVED - that Members respond on an individual or party basis.

ACTION BY: Kathryn Bradley, Planning & Economic Development Business Support Manager

12.2 ED/ED/313 LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP – BUSINESS DIGITISATION PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the latest grant awards assessed under Call 1 of the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) Business Digitisation Programme.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would be aware that the Business Digitisation Programme forms part of the LEP Action Plan and was prioritised for early implementation due to its ability to deliver immediate impact within the shortened delivery period.

The programme launched on 19 January 2026, offering grants of £1,000–£5,000 at an 80% intervention rate to support improvements in business productivity through adoption of digital technologies.

Demand for the programme had been strong, with 32 Expressions of Interest and 13 full applications received shortly after launch.

The following seven applications had been assessed and were presented for approval under Call 1.

Business	Description	Amount to be Awarded
Devine Design	Graphic design and merchandise printing agency	£5,000.00
Newtownabbey Eats	Food delivery business utilising local independent restaurants, cafés, and takeaways	£4,889.51
Rea Sawmills Ltd	Timber manufacturing business	£3,014.39
Kitchens Direct NI Ltd	Kitchens and Bedrooms manufacturer and installer	£3,624.59
NI Counselling	Private counselling and psychotherapy organisation for adults	£5,000.00
MH Motors	Automotive retailer specialising in used vehicles	£2,856.65
365 Security	Fire protection and electronic security systems	£4,699.00

The businesses detailed above had been assessed internally by LEP staff and externally by an assessment panel established through the LEP Stakeholder Group.

Call 1 opened on 19 January and closed on 6 March 2026. The Council had previously approved grants for two businesses totalling £9,059.28.

3. Previous Decision of Council

- November 2025 – Approved the finalised Action Plan for Year 1, Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding, which were submitted to DfE on 9 December 2025.

- January 2026 – LoO received (13 January) and signed/returned (29 January), enabling launch of Year 1 programmes including Business Digitisation.
- March 2026 – Final Action Plan approved for years 2 and 3.

4. Financial Position/Implication

The total LEP programme allocation confirmed through the Letter of Offer was £2,868,000 to 31 March 2028. LEP had assigned £200,000 for the Business Digitisation Programme across the duration of the funding period, with the allocation structured to deliver small-scale digital adoption grants at pace. The accelerated launch had resulted in strong uptake, with applications continuing to be assessed and a second call now opening.

5. Summary

The report seeks Members approval of seven grant awards under the LEP Digitisation Programme.

Moved by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Alderman Boyle and

RESOLVED - that Members approve the grant awards to the seven businesses totalling £29,084.14.

ACTION BY: Conor Steele, Local Economic Partnership Officer

Aldermen Boyle, Michael and Smyth and Councillor Ward left and returned to the Chamber during Item 12.3.

Alderman Bradley and Councillors O'Hagan and O'Lone left the meeting during Item 13.2.

12.3 EH/EHS/009 REVIEW OF HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPANCY (HMO) LICENCE SCHEME CHARGES AND PROPOSED INCREASE IN LICENCE FEE FROM 1 APRIL 2026

1. Purpose

This report seeks Members' approval to increase HMO licence application and variation fees in order to support the cost-neutral operation of the HMO Licensing Scheme from 1 April 2026.

2. Background

Members were aware the Northern Ireland Houses in Multiple Occupation (NIHMO) Unit, based within Belfast City Council, administers and manages the HMO licensing scheme on behalf of all 11 councils. This shared service included processing licence applications, carrying out property checks and inspections, and providing regulatory support to each council.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 "2016 Act" received Royal Assent on 12 May 2016 and took effect from the 1 April

2019. The Department for Communities ("DfC") laid the subordinate Regulations the Houses of Multiple Occupation (Fees) Regulations (NI) 2019 "2019 Regulations". These Regulations set the maximum level of fee for an application for an HMO licence at £45 per person, per annum.

Following the submission of financial information by Belfast City Council to the Department for Communities ("DfC") in December 2024, the Department in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 84 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 ("2016 Act") enacted the Houses in Multiple Occupation (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 ("2025 Regulations"). Those regulations came into operation on the 1 August 2025.

The 2025 Regulations changed the maximum permissible fee from £45 per person, per annum to £75 per person, per annum.

The policy objective of the 2025 Regulations was to allow the HMO Licensing Scheme to continue to operate on a cost neutral basis for councils. This reiterated the policy objective at the time of the introduction of the 2016 Act, which was to ensure that the transfer of the administration of HMOs to councils would be cost neutral and not at the expense of rate payers.

However, there was an inconsistency between the Houses in Multiple Occupation (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 and the Provision of Services Regulations 2009. Legal advice was sought from external counsel, and Belfast City Council Legal Services subsequently confirmed that, in setting the fee payable for an HMO licence application, the Council was restricted to recovering only the cost of processing the application. This represents approximately 86% of the total cost of delivering the HMO service.

In response to a query why the Council cannot charge the full cost of delivering the HMO service, it was important to clarify that Council is legally restricted in what it can recover through licence fees. While the 2025 Regulations set a maximum fee of £75 per person per annum, the Provision of Services Regulations 2009 require that fees must relate only to the cost of the application process. This means that costs associated with post-grant licence maintenance and enforcement activity cannot be included in the licence fee. Charging above the calculated application cost (currently £62) would therefore place the Council in breach of the 2009 Regulations.

Council must continue to have regard to the policy objective underpinning both the 2025 Regulations and the 2016 Act, namely that the HMO Licensing Scheme operates on a cost-neutral basis and does not place an additional burden on ratepayers. The proposed fee level reflects the maximum amount that can be charged within these legal and policy constraints.

A review of the HMO charging model had forecasted that for the current 5-year term 2024/25 – 2028/29 the licence application fee needs to increase to £62 per person, per annum.

A paper was presented to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives ("SOLACE") on 6 February 2026 to inform them of the need to increase the HMO licence fee. SOLACE agreed to the proposed fee increase and confirmed that each Council would take a report to their respective Council Committee in March 2026 to agree the uplift.

3. Previous Decision of Council

On the 2 September 2024 the Council agreed to increase the HMO licence fee to £45 per person per year, that being the maximum amount permissible at that time pursuant to Houses of Multiple Occupation (Fees) Regulations (NI) 2019 "2019 Regulations". The following additional fees were also agreed at that time –

Licence variations	
Item	Cost
Addition of a new managing agent.	£225
Addition of a new occupant	£225 for each new occupant + £100 inspection fee (per visit)

4. Financial Position

As part of the Belfast City Council's submission to DfC, in December 2024, officers proposed an increase to the maximum fee to future proof the fee structure and to ensure no burden to rate payers as a consequence of the delivery of this function.

The DfC Review was completed in 2025, and it accepted Belfast City Council's recommendation to increase the maximum HMO licence fee and brought and enacted the Houses in Multiple Occupation (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 ("2025 Regulations"). Those regulations came into operation on the 1 August 2025. The maximum fee was increased from £45 per person, per annum to £75 per person, per annum.

In December 2025, the NIHMO team engaged with Belfast City Council Finance colleagues and ran financial models to calculate the current operating costs of the HMO Service.

The total gross cost of the service for the 5-year period from 2024/25 to 2028/29 was estimated to be £5.74M, of which £4.9M is eligible to be covered by the license fee. To cover the £4.9M over the 5-year cycle, councils need to charge £62 per occupant per year.

It was proposed that the HMO licence application fee be increased to £62 per occupant per year for the remainder of the current 5-year cycle, with effect from 1 April 2026.

This would still leave Belfast City Council with £804k of unfunded activities outside of the application process. This is forecast to be met in part from enforcement fees and miscellaneous income.

It was proposed to increase the costs of varying an HMO licence for the remainder of the current 5-year cycle, with effect from 1 April 2026 as follows:

Licence Variations	
Item	Cost
Addition of a new managing agent.	£250
Addition of a new occupant	£310 for each new occupant + £125 inspection fee (per visit)

However, this still leaves an estimated budgetary gap of £521k over the course of the 5-year cycle.

5-year cycle 2024/25 to 2028/29

Total cost of HMO activities outside of license application	£804,083
Less other expected incomes (enforcement fees and miscellaneous income)	-£282,690
Unfunded activities	£521,393

Furthermore, as Belfast City Council did not increase the fee at the beginning of this 5-year cycle, Belfast City Council would also have a gap as a result of 24/25 and 25/26 licenses being charged at the lower rate of £45.

5-year cycle 2024/25 to 2028/29

License income expected in Y1 and Y2 at breakeven rate	£2,323,741
License income expected to 31/03/26 at lower charge	£1,694,312
Income lost due to delay in increasing license fee	-£629,429

There was currently a deferred income balance relating to HMOs of approx. £900k that could offset the majority of the gap, but councils need the legislative inconsistency with the Provision of Services Regulations 2009 to be resolved the HMO function would begin to operate at a deficit from the second half of the financial year 2027/28.

As a result of the potential shortfall in funding, Chair of SOLACE would be writing to the DfC Permanent Secretary regarding the risk being carried by councils and the need to bring forward legislation address this matter within the current mandate.

5. Summary

The report seeks approval to increase HMO licence application fees to £62 per occupant per year from 1 April 2026 to support the cost-neutral operation of the scheme. While legislation allows a maximum fee of £75, legal constraints limit councils to recovering application processing costs only. Financial modelling indicates the proposed increase was necessary to cover eligible

costs over the current 5-year cycle. Some costs associated with the wider operation of the service cannot be recovered through licence fees. The proposal had been endorsed by SOLACE, with all councils considering similar increase.

Following Members comments on a possible deferment of the matter, the Chief Executive invited Mr Kevin Bloomfield, NIHMO Manager, Belfast City Council to address the Chamber.

Mr Bloomfield explained the responsibilities Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council had within their service level agreement with Belfast City Council and the consequences of deferring the decision which would allow applications to be automatically granted, and that Council would be responsible for any deficit. He also acknowledged the conflict between the HMO Act, the Fees Regulations and the Professional Services Regulations.

Mr Bloomfield, the Director of Economic Development and Planning, the Borough Lawyer and the Chief Executive responded separately to Members' queries regarding the basis for the proposed £75 fee, current legislation and guidance, risks associated with deferral, the legality of postponing Council's power to grant an application and granting applications in line with planning policy.

Mr Bloomfield agreed to hold a workshop, at a time convenient for Members, between now and the next Council meeting.

Moved by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Alderman Ross that

The matter be deferred for one month to allow officers to provide legal advice on the proposed fees and charges, outline the practical considerations of developing bespoke HMO policy, and clarify the position of HMOs in relation to licensing applications and the planning framework.

On the above proposal being put to the meeting 22 Members voted in favour, 14 against and 0 abstentions.

The proposal was declared carried and it was

RESOLVED - that the matter be deferred for one month to allow officers to seek legal advice on the proposed fees and charges, outline the practical considerations of developing bespoke HMO policy, and clarify the position of HMOs in relation to licensing applications and the planning framework.

ACTION BY: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Richard Baker, Chief Executive

The Mayor called for a short recess and the meeting reconvened at 8.30pm.

MOTION TO PROCEED 'IN COMMITTEE'

Moved by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and

RESOLVED - that the Council proceeds to conduct the following business 'In Committee'.

Members were advised that the live stream and audio recording would cease at this point.

Aldermen Boyle and Campbell left the meeting during Item 13.1.

13 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

13.1 IN CONFIDENCE FI/GEN/032 MEMBERS BRIEFING ON THE 2027 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION

Members were advised that the Director of Finance would present a briefing on the 2027 Local Government Elections at the meeting.

[REDACTED]

Moved by Alderman Magill
Seconded by Councillor Webb and

RESOLVED - [REDACTED]

ACTION BY: John Balmer, Director of Finance and Richard Baker, Chief Executive

Councillor Kinnear left and returned to the Chamber during Item 13.2.

13.2 IN CONFIDENCE CE/GEN/103 THE LEASE OF ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE AND RELOCATION OF STAFF TO MOSSLEY MILL

[REDACTED]

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Alderman Smyth's objection to this item was noted.

Moved by Councillor Bennington
Seconded by Alderman Magill and

RESOLVED – [REDACTED]

ACTION BY: Richard Baker, Chief Executive

Councillor Kinnear left the meeting at Item 13.3.

13.3 IN CONFIDENCE G-LEG-14-628 DUBLIN ROAD DEVELOPMENT/BRIDGE STREET CARPARK ACCESS & IMPROVEMENTS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members regarding the development of lands at Dublin Road and the Council's Dublin Road carpark, Antrim.

2. Background

Members were reminded of the request received from a developer who wishes to build 38 units for the over 55-year age group on land beside the Council owned Dublin Road carpark. To satisfy the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) access requirements for the development, the Developer requires a portion of the Council's carpark which would involve the loss of approximately 8 disabled parking spaces in the carpark, however, these could be accommodated elsewhere within the carpark which does not normally operate at full capacity.

The Developer would carry out and pay for improvement works to the existing entrance of the carpark and the surrounding area.

At the August 2023 Council meeting Members agreed to dispose of the land (outlined in pink on the circulated map ("DR 1")) for the sum of £ [REDACTED] subject to the developer securing planning permission, undertaking the required enhancement works to the entrance in line with Council and DfI requirements and the resolution of all legal issues.

3. Update

The Developer was granted planning permission for the development by the Planning Committee in March 2025.

Officers met with the Developer, his surveyor, the Council's surveyor and DfI, to discuss the works required to the entrance to the development site which incorporates the Council's carpark. It was agreed that the portion of Council land required by the Developer needs to be adjusted. The adjustment was shown in green in the enclosed map ("DR 1"). The adjustment means that the Developer now requires 249 m² as opposed to 280 m². Officers were satisfied that the adjustment had no impact on the original sale price or further impact on the carpark as previously agreed by Members.

The Developer required a works licence to enter the Council's carpark to carry out enhancement works to the entrance of the Council's carpark and to reposition the disabled spaces and undertake associated re-lining etc as required. The Developer and Officers would ensure that the carpark was accessible for the duration of the works licence albeit some areas may be restricted for short periods.

In preparation for the sale of the portion of the carpark Officers discovered, and the Department confirmed, that the boundary to the carpark required rectification and shown as being part of the development site rather than being part of the Council's boundary. This was not a land transfer and was a technical map correction of the boundary lines. This is marked as red on the circulated Map ("DR 2").

The Director of Economic Development and Planning provided clarification in relation to whether the proposed development could worsen downstream flooding in surrounding areas, timescales for drainage works and the opinion of DAERA.

Moved by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Goodman and

RESOLVED - that Members approve the following:

- a) The amended purchase map as shown in green on the enclosed map ("DR1").**
- b) The map boundary correction as shown in red on the enclosed map ("DR 2").**
- c) A Works Licence granting access to the Developer to the Dublin Road carpark to carry out the enhancement works to the carpark entrance and affected areas of the carpark. The details and completion of the Works Licence to be delegated to Officers.**

ACTION BY: Paul Casey, Borough Lawyer

MOTION TO PROCEED 'OUT OF COMMITTEE'

Moved by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and

RESOLVED - that the Council proceeds to conduct any remaining business 'In Public'.

Members were advised that the audio recording would restart at this point.

The Mayor thanked everyone for attending and the meeting concluded at 9.29pm.

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.