28 October 2026

Committee Chair: Councillor E McLaughlin

Committee Vice-Chair: Alderman L Clarke

Committee Members: Aldermen – P Bradley and J Smyth

Councillors – M Cooper, S Flanagan, R Foster, J Gilmour, N Kelly, L Kirkpatrick, AM Logue, A McAuley, V McWilliam, L O'Hagan and S Ward

Dear Members

**MEETING OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

A meeting of the Operations Committee will be held in the **Round Tower Chamber, Antrim Civic Centre on Monday 2 November 2026 at 6.30 pm.**

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely



Richard Baker, GM MSc
**Chief Executive, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council**

**PLEASE NOTE: Refreshments will be available in the Café from 5.20**

**For any queries, please contact Member Services:**

Tel: 028 9448 1301 memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

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**REPORT ON BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING ON MONDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2026**

## 4 PRESENTATION

## 4.1 PK/GEN/005 PRESENTATION BY DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE

**1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this presentation is to provide Members with a verbal update on DfI grass cutting within the Borough.**

2. Introduction

Members are advised that Colin Cochrane, Andrew Gillan and Richard Ayton, from the Department for Infrastructure will provide a verbal update on DfI grass cutting in the Borough and Members' questions will then be addressed.

**3. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that Members note the update.**

Prepared by: Paula Robinson, Executive Officer

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

## 5 ITEMS FOR DECISION

## 5.1 PK/GEN/035/VOL5 GRASS CUTTING REVIEW

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on Council's grass-cutting arrangements, and associated financial and resource implications, including service delivery agreements with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for identified DfI lands, across the Borough.**

2. Introduction/Background

Previous reports to the Operations Committee have outlined the respective grass-cutting responsibilities of Council and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI), together with the challenges arising from changes to DfI's maintenance regime.

In recent years, DfI has significantly reduced grass-cutting activities on its estate (including roadside verges, splaylines and other public land owned by DfI) due to budgetary pressures and the implementation of biodiversity-focused land management practices. DfI verge maintenance is now generally limited to visibility splays and road safety requirements, with grass-cutting in many locations limited to a 1.1-metre swathe undertaken twice annually. This has impacted public perceptions of maintenance standards across several prominent verges and open spaces throughout the Borough, which DfI is responsible for.

In that same timeframe, Council has progressively extended its maintenance programme to include several DfI-owned and other non-Council-owned locations. This approach was intended to maintain the appearance of key gateway sites, roadside verges and amenity areas, ensuring that important locations continued to meet community expectations and contribute positively to the overall presentation of the Borough.

Recognising the financial, operational and governance implications associated with maintaining land outside Council ownership, Members previously agreed that a clear and consistent set of criteria should be applied when considering the inclusion of DfI locations within Council's grass-cutting programme. These criteria were designed to ensure that decisions are made transparently and that limited resources are targeted towards locations of strategic importance.

The agreed criteria are as follows:

**No Additional Non-Council-Owned Land to be Added**
This criterion ensures that Council's existing commitment to maintaining third-party land does not continue to expand, thereby avoiding additional, unsustainable, resource pressures and ongoing maintenance liabilities.

**Locations Must Contain Significant Council Assets or Enhancements**
Locations should include Council-owned flowerbeds, sculptures, tree planting, public realm improvements or other significant environmental enhancements. This ensures that maintenance resources support areas where Council has made a direct investment in improving the local environment.

**A 10-metre distance on either side of town and village signage where traffic regulations permit**
Grass cutting may be undertaken within a 10-metre area on either side of town and village signage, where traffic regulations permit. This approach helps maintain attractive and welcoming gateways into towns and villages, creating a positive first impression.

**Each (DfI) location must have a Memorandum of Understanding with DfI**
Each location must be supported by a Memorandum of Understanding with DfI. Such agreements provide clarity regarding ownership, maintenance responsibilities and accountability, ensuring an agreed framework for service delivery and ongoing site management.

3. Financial Implications

Historically, Council incurred annual costs of approximately £80,000 through the urban grass-cutting arrangement with DfI, together with an estimated £60,000 per annum associated with maintaining the 34 DfI-owned locations across the Borough.

Following the cessation of the urban grass-cutting arrangement and the subsequent reduction in maintenance activities on non-Council-owned land, Council has realised efficiencies of approximately £100,000, supporting effective delivery of core Council services.

These efficiencies have been realised while retaining maintenance at several strategically important locations that meet the agreed criteria and make a significant contribution to the appearance of towns, villages and key gateway sites. The revised approach has enabled Council to concentrate resources on its core estate and priority locations, ensuring that available budgets are utilised effectively while continuing to support a high-quality.

The current annual cost of the Council's mobile grass-cutting and grounds maintenance service is approximately £781,029. This figure relates to Council's mobile grass-cutting operations and does not include the cost of grass-cutting and grounds maintenance activities undertaken across the Council estate. The expenditure noted include direct staffing costs associated with Council's in-house workforce, an apportionment of fuel, plant and machinery operating costs and expenditure relating to external contractors engaged to undertake specialist or supplementary maintenance works.

Given the scale of the existing maintenance programme and associated budget commitments, the inclusion of additional sites within the grass-cutting schedule would result in increased operational demands and ongoing maintenance obligations. Any future expansion of the programme would

therefore require careful consideration of resource availability, service priorities and value for money.

4. Key Considerations

As part of the review of grass-cutting arrangements, consideration has been given to the implications of Council undertaking maintenance activities on land that is not within its ownership or direct control.

While Council has historically maintained several non-Council-owned locations in order to support the overall appearance and presentation of the Borough, such arrangements can present legal, operational, financial and governance challenges where responsibilities for ownership, insurance, inspection, maintenance and risk management are not formally defined.

These considerations have been brought into sharper focus by a recent legal claim relating to an alleged incident on third-party land (not owned by Council). The matter remains subject to ongoing legal proceedings and no liability has been determined; the case does however highlight the potential risks associated with undertaking maintenance activities on land outside Council ownership or formalised control.

The review has therefore considered not only the operational and resource implications of maintaining non-Council-owned land, but also the wider governance and risk considerations arising from such arrangements. Particular regard has been given to the potential precedent that could be created through the continued inclusion of additional third-party sites, which may lead to increased requests from external landowners and public bodies for Council to assume maintenance responsibilities.

The findings of the review reinforce the importance of formal agreements, including Memoranda of Understanding where appropriate, to clearly define ownership, responsibilities and accountability. This approach supports sound governance, effective asset management and the prudent deployment of Council resources, whilst ensuring maintenance activity remains focused on locations where Council has a clear role, responsibility and demonstrable community benefit.

The review has confirmed that the current maintenance arrangements, based on the previously agreed criteria, enables Council to maintain strategically important locations while ensuring that financial, human and physical resources remain focused on the core Council estate. The approach has reduced expenditure associated with non-Council-owned land, delivered operational efficiencies and minimised additional staffing and maintenance demands. As a result, Council has been able to target available resources towards priority locations while maintaining high standards across its own assets. Continued adherence to the agreed criteria will support sustainable service delivery, effective resource management and the ongoing provision of quality environments.

## 5. Recommendation

**It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report and that the findings of the grass-cutting review detailed therein be approved.**

Prepared by: Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks Operations

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

## 5.2 G/LEG/079 OFF-STREET CARPARKS

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval of the draft Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Off-Street (Public Car Parks) Parking Order 2026.**

**This Order is required to establish the necessary legal framework for the Council to manage, operate, and enforce its own off-street car parks following guidance from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI).**

### 2. Background and Context

Following the Review of Public Administration, the ownership, operation, and enforcement of off-street car parks transferred from central government to local Councils under the Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 ("the 2015 Act").

The 2015 Act amended the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 to designate Councils as "parking authorities". This allowed Councils to introduce "administrative orders" to govern their own car parks.

However, the 2015 Act lacked transitional provisions. As a result, Councils have temporarily relied on the legacy Off-Street Parking Order (Northern Ireland) 2000 ("the 2000 Order") to maintain operational arrangements. This has created some issues as follows:

- The Department no longer holds the legislative power to amend the 2000 Order for transferred car parks.
- Councils cannot amend the 2000 Order because they are not Statutory Rule-making authorities.
- Legal advice has confirmed that any local administrative order currently introduced by a Council would be superseded by the legacy 2000 Order in the event of a conflict.

To resolve this issue DfI intends to revoke the legacy 2000 Order. To ensure seamless operational continuity, all Councils must have their own localised Administrative Orders enacted and ready to activate prior to the 2000 Order being revoked.

### 3. Proposed Draft Order

DfI has provided a standardised template to ensure consistency across local government. The Borough Lawyer has reviewed this template and agrees with the Department's advice to mirror the core elements of the legacy 2000 Order, adapted specifically for this Borough.

Once enacted, this Order gives the Council full autonomy to amend its parking regulations at any time in the future.

The draft Order will incorporate the transferred carparks and all other Council owned car parks.

Officers are not recommending any changes to current parking operations, tariffs, or charging structures at this time.

The sole purpose of this report is to establish the legally required framework directed by DfI.

The draft Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2026 is enclosed for Members' consideration and approval.

4. Next Steps

If Members approve the draft Order Officers will progress the statutory process through the following stages:

- **Statutory Consultation for an 8 week period:** Engage with key statutory partners and stakeholders, including the DfI Transport Legislation Branch, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and local ratepayers;
- **Public Notice:** Publish a Public Notice in local newspapers initiating a mandatory 21-day period for public objections or feedback. A copy of the draft Order will also be placed on the Council website and circulated through the Council's social media channels and signage displayed in Council car parks as necessary;
- **Committee Review:** Bring a report back to Members detailing any responses or objections received during the consultation period for consideration;
- **Enactment and Advertisement:** Subject to Members' approval, publish a notice in the local press and on the Council's, website confirming the operational commencement date of the new Order;

5. Equality and Good Relations Implications

Equality: Neutral impact across all Section 75 groups.
Good Relations: Neutral impact on good relations.

**6. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that:**

**a) Members approve the draft Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Off-Street Parking (Public Car Parks) Order 2026 for public consultation and Public Notice.**

**b) A report detailing the outcome of the consultation and Public Notice process to be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee for consideration.**

Prepared by: Paul Casey, Borough Lawyer

Agreed by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation and Paul Casey, Borough Lawyer

Approved by: Richard Baker, Chief Executive

## 5.3 WM/WM/033 REQUEST FOR LIVE HERE LOVE HERE SUPPORT

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to seek approval for Live Here Love Here's request for financial support for the programme in 2027-28.**

2. Background

Live Here Love Here delivers a range of Northern Ireland-wide environmental initiatives which Council has supported for many years. The initiatives include:

- Adopt a Spot;
- Big Spring Clean;
- LHLH litter awareness media campaign;
- Community Awards;
- Connecting Communities events;
- Healthy Oceans Healthy Minds;
- Annual Insights Report on public attitude towards litter.

Council and the local community benefit from all these initiatives as well as the Small Grants Scheme which provides grants of £500 to £3000 to local groups delivering practical environmental improvement projects. While 20% of the funding is retained by LHLH to administer their overall programme, 80% is distributed directly to community projects within the Council area.

In addition, LHLH has secured £1.5 million National Lottery funding, and in partnership with Inspire, will be delivering the Climate Minds NI programme, which is expected to start in early 2027 and will further enhance environmental engagement and wellbeing initiatives across Northern Ireland.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Council has continued to support LHLH's community engagement and environmental improvement programmes. In 2026/27, Council contributed £26,250, with funding spilt equally between LHLH's core community engagement programme and its Small Grant Scheme.

4. Financial Position/Implication

LHLH has requested continuation of the current funding arrangement for 2027/28 with an inflationary increase 3.13% with a total annual contribution of £27,072. Financial provision for the funding support has been included in the 2027-28 estimates.

### 5. Recommendation

**It is recommended that Council continues financial support of the Live Here Love Here programme in 2027-28 to a value of £27,072.**

Prepared by: Leanne Smits, Waste Strategy and Sustainability Manager

Agreed by: Lynsey Daly, Head of Waste Strategy and Sustainability

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

## 5.4 WM/WM/033 REQUEST FOR ECO-SCHOOLS SUPPORT 2027/28

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to seek approval for funding to continue the Eco-Schools Programme for the 2027/28 academic year.**

2. Background

Live Here Love Here co-ordinates the Eco-Schools Programme which aims to combine pupils' learning with action to improve the environmental performance of the school. The Eco-Schools Programme is extremely popular across the Borough with 16,120 pupils reached in schools with active green flags. As of June 20206, 59% (44 schools) in Antrim and Newtownabbey have an active Green Flag, a healthy increase from 54% in June 2025. Our Council area now has 7 Ambassador schools supporting other schools and demonstrating excellence in environmental education. This is a strong indicator of excellence, the highest number of Ambassador schools in any other Council area is four.

The Eco-Schools programme has undergone significant enhancement in recent years, informed by feedback from participating schools and delivery partners. The introduction of the myEARTH platform has streamlined the application process, making participation more accessible and reducing administrative burden for schools. In addition, the programme has strengthened engagement through the delivery of a more interactive award ceremony and expanded suite of educational workshops and resources aligned to the curriculum.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Last year, £11,400 in financial support was agreed for the 2026/27 academic year. The funding provided a vital environmental education role for Council and included a dedicated Field Officer who supported schools and delivered workshops on waste, recycling, biodiversity and climate change.

A summary of the Eco-Schools engagement for the 2026/27 academic year is included (enclosed).

Council received this year's funding request (enclosed) from LHLH for the Eco-Schools Programme 2027/28 with two options available.

4. Financial Position/Implication

The funding request for 2027/28 includes two funding options:

Option 1: Support of the Eco-Schools Programme at a cost of £12,775 which includes Eco-Schools programme and award ceremony planning and delivery plus bespoke environmental education package including up to 60 hours of premium workshops direct

to schools and additional structured Field Officer support to schools for Green Flag applications.

Option 2: Support of the Eco-Schools Programme at a cost of £5,665 which includes Eco-Schools programme and award ceremony planning and delivery.

As Members will be aware, the Eco-Schools Programme is part funding by DAERA. Additional DAERA funding (at no extra cost to Councils) will provide access to other Eco-Schools resources including *Climate Ready Classrooms* and new water quality workshops and teaching resources called *Yah to Lough Neagh*.

Given the success of the Eco-Schools programme throughout the Borough and the significant number of schools already benefiting from the funding supplied by Council, Officers would recommend Option 1, £12,775 as this provides the best for value for money and the ongoing provision of support to our schools. This cost has been included in the estimates for 2027-28.

## 5. Recommendation

**It is recommended that Council approves funding in the amount of £12,775 for the Live Here Love Here Eco-Schools Programme 2027/28.**

Prepared by: Leanne Smits, Waste Strategy and Sustainability Manager

Agreed by: Lynsey Daly, Head of Waste Strategy and Sustainability

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

## 5.5 EH/EHS/LR/001 APPLICATION FOR THE GRANT OF AN ANNUAL INDOOR ENTERTAINMENT LICENCE – RAILWAY BAR, 24 RAILWAY STREET, ANTRIM

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for an Annual Indoor Entertainment Licence, held by David Hamilton for the Railway Bar, 24 Railway Street, Antrim, BT41 4AE.**

2. Introduction

An application has been received for the grant of an Annual Indoor Entertainment Licence for the following location

| Licensee | Location of Premises | Type(s)and hours of entertainment | File Number | New Application or Renewal |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| David Hamilton | The Railway Bar, 24 Railway Street, Antrim, BT41 4AE | Dancing, Singing, Music, Other entertainment of like kind.<br><br>**Annual Indoor Entertainment Licence**<br><br>Sunday – Thursday 11:30hrs to 23:30hrs<br><br>Saturday – Sunday 11:30hrs to 01:30hrs<br><br>Number of persons – no greater than 100 | EL230 | New Application |

In line with the Council Protocol for the hearing of Entertainment Licence applications, approved in December 2016, the application must be considered at the Operations Committee meeting.

Council can decide the following:

i. Grant the licence;
ii. Grant the licence with specific additional terms, conditions and restrictions;
iii. Refuse the licence;
iv. Defer an application for further consideration or to obtain further information.

If Council makes a decision against an Officer's recommendation, then Members must state their reasons for doing so. In such circumstances, a recorded vote will be taken.

3. Main Report

An application has been received for the grant of an Annual Indoor Entertainment Licence for the above-named location. In accordance with the Entertainment Licence Policy, Members' approval is required before the licence can be granted.

Members should note that the premises previously held an Entertainment Licence until 2015. The licence was not renewed at that time.

4. Summary

An application for an Annual Indoor Entertainment Licence has been received from David Hamilton in relation to the Railway Bar, 24 Railway Street, Antrim. In accordance with Council protocol for the hearing of Entertainment Licence applications, a decision by Members is needed on the granting of the licence.

**5. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that an Annual Indoor Entertainment Licence is granted to the applicant, David Hamilton for the Railway Bar, 24 Railway Street, Antrim, BT41 4AE.**

- **That all relevant licensing requirements are met**
- **That statutory and public consultees have no objections to the approval**

Prepared by: Kelly Squance, Environmental Health Officer

Agreed by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

## 6 ITEMS FOR NOTING

## 6.1 L/LEI/001 CLOTHING WORN IN COUNCIL LEISURE FACILITIES

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the Council policy regarding the wearing of clothing in Council leisure facilities.**

2. Background

At the October 2026 Operation Committee, a Member noted a resident had contacted him about a recent visit to the Valley Leisure Centre during which he had observed another user in the centre wearing a sports top that included wording related to a perceived political opinion.

3. Key Issues and the law

The Council's MORE Membership Terms and Conditions (enclosed) require members:

*To conduct yourself in an orderly manner so as not to interfere with other members' use of the facilities.*
*To treat facilities, equipment, and other members with respect*

The Council's Fitness Suite Rules and Guidance (enclosed) note that:

*Aggressive, abusive, threatening, anti-social or inappropriate behaviour, including the use of foul or offensive language, will not be tolerated.*
*Appropriate fitness attire must be worn at all times.*

In relation to the specific incident highlighted at the October 2026 Operations Committee, Council has not received a complaint, and nor was the issue referred to staff, at the time of, nor since, the alleged incident.

In Northern Ireland, there is no specific law that generally prohibits someone from wearing clothing which expresses, for example, political or social view and beliefs. The legal position depends on the nature of the shirt, where it is being worn, and the impact on others.

The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO) prohibits discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religious belief and political opinion, including in the provision of goods, facilities, and services. It applies to leisure centres, sports facilities, and other public services. Importantly, the FETO protects individuals from being refused access or treated less favourably because of their religion or political opinion. A sports shirt displaying a political or national symbol may therefore engage these protections.

In Northern Ireland, the right to express yourself through clothing is protected under Article 10 (Freedom of Expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which is brought into domestic law by the Human Rights

Act 1998. Depending on the context, clothing choice can also intersect with Article 9 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act[1]. The Council's Equality Scheme (2026-30) sets out the commitment of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council to fulfilling Section 75 statutory duties and the arrangements for this.

Clothing which displays the following may constitute a criminal offence:

- Garments displaying symbols, slogans, or imagery that are threatening, abusive, or insulting with the intent to stir up hatred (or where hatred is highly likely to be stirred up) against protected groups.

- Wearing clothing, uniforms, or carrying items in a public place that arouse reasonable suspicion that you are a member or supporter of a proscribed (banned) terrorist organisation.

4. Summary

The report provides an overview of Council policies and procedures relating to the wearing of clothing which displays political messaging, within Council leisure facilities and notes protections afforded to individuals under existing legislation.

Officers will continue to consider formal complaints made regarding clothing worn at Council leisure facilitates on a case-by-case basis and take appropriate action, as necessary.

## 5. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation and Paul Casey Borough Lawyer (Legal, Land, Governance and Policy)

## 6.2 PK/GEN/022 NORTHERN IRELAND AMENITY COUNCIL BEST KEPT AWARDS 2026

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on Council's participation and performance in the Northern Ireland Amenity Council Best Kept Awards 2026.**

2. Introduction

The Northern Ireland Amenity Council (NIAC) established the Best Kept Awards in the early 1950s, under the leadership of Professor Arthur Muskett, to promote civic pride, environmental responsibility and community participation through the recognition of towns, villages and residential areas that demonstrate high standards of environmental quality, appearance and management.

The Best Kept Awards are one of the longest-running environmental award schemes within Northern Ireland and subsequently influenced the development of similar environmental competitions such as Britain in Bloom and Ireland's Tidy Towns. The awards have evolved to reflect changing environmental priorities, placing increased emphasis on sustainability, biodiversity, cleanliness, community involvement, and the overall quality of the local environment.

The scheme continues to provide an important benchmark for environmental excellence and encourages all local authorities, community groups, and residents to work collaboratively to enhance and maintain the appearance and sustainability of their local areas.

3. Best Kept Awards 2026 Results

Council has achieved success in recent Northern Ireland Amenity Council Best Kept Awards, reflecting its ongoing commitment to maintaining and enhancing the quality of public spaces across the Borough. That success continued in 2026, with the Borough's performance recognised as follows: Antrim won Best Kept Large Town; Ballynure won Best Kept Small Village and Randalstown won Best Kept Small Town.

These achievements demonstrate the consistently high standards of maintenance, presentation and environmental management delivered across the Borough by Council and in partnership with local communities.

Ballynure also won the prestigious 'Best of the Best' title, as the overall winner of the 2026 competition. The judging panel highlighted the village's "outstanding appearance, excellent standards of cleanliness, vibrant floral displays and strong sense of community pride". Judges singled out the obvious collaborative approach between local residents, community groups, and Council staff in maintaining an attractive and welcoming environment.

The 2026 successes build on the strong partnership between Council, local communities, and volunteers in maintaining and enhancing the Borough's towns and villages and provide a template for future years in other locations. The awards recognise the commitment and pride shown by all those involved and enhance the Borough's reputation for delivering high-quality, attractive, and welcoming local environments.

## 4. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared and Agreed by: Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks Operations

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

## 6.3 L/LEI/004/VOL2 SUMMER SCHEME 2026 PROGRAMME UPDATE

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide an update on, and review of, the Council's 2026 Summer Scheme Programme**

2. Introduction/Background

The Council delivers a range of Summer Schemes and Sports Camps across the Borough during the school summer holidays. In 2026, programmes were delivered across leisure centres and community locations. To promote inclusion, the Council partnered with the Mae Murray Foundation to deliver inclusive schemes and family fun days at Antrim Forum, Crumlin Leisure Centre, Fairview PS, and Mossley Pavilion. In addition, the Council expanded the inclusivity of its programming, delivering two Stay and Play sessions in partnership with Sensory Kids NI.

In addition to Council-run activities, financial support was provided to external organisations through Community Development Grants, totalling £39,700, enabling them to deliver tailored summer programmes. A further £25,000 was allocated to Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools in the Borough, with contributions of up to £5,000 available for each school delivering a Summer Scheme for children and young people with special needs.

3. Summer Scheme 2026 Performance

Over the five-week programme, 2,215 places were booked across eleven Borough locations. The 2026 mainstream programme achieved 82% occupancy.

A further 100 places were provided at the inclusive schemes at Antrim Forum and Mossley Pavilion. Family fun days in Ballyclare and Crumlin attracted a further 202 children. Total participation across Council schemes and associated inclusive activities in 2026 was 2,517 (cf. 2,665 in 2025 mainstream provision).

The reduced numbers participating in the 2026 mainstream programme reflects greater availability of alternative provision, changing customer demand, low uptake at Hydepark, changes to the 'out-of-centre' trips model and reduced capacity at some venues due to essential maintenance works. However, the programme continued to attract strong participation across leisure and community locations and provided a broad range of activities for children and young people throughout the Borough.

The mainstream programme recorded 2,215 bookings (inc. 400 early/late enrolments). A further 302 children participated through the inclusive schemes and family fun days. Key statistics for mainstream venues are detailed below:

| Scheme | Capacity 2026 | Booked 2026 | Occupancy % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Leisure Schemes** | | | |
| Ballyearl | 400 | 205 | 51% |
| Crumlin | 45 | 34 | 76% |
| Sixmile | 450 | 450 | 100% |
| Valley | 1,000 | 993 | 99% |
| Leisure Scheme Total | 1,895 | 1682 | 89% |
| **Sports Camps** | | | |
| Antrim Forum Sports Camp | 160 | 161 | 101% |
| Castle Gardens | 80 | 53 | 66% |
| Crumlin – Sports Camp | 45 | 40 | 89% |
| Sports Camps Total | 285 | 254 | 89% |
| **Community Schemes** | | | |
| Ballynure | 90 | 62 | 69% |
| Doagh (Kilbride) | 45 | 11 | 24% |
| Hydepark | 0 | 0 | 0% |
| Lilian Bland | 200 | 141 | 71% |
| Merville | 180 | 65 | 36% |
| Community Total | 515 | 279 | 54% |
| **TOTALS** | **2,695** | **2,215** | **82%** |

4. Staffing Considerations

The 2026 Summer Scheme was delivered by a dedicated team of approximately 65 staff across eight directly staffed venues, led by the Summer Scheme Coordinator, and supported by Leisure Centre Duty Managers and the Leisure Administration Team. Staffing structures varied by venue, comprising one Senior Leader and between four and nineteen Camp Leaders, depending on participant numbers and capacity.

A total of 88 applications were received through Council's contracted recruitment agency, resulting in 65 appointments. Senior Leaders were also recruited this year through the agency Blue Arrow. Additional specialist sports coaches were engaged for the multi-sport camps at Antrim Forum, Castle Gardens, and Crumlin.
This staffing model ensured appropriate supervision ratios and allowed flexibility to redeploy staff across sites when required.

Summer scheme costs are predominantly staff-related, with the majority of those delivered through agency contracts. The cost of summer scheme provision noted below does not include 'sunk costs' associated with other Council services such as HR and Organisational Development, Finance and Leisure Administration and Centre Management Teams, each of whom contributed to the effective development and delivery of the programme.

5. Financial Review

The total cost of delivering the 2026 Summer Scheme Programme was £154,672.84, with income of £106,918.28, resulting in a net subsidy of £47,754.56. Based on the 2,215 mainstream bookings shown in the performance table, this equates to a net cost to the Council of £21.56 per booking. Overall expenditure decreased compared with 2025, resulting in an improved subsidy position despite lower participation levels.

6. Scheme Review and Learning

The 2026 Summer Scheme Programme delivered another successful year, providing opportunities for children and young people to participate in a wide range of recreational, sporting, and inclusive activities across the Borough. While total mainstream bookings were slightly lower than 2025, overall occupancy was 82%. Customer feedback was positive, with 93% of parents satisfied or extremely satisfied with the scheme and 97% reporting that provided value for money.

Learning from previous years also informed improvements to the customer booking experience. In 2024 and 2025, releasing all places simultaneously led to website and booking system crashes. For 2026, work with the booking system provider and a staggered release of places avoided a repeat of these issues, providing a smoother sign-up journey for customers. This year, 90% of parents reported being satisfied with the booking process.

Delivery across eight directly staffed venues was supported by a dedicated team and continued to benefit from partnership working with specialist disability organisations and local SEN schools to enhance inclusive provision. Financially, the programme generated £106,918.28 in income against expenditure of £154,672.84, resulting in a net subsidy of £47,754.56, an improvement on the previous year.

## 7. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: Kevin Madden, Sport and Physical Activity Manager and Conor McCallion, Leisure Development Manager

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

## 6.4 L/LEI/SD/018 HEALTH INTERVENTION REVIEW

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the review of Council's Health Intervention Action Plan for 2026–27.**

2. Introduction/Background

Members are advised that Council approved the Health Intervention Action Plan 2022–27 in November 2022. A copy is enclosed for Members' reference. The Action Plan aims to increase regular and sustained participation in physical activity across all age groups, supporting the wider objective of addressing health inequalities among vulnerable and inactive groups.

3. Health Intervention Review

Members are reminded that Officers are reviewing the current Health Intervention Action Plan in preparation for the development of the new Health Intervention Action Plan 2027–32.

As part of the review, Officers have identified a number of new and emerging themes that will be considered as part of the ongoing review and development process.

Neurological programming, for example, has emerged as a key theme through delivery of Council's Steady and Strong programme. This area could support people diagnosed with, or living with, a range of conditions, including multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, dementia, stroke, and epilepsy.

Officers will continue to engage with internal and external stakeholders over the coming months, to help inform the priorities for the new Action Plan.

The Health Intervention Stakeholder Engagement Workshop will take place on Wednesday 18 November 2026 in the Linen Suite, Mossley Mill. An invitation will be issued to all Elected Members in advance of the event.

### 4. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: Kevin Madden Sport and Physical Activity Manager and Conor McCallion Leisure Development Manager

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

## 6.5 PK/GEN/030 BRITAIN IN BLOOM AWARDS RESULTS 2026

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on Council's participation and performance in this year Britian In Bloom Awards 2026.**

2. Introduction/Background

Britain in Bloom is one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious horticultural competitions, recognising excellence in environmental improvement, horticultural achievement, and community participation. Delivered by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), the programme assesses entrants against three key criteria: horticultural excellence, environmental responsibility, and community engagement.

Progression to the Britain in Bloom UK Finals is highly competitive, with only the highest-performing locations from regional competitions selected to represent their region at national level. This rigorous process ensures that finalists demonstrate outstanding standards in environmental management, horticultural practice and partnership working.

This year the Borough achieved unprecedented success, with Antrim competing in the Large Town category, Randalstown in the Small Town category, and Ballynure in the Small Village category. This achievement reflects the strong partnership between local communities, volunteers, businesses, community organisations, and Council, supported by ongoing investment in public spaces, biodiversity, and environmental improvements.

3. Results

The Council has previously achieved considerable success in the RHS Britain in Bloom programme. Randalstown secured a Gold Award and was named Overall Winner of the Best Small Town category in the 2022 UK Finals, while Ballynure was awarded a Silver Gilt Medal in the 2023 UK Finals. Randalstown subsequently returned to the national finals in 2024, marking its fifth appearance at this level.

The results from the 2026 RHS Britain in Bloom UK Finals are as follows:

Antrim (Large Town): GOLD
Ballynure (Small Village): GOLD
Randalstown (Small Town): GOLD

A Gold Award in Britain in Bloom is the highest standard of achievement awarded to a community, town, village, city, coastal area, or urban community that demonstrates outstanding performance across the competition's judging criteria and is generally regarded as national recognition that:

- the place is exceptionally well cared for,
- environmental management is of a high standard,
- there is strong community involvement and civic pride,
- and the entry is among the best examples in the UK and Ireland bloom movement.

## 4. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks Operations

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

## 6.6 FI/FIN/004 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 6 - APRIL 2026 TO SEPTEMBER 2026

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the financial performance for the Directorates reporting to the Operations Committee for Period 6 - April 2026 to September 2026.**

2. Introduction/Background

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

3. Summary

As at period 6:

The Estates and Recreation Directorate has an adverse variance of £205k, or 3.4%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

Employee costs are favourable for the period as staff structures are reviewed; however, Facility and Energy Costs and Leisure Membership Income are adverse.

The Environment Services and Sustainability Directorate has a favourable variance of £306k, or 2.3%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

The overall Environmental Services and Sustainability favourable variance is made up of a number of small variances in employee, waste collection, and recycling budgets. The overall % figure is low and Officers continue to monitor the financial situation.

A report on the financial performance, employee costs, highest areas of expenditure and income, and the financial performance by Head of Service is provided (enclosed) for Members' information.

The overall financial position of the Council will be presented to the Policy and Governance Committee.

### 4. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Approved by: John Balmer, Director of Finance; Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability; and John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

## 6.7 WM/WM/049 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM PERFORMANCE UPDATE

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to advise Members that Council has successfully maintained its ISO 14001 accredited Environmental Management System.**

2. Introduction

Council has held ISO 14001 certification for its Environmental Management System (EMS) since 2015 and this assists in reducing the organisation's environmental impact. As part of the accreditation, Council must demonstrate compliance during an external audit, with environmental legislation and regulatory requirements, prevent pollution where practicable and continually improvement in environmental performance.

3. Executive Summary of Audit Report

The external audit was completed in October and confirmed that Council has successfully maintained and achieved re-certification to the ISO 14001 standard. The auditor noted that the Environmental Management System is fully embedded throughout the organisation, with strong evidence of leadership from Elected Members, employee engagement, and commitment to environmental management across Council services.

High levels of compliance and comprehensive documented information demonstrate that the system is well implemented, understood and effectively supporting Council's environmental policy commitments.

### 4. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: Leanne Smits, Waste Strategy and Sustainability Manager

Agreed by: Lynsey Daly, Head of Waste Strategy and Sustainability

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

## 6.8 EH/EHS/FC/011 SAFEFOOD GLUTEN-FREE LIVING WORKSHOP

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Gluten-free Living Workshop delivered by Safefood in partnership with Council's Environmental Health section.**

2. Introduction

Coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity can require individuals to make significant changes to their diet and everyday lives. Access to reliable information and practical guidance can help individuals manage a gluten-free diet, make informed food choices and reduce the risk of cross-contamination.

Safefood, in partnership with Council, delivered a free Gluten-free Living Workshop to provide practical advice and support to residents living with coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity within the Borough.

3. Key Issues

The Gluten-free Living Workshop took place on Tuesday 13 October 2026, at Antrim Civic Centre. The event was organised by Safefood in partnership with the Council's Environmental Health section, which promoted the workshop locally. Safefood provided the trainers and promoted the event through its networks and social media.

The session provided practical guidance on managing a gluten-free diet, including ingredient substitutes, recipes and the prevention of cross-contamination. It also offered participants the opportunity to ask questions, receive advice directly from experienced professionals and share experiences with others managing similar dietary requirements.

A total of 46 residents attended the workshop, with feedback being very positive overall. Attendees particularly appreciated the practical dietary advice, the trainers' knowledge and presentation skills, and the opportunity to receive face-to-face guidance. The workshop was also highlighted as being especially beneficial for people who had been recently diagnosed with coeliac disease.

4. Summary

Council's Environmental Health section worked in partnership with Safefood to deliver a Gluten-free Living Workshop at Antrim Civic Centre on 13 October 2026. The workshop attracted 46 residents and received excellent feedback. The event provided practical advice on managing a gluten-free diet and demonstrated the benefits of partnership working in supporting residents living with coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity.

## 5. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: Christina McErlean, Deputy Head of Environmental Health (Commercial)

Agreed by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

## 7 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Any Other Relevant Business (AORB) may be taken at this point.