



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE ROUND CHAMBER, ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE ON
TUESDAY 3 OCTOBER 2023 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Alderman L Clarke
- Members Present
(In person)** : Councillors – S Cosgrove, H Cushinan,
N Kelly, H Magill, E McLaughlin, A O’Lone,
M Stewart and B Webb
- Members Present:
(Remote)** : Alderman - P Bradley
Councillors - M Brady, S Flanagan, L O’Hagan
- Non Committee
Members:
(Remote)** : Councillor J Gilmour
- Officers Present** : Director of Finance & Governance – S Cole
Head of Organisation Development - L Millar
Lead Human Resources Manager - P Greer
Head of Health, Safety & Resilience – E Girvan
Borough Lawyer & Head of Legal, Legal Services – P Casey
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson
Member Services Officer – C McGrandle
Mayor and Member Services Officer – S Fisher

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

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

1. APOLOGIES

Alderman L Boyle

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3. INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF

None

4. PRESENTATION

A presentation from the Head of Health, Safety and Resilience was given on Health & Safety & Resilience within Council, following which Members' questions were answered.

Proposed by Councillor Brady
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the presentation be noted.

NO ACTION

5 ITEMS FOR DECISION

5.1 CCS/EDP/10 AUTISM IMPACT AWARD RE-ACCREDITATION AND TRAINING

Members were reminded that in December 2022 approval was given to proceed with reaccreditation of the Autism Impact Award.

The Council successfully achieved the Autism Impact Award which is in place for 3 years and is directly linked to achieving actions within the Council Disability Action Plan (DAP) 2020 – 2025.

The Award is supported by Autism NI and ensures that the Council upholds its work as an Autism Friendly Council and includes:

- Training for front-line staff in the Fundamentals of Autism
- Autism Champions based at each of our venues to help make them more welcoming and accessible to those with autism and their families.
- Autism Action Plans designed specifically for each venue to ensure we support those with autism and their families.

Members were further reminded that the 3 year re-accreditation was a total

one-off cost of £2,015 and covers the following:

- Civic Centres
- Arts and Culture venues
- Leisure Centres
- Elected Members

To further promote inclusion it was proposed to extend the training programme to operational staff in Parks, Waste and Recycling Centres at an additional cost of £1,135.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

additional funding of £1,135 for Autism training for operational staff in Parks, Waste and Recycling Centres be approved.

ACTION BY: Jennifer Close, Director of Organisation Development

5.2 G/MSMO/147 NILGA – FORMATION OF NEW NILGA STRATEGIC POLICY NETWORK

Members would be aware of the appointments made at the Annual Meeting to Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA); eight members as Full members for year one and one member as representative on the Elected Member Development group for the term of Council as below:

NOMINATIONS	
Full Members	Elected Member Development
Alderman Smyth	Councillor Webb
Councillor Cushinan	
Councillor Webb	
Councillor McWilliam	
Councillor Flanagan	
Councillor Goodman	
Councillor Bennington	
Councillor Gilmour	

Further to these appointments, NILGA has made an additional request, seeking an Elected Member nomination from each Council to participate in the new NILGA Strategic Policy Network.

This policy oversight group will develop a suitable policy framework and enable members to decide on ongoing priorities, groups etc in a more detailed discussion than is possible at the monthly Executive Committee. A copy of the draft Terms of Reference for the Network was circulated.

NILGA had advised the nomination, may or may not be one of the NILGA Full members and that no specific party membership was required. NILGA have expressed a preference that the nomination be for the term of Council.

Proposed by Councillor Brady
Seconded by Alderman Bradley and agreed that

Alderman Smyth was nominated to the NILGA Strategic Policy Network for the term of Council.

ACTION BY: Liz Johnston, Deputy Director of Governance

5.3 G/MSMO/017 VOL 3 DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE – REQUEST TO PRESENT TRANSPORT & ROADS UPDATE

Members would recall at the September 2023 Council Meeting it was agreed that the Department for Infrastructure would present to a Council meeting in relation to the Roads Programme Annual Consultation.

Council had received a further request (circulated) from the Department for Infrastructure requesting the opportunity to make a further presentation at a Council Meeting to provide an update in relation to Transport & Roads.

The Department had expressed a willingness to complete both presentations at the same Council meeting.

Proposed by Alderman Bradley
Seconded by Councillor Magill and agreed that

the Department for Infrastructure also be invited to present at a Council meeting in relation to the Transport and Roads Update.

ACTION BY: Member Services

5.4 G/GEN/019 CODE OF GOVERNANCE (August 2023)

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council is committed to the principles of good governance and has a Code of Governance to reflect this. The document consolidates the key governance practices within the Council, demonstrating the Council's governance structures are consistent with the core and supporting principles contained in the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (April 2016).

The Code of Governance (circulated), once approved, would be uploaded to the Council website to provide details of Council's existing processes and documentation to demonstrate compliance with the framework.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the Code of Governance (August 2023) be approved.

ACTION BY: Liz Johnston, Deputy Director of Governance

6 ITEMS FOR NOTING

6.1 G-LEG-325/26 DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE - THE PRIVATE STREETS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1980 – DEVELOPMENT AT ASHGREEN, ANTRIM

Correspondence was received from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) advising that streets at the above development had been adopted by DfI Roads (copy map circulated).

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the correspondence be noted.

NO ACTION

6.2 PT/CI/058 APSE AWARDS 2023-24 (ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE EXCELLENCE)

Members were reminded that the Council was shortlisted in three categories for the Annual APSE Awards 2023/24 as follows:

- Best Efficiency and Transformation Initiative
- Best Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship Initiative
- Best Service Team: Sports, Leisure and Cultural Service

Elected Members and Officers attended the Awards Ceremony on Thursday 14 September 2023 at the Titanic Belfast and the Council was announced as the Winner for 'Best Service Team for Sports, Leisure and Cultural Service.'

APSE is a networking community that assists local authorities who are striving to improve their frontline services. The APSE Service Awards uniquely recognises the profound contribution of local council frontline services to local communities and local people.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

6.3 HR/HR/019 AGENCY STAFF UPDATE

Members were reminded that agency staff are used across the Council to provide temporary cover for absence such as:

- Maternity leave
- Secondments
- Sickness absence
- Vacant posts

- Seasonal Events

The use of agency staff is subject to a rigorous approval process, which requires the approval of the Corporate Leadership Team and there is budgetary provision for the majority of posts filled via departmental salary budgets, salary contingency and grant funding.

Current Agency staff

The table circulated at Appendix 1 provided an update on the use of agency staff in August 2023 compared to August 2022. It excluded limited ad-hoc agency cover, which is necessary to provide operational cover, at short notice.

In reviewing the number of agency workers it should be noted that:

- 29 Seasonal Operatives (GMO driver and non-drivers) commenced in March 2023 for 26 weeks to September 2023
- 51 Seasonal Summer Scheme Leaders covered the Summer Schemes from 17 July 2023 for 5 weeks
- 11 Waste Resource Management Operative and Driver vacancies that were covered by agency workers have now been recruited.

Cost of Agency

Circulated at Appendix 2 is the expenditure on agency workers in August 2023.

The cost of agency staff has been significantly reduced for the period 1 April 2023 to August 2023 at 8% of all staffing costs compared to April 2022 to August 2022 which was 11%.

Current recruitment:

Following recent recruitment exercises within Waste Operations, a number of posts covered by agency workers have now been recruited and are being filled by permanent employees as follows:

- 11 x Waste Resource Management Operative and Driver positions have been filled, with a number of existing agency workers gaining permanent employment with the Council in August 2023.

Further recruitment exercises are ongoing to fill Parks Operative positions, with 10 current agency workers being offered permanent contracts which will further decrease our reliance on agency cover.

We are committed to reducing our dependence on agency workers and will continue to recruit directly for vacant positions. However, we may still use agency workers for more ad hoc, seasonal, or temporary coverage as needed.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

6.4 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE, APRIL-AUGUST 2023

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the management of attendance for April 2023 to August 2023 (summary circulated).

Members were advised that absence at the end of August was above target by 1.03 of a day with 6.12 average days lost per employee against a target of 5.09 days. Covid absence was not included in the reported figure as a significant number of these cases work from home during the isolation period.

There continued to be a positive return to work of short term cases along with 6 long term cases ending in August 2023, 3 of which left the Council's employment.

Further analysis of Absence Figures for August 2023 indicated the following:

100% attendance

The 100% attendance rate continued to be high with 78% of our workforce achieving this to the end of August 2023 against a target of 60%.

Formal Case Reviews to date

Formal Case reviews (FCRs) were normally held where all possible steps have been taken and have failed to secure the employee's return to work within a maximum of 9 months.

- **Concluded cases – 21**, with employees either returning to work, obtaining ill health retirement or leaving the organisation.
- **In Progress – 1**
- **Approaching – 2**, there are 2 others approaching this stage with 1 who will exit under vs

Long Term Absence – 87% of the overall absence figures

Long term absence is defined as continuous absence greater than 20 days. Although there was a slight increase in long term absence from 86% to 87% compared to the previous month, it is expected that this figure will decrease in the coming year. This is due to our continued efforts to address complex long term absence cases, conduct regular wellbeing meetings with employees, utilising Occupational Health services, and holding timely absence review meetings.

- **% of Challenging long term cases – 52%**, this includes absence related to road traffic accidents, disability related illness, and general injuries.
- **Returned to work – 3 cases** have successfully returned to work with a further 3 leaving the Council's employment.

Short Term Absence – 13% of the overall absence figures

Short term absence is defined as absence less than 20 working days. Whilst it is understood that short term absences are inevitable, it is crucial for Managers/Supervisors, Human Resources and employees to work together to minimise the impact of these absences on service delivery.

Main Reasons:

- Cold/flu, stomach bug, infection (accounting for 40% of short term absence)
- Stress Depression, Mental Health
- Chest and respiratory issues
- Musculoskeletal problems
- Back and neck problems

Overall Absence

Stress-related absence (including work related stress) accounted for 54% of total absence. Proactive work is ongoing to address this by:

- Encouraging open communication to address stress and mental health concerns in wellbeing meetings.
- Providing mental health awareness training for employees.
- Providing access to mental health support services, through Inspire Counselling service, the Council's Occupational Health service and additional information available through STAYWELL.
- Implementing flexible working arrangements, supporting phased returns and reasonable adjustments where possible in the workplace.
- Encouraging physical activity through the promotion of the Council's employee subsidised Gym Membership Scheme.
- Encouraging participation in our wellness programme with regular wellbeing activities and health advice promoted weekly through the STAY MORE CONNECTED kudoboard.
- Partnering with legal advisors and Employers for Disability NI to arrange awareness sessions on mental health illnesses, to provide training to managers on managing stress and how to encourage open communication to reduce stress-related absence and to promote a healthy work environment.

To improve absence rates and encourage earlier returns to work, the following actions are being undertaken.

- Regular case management discussions are held with legal advisors to support a targeted approach for complex cases. These help Directors, Heads of Services, and HR to review cases, consider reasonable adjustments, and understand the legal context, enabling specific action plans for individual cases.
- Meetings held with directorates with high or complex absence cases have been increased to analyse cases and agree on next steps, with attendance from relevant Directors, Deputy Directors, and Heads of Service. Formal case reviews are scheduled as needed.

- The HR Business Partnership team is working closely with managers and Occupational Health on an individual case management basis. This ensures prompt action is taken to keep absences within target and provides support to managers in absence review trigger meetings for fair and consistent approach.
- Monthly case management discussion meetings are scheduled as needed to review complex cases with an Occupational Health consultant. Case managers attend these sessions to ensure effective use of the Occupational Health service and support earlier returns to work where possible.
- The Corporate and Human Resources Risks registers have been reviewed to reflect the current absence rate position, with actions and interventions recorded to mitigate risks.
- Managers within Parks have received training on effectively managing absence caseloads. Absence management toolkits are under development, and best practice toolkits have been identified and shared on STAYWELL to further assist managers and employees.
- Targeted training is being planned in areas of high absence provided by Human Resources, legal advisors, and in partnership with employers for disability or other relevant organisations.
- Development continues on an online training module to promote the importance of attending work. This will be rolled out to new staff initially and then across the wider organisation in 2023.
- The use of the Wellbeing Calendar is being continued to support employee wellbeing.
- Physiotherapy services are being provided for appropriate cases of back and musculoskeletal-related absence.
- HR will review the absence paperwork, including the absence notification and return to work forms.
- HR will design and develop an Absence action plan

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

6.5 CCS/CS/006 CUSTOMERS CHANNELS UPDATE

Members were reminded that the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan for 2023-2024 sets out the following Performance Improvement Target, "*We will achieve high levels of customer satisfaction*".

The purpose of this report was to provide a quarter one performance update on the indicators that the Plan sets out as measurements of progress towards this target.

We achieve at least 80% satisfaction with overall Council services:

Each issue of the Borough Life magazine has a specific, themed survey, and

within each one, residents are asked to rate their satisfaction with Council services. In addition, further surveys throughout the year will request feedback on satisfaction with Council services and other areas of interest.

During July and August, residents replied to surveys on Council digital services (Borough Life), V36 Skate 100, Muckamore Community Centre and the Sixmile Festival, with 110 responses. Further responses will be added in September by a survey of the Spinning Yarns Festival.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2 (July/August)	2023-24	Status
87.5%	92.9%	80%	91.9%	93.6%	92.5%	On Track

The percentage of abandoned calls will be 6.5% (or less):

A total of **31,561** calls were presented during July and August, a **5.1%** increase compared to **30,041** in the same two months 2022-2023. The percentage for abandoned calls for the period was **4.8%**, and a similar level of performance will be expected to continue throughout the rest of the year, with daily monitoring of figures.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2 (July/August)	2023-24	Status
6.0%	5.1%	6.5%	6.0%	4.8%	5.5%	On Track

We have achieved at least 650,000 online transactions:

Officers will continue to promote and monitor the shift of transactions to an online basis, where practical and beneficial. For the purposes of maintaining consistency with previous benchmarks, this indicator focuses upon the number of online transactions including:

- Caravan bookings
- Online theatre and events bookings
- Leisure bookings
- Dog licensing applications
- Bulky waste bookings

Figures for quarter 2 will be reported in November 2023. The quarter 1 figure of **151,743** is **23.3%** of target, but quarter 2 is expected to be much higher due to ticket sales for events such as the Six Mile Festival and Enchanted Winter Garden.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	2023-24	Status
652,593	874,100	650,000	151,743	November	151,743	On Track

There are at least 8,000 downloads of the Residents App:

Downloads of the ANBorough App are measured through official app stores

(Google and Apple) and totalled **13,963** in 2022-23.

There were **3,158** downloads during quarter two, 42.3% of downloads being for iOS devices and 57.7% for Android. Total downloads of **6,513** is **81.4%** of the target for the year. Downloads are expected to remain steady throughout the next two quarters, particularly over Christmas when new devices are activated by customers.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2 (July/August)	2023-24	Status
14,481	13,963	8,000	3,355	3,158	6,513	On Track

Progress on the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023-2024 is reported on a quarterly basis to the Policy and Governance and Audit and Risk Committees, and final, validated figures are contained within the Annual Report on Performance 2023-2024 (Self-Assessment), which will be reviewed by Council and published on the Council's website by 30 September 2024.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Organisation Development advised that the team were currently looking at new ways to encourage survey and consultation responses.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

6.6 FI/GEN/015 EXTENSION TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT REMOTE MEETINGS LEGISLATION

Members were advised that correspondence, circulated, had been received from the Department for Communities in relation to the extension to Local Government Remote Meetings Legislation.

Section 78 (local authority meetings) of the Coronavirus Act 2020 contained the provision to provide Councils with the flexibility to hold meetings by remote or hybrid means during the Coronavirus emergency.

This was scheduled to expire on 21 September 2023, however the Department has now brought a further extension order to extend section 78 of the Coronavirus Act for a further 6 months, until 24 March 2024.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

6.7 CCS/EDP/11 EQUALITY SCHEME AND ACTION PLAN (EAP) 2023-26 CONSULTATION UPDATE

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 required the Council, when carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine categories of persons noted within the legislative framework. The Council must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Council's Equality Scheme described certain arrangements that as a public authority Council must set-up and is obliged to apply and follow as a means of fulfilling the statutory requirements of Section 75 (1) and (2) i.e., the duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations. This included arrangements for training staff, assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity, and monitoring any adverse impact of those policies that have been adopted.

The Council must provide an Annual Progress report to the Equality Commission to outline how those arrangements have been applied and to assess how effective they have been in supporting the Council to comply with the Section 75 duties. The Council's Annual Progress report to cover the period April 2022 to March 2023 had been submitted to the Equality Commission.

Members were reminded that the draft Equality Action Plan 2023-26 had been approved in April 2023 and to proceed to public consultation. The public consultation was open for 12 weeks from 22 May to 21 August 2023 and a total of two respondents participated in the consultation. The feedback received had been noted however was not related to the actions set out in the draft Equality Action Plan 2023-26 , therefore no amendments were made to the Plan.

The Equality Scheme and Action Plan 2023-26 would be submitted to the Equality Commission and made available on the Council's website.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Brady
Seconded by Councillor Magill 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** G-LEG-86 CONTRACT FOR THE PROVISION OF EXTERNAL LEGAL SERVICES

Members were reminded that Council signed up to the Crown Commercial Services Wider Public Services Legal Services Panel Agreement. The panel was established to provide a simple and compliant route to market for a range of legal service requirements primarily to the wider public sector. This has meant that Council does not need to conduct a full tender process and can take advantage of the contracted prices agreed within the framework.

Hence, the Framework continues to provide the Council with greater flexibility in that the Council has a wider variety of legal firms to choose from for specific periods and areas of work as required. This provision represents best value for the Council through the allocation of competitive hourly and daily rates with options for fixed fees and/or alternative fee arrangements for direct awards and further competitions. In addition, the Council are not subject to a specific fixed term contract for external legal services.

Although it is estimated that Legal Services only availed of the Framework for approximately 5% of the overall work undertaken, it is deemed necessary to continue with the Framework as a contingency as there is no ongoing set fee to be part of the Framework and payment is only made when a solicitors firm is utilised from the Framework.

Legal Services had been advised that a new Framework RM6240 Public Sector Legal Services will now be in operational and will run until 5th September 2026. This new Framework continues to provide highly competitive hourly rates for direct awards and further competitions together with a comprehensive list of legal services. It will continue to provide the Council with greater flexibility and represents best value in securing improvements in the way Legal Services are sourced and provided.

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

Members approve the Council sign up to the Crown Commercial Services Public Services Legal Services Agreement until 5 September 2026.

ACTION BY: Deirdre Nelson, Paralegal

7.2 **IN CONFIDENCE** G-LEG-27 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DEPOT AT ORCHARD WAY

Members were reminded that the Council leased land at 6 Orchard Way from Ellen Mary Winifred Kelly, Raymond Kelly and Shirley Elizabeth McPhillimy ("Head Landlords"). The Council then leased 6b Orchard Way to arc21 who

in turn leased the building to Natural World Products Ltd (NWP) for use as a waste transfer station.

The Council also has a direct lease with NWP in relation to 6a Orchard Way.

NWP use both buildings at 6a and 6b Orchard Way to treat green waste and waste transfer station.

NWP are now asking permission to carry out works to the building at 6b Orchard Way in order to maximise the effectiveness of their operations on site. The facility will still be used for Waste Transfer Station activities but NWP are requesting permission to make external and internal layout changes to allow some shredding, screening and baling of the waste which will make outward transportation more efficient. The shredding of the waste may release some odours and while the facility operates a negative pressure scheme to control release, the installation of a stack will further mitigate any odour issues. The Planning Committee granted planning permission to NWP on 17 July 2023 for the works to facilitate the change of use of the building.

Under the terms of the lease NWP require the consent of the Head Landlords and the Council for any additional new building works. The Head Landlords confirm that they consent to the new building works. The waste operations at the building will continue to be monitored by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency through their waste management licencing regulations, with the quantity and type of waste permitted at the facility remaining unchanged.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Stewart and agreed that

the request from NWP to carry out the above referred to works be approved.

ACTION BY: Paul Casey, Borough Lawyer & Head of Legal Services.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Brady 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 7:09 pm.

MAYOR