



25 March 2026

To: Each Member of the Council

Dear Member

MEETING OF ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBAY BOROUGH COUNCIL

A meeting of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council will be held in the **Council Chamber, Mossley Mill** on **Monday 30 March 2026** at **6.30 pm**.

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Baker".

Richard Baker, GM MSc
Chief Executive, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council

For any queries, please contact Member Services:

Tel: 028 9448 1301/028 9034 0107

memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

AGENDA

- 1 Bible Reading and Prayer (In accordance with Standing Orders, Members are not required to attend for this part of the meeting and, following this part of the meeting, Members outside the Chamber will be called to the meeting).
- 2 Apologies
- 3 Declarations of Interest
- 4 To take as read and confirm the minutes of the proceedings of the Council Meeting of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council held on Monday 23 February 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 5 To approve the minutes of the proceedings of the Operation Committee Meeting of Monday 2 March 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 6 To approve the minutes of the proceedings of the Policy and Governance of Tuesday 3 March 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 7 To approve the minutes of the proceedings of the Community Development Committee Meeting of Monday 9 March 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 8 To approve the minutes of the proceedings of the Economic Development Committee Meeting of Tuesday 10 March 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 9(a) To take as read and confirm the Part 1 of the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee Meeting held on Monday 16 March 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 9(b) To approve Part 2 of the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee Meeting held on Monday 16 March 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 10 To approve the minutes of the proceedings of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting of Wednesday 18 March 2026, a copy of which is **enclosed**.
- 11 NOTICE OF MOTION
- 12 ITEMS FOR DECISION
 - 12.1 NIHE - Review of New Build Grant Support
 - 12.2 Local Economic Partnership – Business Digitisation Programme
 - 12.3 Review of Houses In Multiple Occupancy (HMO) Licence Scheme Charges and Proposed Increase In Licence Fee From 1 April 2026
- 13 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE
 - 13.1 Members Briefing on the 2027 Local Government Election

- 13.2 Lease of Antrim Civic Centre and Relocation of Staff to Mossley Mill
- 13.3 Dublin Road Development/Bridge Street Carpark Access & Improvements

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.”

12 ITEMS FOR DECISION

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is 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 (**enclosed**) 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 will help ensure the Social Housing Development Programme (SHPD) can 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 have 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 aims 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 has 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 has 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 are invited by the NIHE on the review of new Build Grant Support.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members respond on an individual or party basis.

Prepared by: Kathryn Bradley, Planning & Economic Development Business Support Manager

Agreed by: Sharon Mossman, Deputy Director of Planning & Building Control

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development & Planning

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is 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 will 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 has been strong, with 32 Expressions of Interest and 13 full applications received shortly after launch.

The following seven applications have been assessed and are 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 have 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 has 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 is £2,868,000 to 31 March 2028. LEP has 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 has 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.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members approve the grant awards to the seven businesses totalling £29,084.14.

Prepared by: Conor Steele, Local Economic Partnership Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure and Michael McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development, Planning

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 are 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 includes 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 is 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 is 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 is 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 has 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 will 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 is 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 is proposed that the HMO licence application fee is 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 is 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 will 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 is currently a deferred income balance relating to HMOs of approx. £900k that can 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 will 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 will 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 is 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 has been endorsed by SOLACE, with all councils considering similar increase.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members:

- a) **approve the increase of the HMO licence application fee to £62 per person per year.**
- b) **approve the increased costs of varying an HMO licence 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)

Prepared by: Kevin Bloomfield, NIHMO Manager, Belfast City Council

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

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