



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE HELD AT MOSSLEY MILL ON 7 DECEMBER 2021 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair:** Alderman P Michael
- Members Present:** Councillors – M Cooper, H Cushinan, R Foster, S Flanagan, N Kelly, A McAuley, T McGrann, M Magill, B Mallon, N Ramsay, V Robinson, M Stewart and R Wilson
- Non Committee Members:** Councillors – A Bennington, N McClelland and V McWilliam
- Officers Present:** Deputy Chief Executive of Finance & Governance – S Cole  
Director of Organisation Development – D Rogers  
Deputy Director of Finance – J Balmer  
Head of Finance – R Murray  
Head of Governance – L Johnston  
Borough Lawyer & Head of Legal Services– P Casey  
Head of Human Resources – J Close  
Head of ICT – G Smyth  
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson  
Member Services Officer – S Boyd

**CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

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

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, passed on condolences, thoughts and prayers to the family of Jim Bingham, former Mayor of Newtownabbey Borough Council, and former Councillor for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.

In order to protect public health during the current COVID-19 emergency it was not possible to allow the public or the press to physically attend the meeting. The public and the press can access those parts of the meeting which they are entitled to attend via livestream (a link to which is on the Council website). The meeting minutes and audio recording would be published on the Council's website.

**1. APOLOGIES**

None

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Item 5.5 Councillor R Foster

## **3. PRESENTATION**

### **3.1 FI/FIN/11 DRAFT RATES ESTIMATES UPDATE 2022/23**

The Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance and the Director of Organisation Development provided a presentation on the 2022/23 Estimates for Finance & Governance, Organisation Development and Capital Financing and responded to Members' queries.

## **4. ITEMS FOR DECISION**

### **4.1 FI/GEN/016 CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS NORTHERN IRELAND 2022**

The Department for Communities (DFC) is consulting on proposals to amend the local government pension scheme in Northern Ireland.

A consultation briefing paper prepared by the Department and copy of the draft legislation "The Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022" was circulated.

The main amendments proposed are regarding survivor benefits and follow from two recent judgements.

The Northern Ireland Local Government Officer Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) are the administrator for the local government pension scheme for Council and their consultation response was also circulated.

Since July 2017, following the Supreme Court Judgement in the case of Walker v Innospec, local government pension schemes have been required to amend their regulations to provide equal survivor benefits for same sex couples to that provided for widows of opposite sex marriage, based on a member's full length of service.

Following the Goodwin case (Employment Tribunal: Mrs Goodwin v Department for Education), the Chief Secretary to the Treasury issued a statement that local government pension schemes should be amended so that surviving same sex spouses and civil partners will, in certain cases, receive benefits equivalent to those received by widows of opposite sex marriage.

It is further proposed in the consultation that these measures to ensure equality of treatment regardless of gender or sexual orientation, be applied retrospectively to 2005 when civil partnerships became legal in England and Wales. Since civil partnerships become legal in Northern Ireland in 2020 these amendments could be applied from 2020.

A number of further minor policy changes are proposed in the draft regulations including:

- Amendment to the 30-day rule
- Removal of the limit of 50% of pensionable pay for additional voluntary contributions
- Lump sum death benefit amendments on line with Finance Act 2004 and Finance Act 2011

Councils actuarial valuation expects that the implementation of the Goodwin outcome alone will increase Councils defined benefit obligation by 0.2%. This along with many other factors will be reflected in the next triennial valuation of the NILGOSC scheme in March 2022.

A draft response to the consultation was circulated for consideration.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the draft response be approved.**

*ACTION BY: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance*

#### **4.2 G-LEG-321/15 BUSH ROAD, ANTRIM – PROPOSED SPEED LIMIT REDUCTION**

Members were advised that correspondence had been received from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) regarding a proposed speed limit reduction at Bush Road, Antrim. A copy of the correspondence and map was circulated for Members' information.

DfI have requested comments from the Council in respect of this proposal.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly  
Seconded by Councillor Wilson and agreed that

**Council responds to the Department of Infrastructure in support of the proposed 40 mph speed limit reduction.**

*ACTION BY: Elaine Keenan, Solicitor*

#### **4.3 G-LEG-44 DOCUMENTS FOR SIGNING AND SEALING**

Documents which are required to be signed and sealed are included in the Council agenda for Members approval. These documents will normally be legal agreements and contracts between the Council and third parties. The documents will have already been approved at a Council meeting.

The Borough Lawyer is of the opinion that documents and contracts which have been approved by Members and are required to be signed and sealed, should also be approved for signing and sealing at the same meeting. This will ensure that when Members approve a document or a

contract at a Council meeting, that will also approve the signing and sealing of the document at the same time.

Proposed by Councillor Ramsay  
Seconded by Councillor Wilson and agreed that

**Standing Orders are amended to allow for documents which are approved at a Council meeting, and are required to be signed and sealed, are approved for signing and sealing at the same Council meeting.**

*ACTION BY: Paul Casey, Borough Lawyer and Head of Legal Services*

## **5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

### **5.1 G/MSMO/41 MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

Members were advised that during the previous term of Council, it was agreed that attendance records for each of the Council and Committee meetings be summarised on a six monthly basis (June-November) and published on the Council's website.

A summary sheet (circulated) had been prepared showing the total attendance for the period 1 June to 30 November 2021, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the summary sheet recording Members' attendance for each of the Council meetings; and Committee Member attendance for each of the Committee meetings for the period from 1 June 2021 – 30 November 2021 be noted.**

*ACTION BY: Member Services*

### **5.2 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – OCTOBER 2021 – PERIOD 7**

A budget report for October 2021 – Period 7 was circulated for Members information.

The Council's financial position at the end of October 2021 shows a favourable variance of £1.17m before exceptional costs.

Including exceptional severance costs of £229k, Covid-19 costs of £308k and government grant income of £359k, the Council's overall position is £992k favourable.

Should the favourable position continue until the end of the financial year, contributions may be made to Reserves to offset future operational or rates losses, or for Borough Recovery and Strategic Projects.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

### **5.3 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

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.

The table circulated provided an update for Members on the use of agency staff as at October 2021 as compared to October 2020. It excludes limited ad-hoc agency cover, which is necessary to provide operational cover, at short notice (Appendix 1 circulated).

Appendix 2 (circulated) set out expenditure on agency workers in October 2021.

The cost of agency staff had increased for the period of 1 April 2021 to 31 October 2021 at 8% of all staffing costs compared to 4% for the same period last year. It was noted that agency expenditure was significantly reduced last year following the release of agency workers in May 2020. This year's costs had also increased due to the late application of the April 2020 pay award and the respective back charges incurred.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

### **5.4 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE**

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the management of attendance from April 2021 – October 2021 (absence summary circulated).

## **April 2021 – October 2021 - Attendance Update**

Excluding COVID-19 sickness absence, the average days' absence per employee was 8.86 days against a target of 7.2 days, which represents 1.66 days above target.

There has been a 6% increase in cold and flu related absences since September 2021. However, interventions have been taken with free flu jabs recently being offered to staff and Elected Members. Occupational Health have confirmed that 112 flu jabs were administered. This was an increase in uptake on the previous year with an additional half day arranged to cover the demand.

Long term absence accounts for 88% of sickness absence. This currently represents 23 employees, with 16 of these receiving full pay, 5 on half pay and 2 on zero pay. At present, formal case review meetings are being planned for 4 employees and HR Partners continue to work with Heads of Service and Managers to monitor long term absence cases, to proactively accomplish employee health and wellbeing and improve the ongoing management of attendance.

The number of employees with 100% attendance was 75% with the corporate target set this year at 60%.

The Council's Employee Engagement and Wellbeing Strategy continues to support the management of attendance with the Council establishing a holistic approach by providing a wide range of interventions across the organisation.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

## **5.5 G/MSMO/27 ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP MINUTES**

Members were advised that a meeting of the Member Development Working Group took place on Monday 8 November 2021 and a copy of the minutes was circulated for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the Minutes of the Member Development Working Group Meeting held on Monday 8 November 2021 be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

## 5.6 HR/ER/003 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Employee Engagement is a workplace approach developed to ensure that employees are committed to the goals and values of the Council, motivated to contribute to organisational success and were able, at the same time, to enhance their own sense of wellbeing.

In September 2021 the Employee Engagement Working group was established to further our commitment to employee engagement and to developing the needs of our large multi-site workforce.

The working group, led by the Chief Executive, consists of 28 cross directorate members from all areas to ensure our employee engagement approach is fit for purpose for our front line employees and our office based teams.

The Council recognises the changing needs of our workforce and the need to respond with agile and innovative solutions which focus on initiatives that drive engagement and support our Recovery Plan going forward. As a Council we are committed to attracting great people to the organisation and to developing and retaining staff.

Members are reminded that the Council's initial Employee Engagement & Wellbeing Strategy, Engage and Deliver 2016-2020, was designed to support the delivery of organisational outcomes anchored within the Corporate and Community Plans.

The Strategy was developed based on the following 4 key themes:

- Keep Connected
- Keep Health Focused
- Keep Valuing Others
- Keep learning

These themes remain important and relevant and will continue to focus our employee engagement approach and will be further shaped by our commitment to customer service and delivering on behalf of our residents.

### **Outcomes of Working Group**

An Employee Engagement Action plan has been developed following input from the initial meeting in September. The plan outlines our key commitments to developing all our people moving forward and will continue to be progressed with input from the EEWG and directly from our front line services.

For Members' information a copy of the Employee Engagement Action Plan for 2021/23 was circulated.

The Employee Engagement Action Plan builds on our well established commitment to Employee Wellbeing.

At the November working group meeting a further session was held to shape the development of a new programme for corporate and local induction. Following collation of all input a new induction product will be scoped and presented to the next Employee Engagement Working Group meeting in January.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
 Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

## 5.7 CCS/COR/4 CONSULTATIONS AND SURVEY UPDATE 2021/22

### **Background**

The Council delivers a number of surveys to encourage feedback to ensure that we consider a full range of opinions to inform decision making. These opinions and views directly influence service development.

The Council utilises the online digital platform Citizen Space through which all surveys are easily accessed and data is collated. Types of survey include those relating to the Corporate Improvement plan for example the 'Our Beautiful Borough' survey which was carried out earlier this year. Other surveys have included those relating to events e.g. Quiet Play Park Sessions Survey, whilst individual ad hoc surveys are being reported to Heads of Service.

In addition, the Council has held public Consultations to help shape key strategic plans, including the Corporate Recovery Plan 2021 -2023 which was developed to set out a number of proposed objectives as part of the Covid-19 recovery. From this consultation there came subsequent suggestions of a number of improvements for the Borough such as "Increase the amount of available rubbish and dog foul bins" and "Increase the amount of available outdoor seating areas".

### **Recent & Planned Surveys**

<b>Survey</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>No of Consultees</b>	<b>Key points</b>
Our Beautiful Borough	April 2021	Borough Life Citizen Space	296	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 85% were satisfied with the attractiveness of our Borough</li> <li>• 86% were satisfied with the appearance of our parks and open spaces</li> <li>• 74% satisfied with the provision of litter bins in their area</li> <li>• 74% satisfied that the litter bins are well maintained and emptied regularly in their area</li> <li>• 58% satisfied with the cleanliness of the roads and streets in their area</li> </ul>



Digital Services Survey	June 2021	Borough Life Citizen Space	32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall 94% were satisfied with our services</li> <li>• 60% of the residents use the digital platforms.</li> <li>• 67% of the residents get their information from our website or the Borough Life magazine</li> <li>• 95% were satisfied with the quality of this information</li> <li>• 67% of resident's access information from the website or Borough Life</li> <li>• 95% are satisfied with the quality of the information</li> <li>• 60 % had used our digital platforms in the 12 months preceding the survey</li> </ul>
Feeling Safe in Our Borough	October 2021	Borough Life Citizen Space		This surveys targets results of the safety and good relations of our Borough and result will be published in December 2021 .
Waste service Satisfaction Survey	January 2022	Borough Life Citizen Space		Currently Under development

Members considered the results of the survey 'Our Beautiful Borough' during the Litter Workshop and as a result an action plan was created detailing improvements to tackle the issue of litter throughout the Borough. The continuation of community clean ups and litter picks was also a focus from the results received.

The Digital Services Survey provided a valuable insight to customer preference in regards to the digital services and channels we have available. The feedback included suggestions on what customers would like to see on social media. This continues to help us to provide more of the content our customers want to access via our social media channels.

In Quarter 4 (January to March 2022) there will be the January 2022 Edition of Borough Life which will focus on residents "satisfaction with the Council's Waste service" and the March 2022 Edition will be in relation to the "attractiveness of the Borough".

### **Consultations**

The following number of consultations have been carried out to date since April 2021 and a list of these surveys was circulated for Members information.

Quarter	Number of Consultations	Number of Consultees
Quarter 1 (April to June 2021)	8	805
Quarter 2 (July to September 2021)	6*	199*
Quarter 3 (October to December 2021)	1* (to date)	tbc
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	

\*Consultation remains open and more responses will be received

Consultation/feedback will be sought in relation to the Enchanted and Inclusive Winter Garden events at Antrim Castle Gardens. This feedback will be key to shaping the events for next year.

Other consultations planned are the Draft Dual Language Street Sign Policy (dates tbc) and the Equality Scheme and associated action plan, detailing the Council's equality and diversity commitment.

### **Next steps**

A further report detailing 2022/23 planned survey activity and the remaining outcomes and actions planned from the feedback received to date will be brought to committee in early 2022.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

### **PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'**

Proposed by Councillor Foster  
Seconded by Councillor Magill and agreed

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

## **6 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE**

### **6.1 IN-CONFIDENCE G/DPFI/2 QUARTERLY REPORT ON FOI/EIR/DPA REQUESTS**

A report had been prepared on requests received in the second quarter of the year (1 July to 30 September 2021) under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and the Data Protection Act (DPA) and this was circulated.

A summary of the quarter's statistics is as follows:

- There was an 11% increase in the number of requests on the same period the previous year.

- Of the 69 requests received, 50 were under FOI, 15 under EIR and 4 under DPA.
- 59 requests were completed within the quarter.
- 97% of the requests were completed within the legislative deadlines of 20 days for FOI and EIR requests and a calendar month for requests made under DPA.
- The sections that received the most requests in the quarter were Finance (15), Planning (15), Environmental Health (12), and Governance (11).
- Two appeals were received during the quarter. One appeal related to a request for information on ARC21 and the proposed development at Hightown Quarry. Exemptions had been applied under Section 41 for confidential information, section 42 Legal Professional Privilege and section 43 Commercial Interests. The Council's internal appeal process upheld the original response. The other appeal was by a resident requesting details of complaints related to their address and was under consideration by Environmental Health at the end of the quarter.
- On 17 August 2021 the ICO notified the Council that they had received a complaint on 28 June 2021 in relation to a request about Planning decisions made by the Council. The ICO will contact the Council with details of the complaint when the case has been allocated to a case officer.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Wilson and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

## **6.2 IN-CONFIDENCE FI/PRO/GEN/044 PROCUREMENT TENDER REPORTS AND AWARD OF CONTRACTS**

Members were reminded that Council agreed in June 2021 that the Council Scheme of Delegation be used for the award of contracts and Members be updated retrospectively.

This process allows service and project delivery to be expedited more efficiently and facilitates timely delivery of actions against the Council's Recovery plan.

A list of contracts approved by the Corporate Leadership Team in November 2021 was circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Magill and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

### 6.3 PT/CI/105 **IN CONFIDENCE** CORPORATE PLANNING WORKSHOP 2021

Members were reminded that the Corporate Planning Workshop was held on the 12<sup>th</sup> November and 26<sup>th</sup> November 2021 in Mossley Mill, Linen Suite and remotely via zoom.

A workshop report was circulated at Appendix A and B along with presentation slides, for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the report be approved.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'**

Proposed by Councillor Foster  
Seconded by Councillor Magill 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, wished Members a very Merry Christmas and prosperous 2022 and the meeting concluded at 7.02 pm.

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**MAYOR**