MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE ROUND TOWER CHAMBER, ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE ON MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2026 AT 6.30 PM

In the Chair	:	Councillor E McLaughlin
Committee Members (In person)	:	Aldermen – P Bradley, L Clarke and J Smyth Councillors – R Foster, J Gilmour, N Kelly, AM Logue, L O'Hagan and S Ward
Committee Members (Remote)	:	Councillors M Cooper, S Flanagan, L Kirkpatrick and A McAuley
Non Committee Members (In person)	:	Councillor B Webb
Non Committee Members: (Remote)	:	Councillors J Burbank and H Magill
Officers Present	:	Director of Environment Services and Sustainability – M Laverty Director of Estates and Recreation – J News Head of Parks Operations - P Mawhinney Head of Leisure Operations – D O'Hagan Head of Environmental Health & Wellbeing – C Kelly ICT Systems Support Officer – C Bell Member Services Officer – E Skillen

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the September Operations Committee meeting and reminded all present of the audio recording procedures.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor V Mc William

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 4.1 – Councillor L Kirkpatrick

3 INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF

The Chairperson welcomed John News, recently appointed Director of Estates and Recreation to the meeting and conveyed best wishes and success in his new role.

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 PK/GEN/223 HORTICULTURAL GRANT AID PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the 5 grant award recommendations set out within the 2nd Call of the Horticultural Grant Aid Programme 2026-27.

2. Background

Members were reminded that Council previously approved the Horticultural Grant Aid Programme that offered grants of up to £1,500, fully funded, to support up to 20 local community groups in delivering horticultural projects on land accessible to the general public within the Borough. Eligible applicants must be fully constituted community groups, schools, or sporting organisations based in the Borough.

Successful applications would demonstrate increased community involvement in planting activities and/or the purchase of horticultural materials and features.

3. Call 2 Applications 2026-27

A total of 5 applications were received during the second call for the Horticultural Grant Aid Programme, with 5 applications meeting the approved criteria. A comprehensive table outlining the 5 applications, including key details and corresponding recommendations, had been circulated for Members' information and consideration as part of the decision-making process. Members were reminded that funding was subject to satisfactory monitoring and evaluation.

4. Financial Position

The approved budget for the 2026-27 Horticultural Grant Aid Programme was £30,000.

The financial position was outlined in the table below:

Call Number	No. of applications recommended of funding	Amount awarded	Budget remaining
1	12	£16,702	£13,298
2	5	£6,900	£6,398

A third call for applications would be issued shortly, with submissions to be assessed and presented for consideration at a future meeting of the Operations Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Logue
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

approval be granted for the Horticultural Grant Aid Programme applications, £6,900 for 2026-27.

ACTON BY: Anna Boyle, Funding Unit Manager and Nadine Campbell, Parks Development Manager

4.2 EH/EHS/004 TOBACCO AND VAPES: PACKAGING, APPEARANCE AND DISPLAY CONSULTATION

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for a Council response on proposals for regulating tobacco, vaping and nicotine product packaging, device appearance and retails displays, to implement the Tobacco and Vapes Act.

2. Background

This consultation was to seek views on proposals to regulate tobacco, vaping and nicotine products under the Tobacco and Vapes Act.

The proposals covered:

- the packaging of certain tobacco products, cigarette papers, herbal smoking products, heated tobacco devices, and vaping and nicotine products;
- the appearance of heated tobacco devices and vapes; and
- where shops can display herbal smoking products, cigarette papers, heated tobacco and other tobacco-related devices, and vaping and nicotine products.

The proposals applied across the UK and had been developed in collaboration

with the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The overall aim was to reduce the appeal of these products, particularly among children and young people, while supporting adult smokers to quit.

Further details of the consultation could be found at;

https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tobacco-and-vapes-packaging-appearance-and-display

3. Key Issues

Smoking and wider tobacco and nicotine use remained significant public health concerns across the UK. Although adult smoking prevalence continued to decline, the scale of tobacco use remained substantial. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) *Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2024* reported that around 5.3 million people aged 18 years and over (10.6%) were current cigarette smokers in the UK in 2024. This was the lowest proportion of current smokers since records began in 2011.

Smoking prevalence in 2024 varied across the four UK nations:

- England: 10.4%
- Scotland: 12.0%
- Wales: 11.4%
- Northern Ireland: 10.5%

Alongside smoking, the use of vaping and other nicotine products remained an important public health consideration. In 2024, around 5.4 million adults aged 16 years and over (10.0%) reported using e-cigarettes either daily or occasionally, meaning e-cigarette use exceeded the number of current smokers for the first time.

The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2024 introduced a smokefree generation by making it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. The UK Government and the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were working together to implement the Act and develop the regulations required to support it.

Other significant measures had also been introduced. For example, the sale and supply of single-use vapes had been banned across the UK since 1 June 2025.

The UK Government and devolved governments were now consulting on further regulations under the Tobacco and Vapes Act. The consultation, *Tobacco and vapes: packaging, appearance and display*, was seeking views on proposed measures covering tobacco, vaping and nicotine products across the UK.

The consultation focused on three main areas:

- New packaging requirements – including proposals for standardised

packaging for a wider range of tobacco and related products, as well as vaping and nicotine products. The proposals included tobacco products not currently covered by plain-packaging requirements, heated tobacco devices, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers.

- New restrictions on the appearance of vaping and heated tobacco devices – including proposals to restrict colours, branding, imagery, digital screens and designs that imitated other products.

- New restrictions on the retail display of products – including proposals to restrict where vaping, nicotine, herbal smoking and certain tobacco-related products could be displayed in shops.

The consultation also considered issues such as flavour descriptors, nicotine and ingredient information, age-restriction markings and health warnings on product packaging.

A draft response was circulated for Members' approval.

The response was broadly supportive of the proposals, with a strong focus on public health, reducing the appeal of tobacco, vaping and nicotine products to children and young people, supporting cessation, and ensuring consistent regulation.

Key points were:

• Plain packaging:	Support for extending plain packaging requirements to all tobacco products, heated tobacco devices, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers.
• Health warnings:	Support for both text and pictorial health warnings, including on heated tobacco devices and cigarette papers.
• Quit messages:	Support for quit-themed pack inserts across tobacco, heated tobacco and herbal smoking products, where practical.
• Product appearance:	Support for restricting colours, finishes, branding, imagery, artwork and cosmetic lights on vapes and heated tobacco devices.
• Digital screens:	Support for limiting screens to essential safety and status information, while noting that some colour may be beneficial for displaying safety warnings.
• Product design:	Support for preventing vapes and heated tobacco devices from imitating toys, food, cosmetics, gaming devices or other consumer products.
• Vape and nicotine packaging:	Support for standardised packaging, restrictions on promotional imagery and features, and child-resistant and tamper-evident packaging.

- Flavours: Support for restricting flavour descriptors, particularly those using confectionery, dessert, alcohol, drink or other child-appealing terminology. Clear definitions and guidance were highlighted as important for effective enforcement.
- Consumer information: Support for clear information on ingredients, nicotine strength, health warnings, expiry dates, disposal and safe use, while ensuring safety, CE marking and traceability information remains visible.
- Retail display: Support for restricting displays of tobacco, vaping, nicotine and related products to behind the sales counter, including temporary displays.
- Price lists: Support for consistent restrictions on price displays and preventing price lists from being used as a form of promotion.
- Exemptions: Support for exemptions in relevant trade premises and specialist tobacconists where access is restricted, but support for removing the bulk tobacconist exemption.
- Implementation: Support for up to 12 months to implement packaging and device requirements, with a possible additional six-month transition period for retailers. Six months was considered sufficient for implementing retail display restrictions.
- Enforcement: Emphasis on the need for clear legislation, guidance, commencement dates, training, resources and evidence requirements to support consistent enforcement.

4. Summary

The draft response was broadly supportive of the proposals to regulate the packaging, appearance and retail display of tobacco, vaping and nicotine products under the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2024. The measures were intended to reduce the appeal of these products, particularly to children and young people, while supporting adults to quit smoking.

The proposed response supported the introduction of standardised packaging and stronger health warnings, restrictions on product appearance and child-appealing designs, controls on flavour descriptors and promotional features, and requirements for tobacco, vaping and nicotine products to be displayed behind the sales counter. It also supported clear consumer information and appropriate exemptions for specialist premises.

It was important to ensure that the proposed measures were practical and proportionate for businesses so sufficient time was requested for implementation, supported by clear guidance and effective communication to ensure that the new requirements could be understood and applied consistently.

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

that the draft consultation response be approved.

ACTION BY: Christina McErlean, Deputy Head of Environmental Health (Commercial)

4.3 EH/EHS/CP/002 – REVIEW OF TOY SAFETY REGULATIONS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for a Council response to the UK Government's review of toy safety regulations, including consideration of the new EU Toy Safety Regulation and its implications for Northern Ireland.

2. Background

On 1 January 2026, the EU Toy Safety Regulation (EU) 2025/2509 came into force and would apply in full, from 1 August 2030. The Regulation represented a significant update to the existing EU framework for toy safety, with the aim of strengthening protections for children and consumers while reflecting developments in technology, chemicals and online retail.

Under the terms of the Windsor Framework, the new EU Toy Safety Regulation would apply in Northern Ireland. The UK Government was therefore considering the EU's reforms, including any issues associated with the continued recognition of the new EU product requirements for toys and the potential implementation of a similar approach in Great Britain (GB).

A number of the UK Government's wider objectives for product safety reform were also reflected in the new EU Regulation. These included responding to new and emerging technologies, strengthening supply-chain responsibilities, improving access to product information, moving towards paperless compliance documentation and supporting more effective market surveillance and enforcement.

Further details of the consultation could be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/toys-safety-regulations-call-for-evidence

3. Key Issues

The EU Toys Regulation introduced some key changes which included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Updated approach to chemicals: The existing restrictions on carcinogenic, mutagenic and toxic substances were expanded to cover additional substances considered particularly harmful to children. These included

endocrine-disrupting chemicals, substances that could adversely affect the respiratory system and chemicals that were toxic to the skin or other organs. The Regulation also strengthened the approach to chemical risk assessment and restrictions on certain substances in toys.

- Digital Product Passport (DPP): Toys placed on the EU market would be required to have a Digital Product Passport, providing information about the toy's compliance and safety characteristics. The DPP would replace much of the functionality currently provided through paper-based documentation and was intended to make relevant product information more readily accessible to consumers, businesses, customs authorities and market surveillance authorities. Information associated with the DPP would include, among other things, the relevant product information, applicable conformity information and the customs commodity code, with access provided through a data carrier such as a QR code.

- Internet-connected toys and Artificial Intelligence (AI): The Regulation took greater account of connected toys and emerging technologies. Depending on their characteristics and functionality, manufacturers may need to comply with other EU legislation in addition to the Toy Safety Regulation, including the EU AI Act and the Cyber Resilience Act. For example, certain AI applications could be prohibited where they presented unacceptable risks, while AI systems performing certain safety-related functions may be subject to additional requirements, including high-risk requirements and, where applicable, third-party conformity assessment.

- Online marketplaces: The Regulation placed additional obligations on economic operators and online market places in relation to toy safety information. Online marketplaces would be required to facilitate access to relevant product information, including the Digital Product Passport, for example through a QR code or other appropriate data carrier. This reflected the increasing importance of online sales channels in the toy market and the need to ensure that consumer protection requirements applied effectively regardless of how a product was purchased.

- Responsibilities across the supply chain: The Regulation strengthened and clarified the responsibilities of manufacturers, importers, distributors etc. This was intended to improve traceability and ensure that appropriate safety and compliance information was available throughout the supply chain.

- Market surveillance and enforcement: The new framework was also intended to support more effective market surveillance and enforcement by providing Councils with improved access to product and compliance information. This may assist Councils in identifying unsafe or non-compliant products, particularly where products were sold through online marketplaces or cross-border supply chains.

The UK Government was giving due consideration to the EU's reforms of toys legislation, with many of its own objectives for product safety reform also featuring in the EU's new Toy Safety Regulation, such as considerations around new and modern technologies, a move to paperless documentation and

obligations on all actions in the supply chain.

From a trade perspective, continuing to recognise EU product requirements would reduce friction for UK manufacturers selling into the EU and for those seeking to import products into GB. Taking a similar approach across the UK to the EU Toy Safety Regulation would also mean the rules for placing a product on the market in GB were aligned with those which applied to products in Northern Ireland.

A draft Council response (circulated) was included for Members' approval. The draft response was developed in conjunction with other councils across Northern Ireland to reflect a shared local government perspective on the proposed changes, including the implications for enforcement, resources and implementation.

The response was broadly supportive of taking a similar approach across the UK as the EU Toy Safety Regulation was intended to strengthen toy safety standards, improve consumer protection and, support enforcement activity.

The following key points were within the draft response.

- Regulatory consistency**:** Continued alignment would reduce divergence between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, providing greater clarity for businesses, consumers and enforcement authorities.
- Improved Toy Safety: the draft response supported stronger measures relating to harmful chemicals, product traceability, Digital Product Passports and toys sold through online marketplaces.
- Enforcement capacity: Effective implementation would require Councils and other enforcement authorities to have sufficient resources, training, testing facilities and access to relevant expertise, particularly in relation to chemicals, AI and emerging technologies.
- Information sharing: Improved information-sharing arrangements between Councils, Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) and other relevant authorities were needed to support effective market surveillance and enforcement.
- Online marketplaces: Greater accountability for online marketplaces was supported to help ensure that only safe and compliant toys were available to consumers.
- Business engagement: the draft response proposed that the mandatory registration of toy businesses with councils to improve communication, engagement and the dissemination of regulatory requirements.

A similar approach would also support greater consistency in toy safety requirements across Northern Ireland and Great Britain and help reduce some of the complexity associated with enforcing differing product safety regimes across the UK.

However, to achieve these benefits, enforcement authorities needed to have access to the information, training and resources necessary to carry out their functions effectively.

4. Summary

The proposed response was broadly supportive of the UK Government continuing to recognise the new EU product requirements for toys and implementing a similar approach across the UK.

A consistent approach would strengthen toy safety and consumer protection, support trade and reduce regulatory divergence between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. It would also align with wider UK objectives around digital documentation, new technologies, supply-chain responsibilities and effective market surveillance.

However, implementation should be proportionate and supported by clear guidance, appropriate transitional arrangements and sufficient resources for enforcement authorities to carry out their functions effectively.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Logue and agreed that

the draft consultation response be approved.

ACTION BY: Christina McErlean, Deputy Head of Environmental Health (Commercial)

4.4 L/LEI/VLC/001 USE OF THE VALLEY LEISURE CENTRE FOR THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION BALLOT COUNT ON 9 – 11 MAY 2027

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to request Members' approval on the closure of the Valley Leisure Centre to facilitate the election count for the Local Government Elections in May 2027.

2. Previous Decision of Council

Council previously approved the use of The Valley Leisure Centre to facilitate the election count for the Local Government Elections in 2023.

3. Key Issues

The Centre would be affected as follows:

I. the main sports hall and ancillary halls would be closed from 09.00am on Sunday 9 May 2027 to allow the building to be secured.
II. total closure of the centre on Monday 10 May and Tuesday 11 May 2027 inclusive.

The Centre would re-open on Wednesday 12 May 2027.

The pitches would remain open, being independently operated from the pavilion, and MORE members would be informed of the alternative facilities at

Sixmile and Ballyearl.

Proposed by Councillor O'Hagan
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

approval be given for the Valley Leisure Centre to be closed as outlined in the report to facilitate the Local Government Election Count.

ACTION BY: Paula Robinson, Executive Officer to the Director of Estates and Recreation

4.5 L/LEI/002/VOL3 LEISURE GRANT AID PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the recommendations set within the 2nd call of the 2026-27 Leisure Grant Aid Programme.

2. Introduction

For the period June - July, a total of 13 applications were received, 8 applications were deemed ineligible and 5 met the criteria for funding. Details of the grant programme criteria were circulated to Members.

A table setting out details and recommendations for the 5 applications was circulated for Members' reference. Upon approval of the listed grants, the remaining balances in each funding category were outlined below:

Category	**Budget**	**No. of apps. to date**	**Approved spend to date 2026-27**	**2nd Call No. of apps.**	**Grants proposed (£)**	**Funding Balance remaining (subject to approval of applications)**
Capital Grants	£40,000	4	£40,000	0	£0	£0
Grants to Clubs	£50,000	5	£8,576	0	£0	£41,424
Grants to Athlete Bursaries	£30,000	46	£30,000	5	£0	£0
Grants to Coaches and Officials Bursaries	£5,000	3	£675	0	£0	£4,325
Sports Event Grant	£40,000	5	£9,446	3	£14,850	£15,704
Defibrillator Grant	£5,000	3	£1,500	1	£0	£3.500

Allocation total	**£170,000**	**80**	**£90,197**	**9**	**£14,850**	**£64,953**
Fitness Suite Gold Card	20 Awards	14	14 Applications	4	4 Applications	2 Applications

3. Financial Position/Implication

The overall budget for the 2026-27 programme was £170,000. The eligible amount requested from the 5 applications who met the criteria was £14,850. Should the £14,850 be approved, this would leave a remaining balance of £64,953 for the 2026-27 financial year.

4. Summary

The overall budget for the 2026-27 programme was £170,000. Should approval be given for the 5 grants listed, the total spend to date would total £105,047 with a remaining balance of £64,953.

Proposed by Councillor Gilmour
Seconded by Councillor Logue and agreed that

approval be granted for the Leisure Grant Aid Programme call 2 applications, covering the period from June – July 2026.

ACTION BY: Anna Boyle, Funding Unit Manager and Conor McCallion, Leisure Development Manager

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 EH/PHWB/014 BREASTFEEDING WELCOME HERE SCHEME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to inform Members that all Council premises had successfully signed up to the regional Public Health Agency Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme.

2. Introduction

The Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme promoted breastfeeding-friendly environments for mothers when they were out and about, recognising the significant health and wellbeing benefits of breastfeeding for both mother and baby. Northern Ireland had comparatively low breastfeeding rates, and the scheme aimed to address the lack of support available to mothers, particularly when breastfeeding in public.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In May 2024, the Operations Committee recommended that all Council operated premises signed up to the regional Public Health Agency Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme.

4. Key Issues

The Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme provided reassurance to mothers that they were welcome to breastfeed within participating premises

Membership of the scheme required organisations to:

- Accept breastfeeding in all public areas of the premises;
- Ensure that mothers were not asked to move or stop breastfeeding;
- Promote staff awareness of, and support for, breastfeeding mothers; and
- Display a Breastfeeding Welcome Here window sticker and certificate.

As a member and supporter of the scheme, Council had committed to meeting all the scheme's criteria. All Council buildings were now displaying the Breastfeeding Welcome Here window sticker and were listed as members on the Breastfed Babies website. In preparation for joining the scheme, all frontline managers received awareness training, which was subsequently cascaded to relevant staff.

To mark the Council's participation in the scheme, a celebration event was held on 27 May 2026 for breastfeeding mothers. The event brought together Council representatives, health professionals from the Public Health Agency (PHA) and representatives from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT). It provided an opportunity to raise awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of breastfeeding and to highlight the support available to breastfeeding mothers.
Council Officers had also promoted the scheme to relevant businesses across the Borough. The Council website contained a list of businesses that had signed up to the scheme and provided a link for businesses interested in joining: https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/community-initiatives/breastfeeding-welcome-here/

5. Summary

Members were advised that all Council premises had successfully signed up to the Public Health Agency's Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme, demonstrating the Council's commitment to supporting breastfeeding mothers and promoting breastfeeding-friendly environments. Officers had also promoted the scheme across the Borough and raised awareness through staff training, community engagement and outreach to local businesses.

Proposed by Councillor Gilmour
Seconded by Councillor Logue and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.2 EH/PWHB/012 AGE FRIENDLY - OVER 50S SUMMER SCHEME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to inform Members of the Age Friendly Over 50s Summer Scheme which was designed to encourage older residents to remain active, connected and engaged throughout the summer months through a range of creative, social and recreational activities.

2. Background

Members were reminded that Environmental Health led the Council's Age Friendly agenda, which aimed to make the Borough a better place in which to age.

During the summer months, many community groups and programmes for older residents paused their activities. This could result in a reduction in accessible and structured opportunities for social engagement and participation, potentially contributing to increased social isolation and reduced wellbeing among older people.

In response to this gap, the Health and Wellbeing Team piloted the first Over 50s Summer Scheme in 2025. The initiative was the first of its kind in Northern Ireland and was developed to provide older residents with opportunities to stay active, connected and engaged during the summer period.

The success of the pilot demonstrated a clear demand for activities during the summer months, and the programme was subsequently expanded in 2026.

3. Key Issues

Following the success of the initial pilot, this year's Over 50s Summer Scheme was significantly expanded and delivered over a six-week period throughout July and August 2026, compared with one week in 2025.

The expanded programme offered a creative, varied and engaging programme of free activities for residents aged over 50. Participants enjoyed a wide range of opportunities, including first aid training, walking groups, sewing machine workshops, train journeys, brooch-making, adult storytelling, canvas painting, line dancing, decoupage workshops, games mornings and many other social and recreational activities.

The expansion of the programme resulted in a significant increase in participation. A total of 293 residents participated in 2026, compared with 127 participants in 2025, representing an increase of approximately 131%.

The number of events and activities also increased significantly, from 11 in 2025 to 25 in 2026. This enabled residents to access a wider range of opportunities and increased the choice of activities available throughout the summer.

Events were delivered across all seven District Electoral Areas (DEAs), helping to ensure that residents throughout the Borough had opportunities to participate in activities within their local communities.

The programme was delivered through a collaborative approach involving the Council's Waste, Leisure, Parks, Arts and Culture teams, alongside arc21, the Community Relations Forum and Libraries NI. This partnership approach enabled the delivery of a diverse range of accessible activities, encouraging participation, promoting social inclusion and providing enjoyable experiences for older residents. The involvement of the Community Relations Forum also strengthened partnership working in support of the programme.

Participant satisfaction remained exceptionally high, with 100% of participants reporting that they enjoyed the events and approved of the range of activities offered.

The programme delivered a range of wider benefits, including increased social interaction, improved confidence and wellbeing, opportunities to learn new skills and increased physical activity. It also raised awareness of Council and community services, provided opportunities to engage with and support vulnerable residents, and strengthened partnership working across the Borough.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, including:

"*The summer scheme was a real lifeline for me, I live by myself and it can be lonely, I really enjoy getting out and meeting new people*"

"*The scheme was great for social interaction; it's very welcoming and great fun.*"

A social media video was also produced, featuring residents who participated in the programme and highlighted the range of activities available. The video could be viewed on the Council's website:

https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/community-initiatives/age-friendly/silver-summer-scheme/

Building on the success of this year's Over 50s Summer Scheme, the Health and Wellbeing Team would continue to develop and deliver activities throughout the year to encourage participation, promote wellbeing and help address social isolation among older residents.

For residents who were unable to attend the Summer Scheme, the Council website also provided a dedicated Age Friendly section, which included the "News for You" older persons magazine and the "Ask the Age Friendly Officer" feature, allowing older residents to submit questions directly to the Age Friendly Officer.

https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/community-initiatives/age-friendly/

4. Summary

The Over 50s Summer Scheme successfully addressed a gap in structured summer activities for older residents by providing a programme of free, inclusive and accessible events across the Borough.

The 2026 programme represented a significant expansion on the 2025 pilot, increasing from 11 to 25 events and activities and from 127 to 293 participants, an increase of approximately 131%. The programme also increased in duration from one week in 2025 to six weeks in 2026.

This expansion was achieved while maintaining 100% participant satisfaction in both years.

The programme provided more than simply opportunities to participate in activities. It supported social interaction, confidence and wellbeing, physical activity and skills development, while also increasing awareness of Council and community services and providing opportunities to identify and signpost vulnerable residents to appropriate support.

Building on this success, Environmental Health - Health and Wellbeing team would continue to develop opportunities throughout the year to support older residents, promote wellbeing, reduce social isolation and strengthen connections within communities.

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing agreed to provide Members with a breakdown of the age profile of participants using the scheme in the future.

Proposed by Councillor O'Hagan
Seconded by Councillor Gilmour and agreed that

the report be noted.

ACTION BY: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

5.3 EH/EHS/009 CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES – HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO) LICENSING REGIME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to advise Members of the response received from the Department for Communities (DfC) following correspondence issued by Council regarding the operation of the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing regime and the limitations of the current fee framework.

2. Background

Members were reminded that, at a previous meeting of the Committee, concerns were raised regarding the financial sustainability of the current HMO licensing regime.

The HMO licensing function transferred from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to district Councils on 1 April 2019 on the basis that the service would operate on a cost-neutral basis. However, under the current legislative framework, Councils were limited to recovering only those costs directly associated with processing HMO licence applications and were unable to recover the wider costs of administering, regulating and enforcing the licensing regime.

Members were asked to note that, whilst Council had approved an increase in the HMO licence application fee in line with the regional approach, this increase addressed only the recovery of eligible processing costs and did not resolve the wider issue of unrecoverable service costs.

Accordingly, Members requested that correspondence be issued to the Minister for Communities seeking urgent consideration of legislative amendments to enable a sustainable and fully cost-recoverable HMO fee framework, together with consideration of interim financial support should the HMO service begin to operate at a deficit pending legislative change.

A copy of the Council's correspondence was circulated for Members' information.

3. Key Issues

A response had now been received from the Minister for Communities and was circulated for Members' information.

In the response, the Minister acknowledged the concerns raised by Council regarding Councils' ability to recover the wider costs associated with administering, regulating and enforcing the HMO licensing regime under the current legislative framework.

The Minister advised that the Department amended the Houses in Multiple Occupation (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 in 2025, increasing the maximum fee from £45 to £75 per occupant per year in response to cost pressures identified by councils.

The Department also acknowledged Council's proposals for legislative change to introduce a revised fee structure, including provision for compliance and enforcement activity. The Minister had confirmed that the Department intended to commence the policy development process immediately, beginning with discussions with Belfast City Council to better understand the scale and scope of HMO licensing administration and enforcement activity.

In relation to Council's request for interim financial support should the HMO service operate at a deficit, the Minister advised that any such request would require consideration in the context of the Department's overall budget availability and normal financial planning and in-year monitoring processes.

The Minister concluded by confirming the Department's commitment to continued engagement with Councils on the operation of the HMO licensing regime.

4. Summary

Following Members' request, correspondence was issued to the Minister for Communities regarding the financial sustainability of the HMO licensing regime. The Department had acknowledged Council's concerns and confirmed that it would commence policy development to consider potential legislative changes to the HMO fee framework. No commitment had been given at this stage regarding legislative amendments or interim financial support.

In response to a Member's query, the Director of Environment Services and Sustainability advised that no timescale had been provided regarding financial support. He confirmed that further updates would be provided to Members.

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the report be noted.

ACTION BY: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

5.4 EH/EHS/FC/012 DRINKING WATER QUALITY REPORT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to advise Members that Northern Ireland Water had published its 2025 Drinking Water Quality Report for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and demonstrated compliance with the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 in the Borough.

2. Background

Northern Ireland Water's supply area was divided into Water Supply Zones, each serving a population of up to 100,000 people. There were seven Water Supply Zones wholly or partially within the Borough. Water quality was monitored through random sampling at customers' taps and planned sampling at authorised supply points within each zone.

The annual Drinking Water Quality Report (circulated) provided details of water quality performance for each Water Supply Zone and reported compliance with the standards prescribed by the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017. The report also highlighted any significant drinking water quality events and outlined capital investment programmes affecting the Council area.

In 2025, the overall compliance rate for customer tap and supply point samples

within the Borough remained at 99.9%, matching the Northern Ireland average. The majority of Water Supply Zones fully complied with all physico-chemical and microbiological standards.

One water quality exceedance was recorded within the Dunore Point Antrim Water Supply Zone, where a single sample exceeded the prescribed concentration for manganese. Northern Ireland Water's investigation concluded that the cause of the exceedance could not be determined; however, repeat sampling confirmed satisfactory water quality thereafter.

The report also recorded a significant operational event at Killylane Water Treatment Works in November 2025, where a sample pump malfunction resulted in elevated aluminium levels in final water at the treatment works. The incident also identified telemetry communication and shutdown alarm issues. Following investigation and remedial action, all subsequent samples were satisfactory and there was no ongoing impact on drinking water quality supplied to customers. Northern Ireland Water also continued to invest in a range of capital works across the Borough aimed at maintaining and improving water quality, network resilience and the long-term reliability of the public water supply.

2. Summary

The 2025 Drinking Water Quality Report demonstrated that drinking water supplied throughout Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough continued to be of a very high standard. Overall compliance with the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 remained at 99.9%, consistent with previous years and in line with the Northern Ireland average.

While one isolated manganese exceedance was recorded in the Dunore Point Antrim Water Supply Zone and an operational incident occurred at Killylane Water Treatment Works, investigations confirmed that these were isolated events, appropriate corrective actions were implemented, and subsequent monitoring confirmed satisfactory water quality. Overall, the report demonstrated that Northern Ireland Water continued to deliver a safe, high-quality drinking water supply to customers across the Borough while progressing investment programmes to maintain and improve the water supply infrastructure.

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Environment Services advised that the report had been provided by NI Water. He confirmed that he would contact NI Water regarding a geographical error in the document and was there any consideration given to sampling for microplastics in the future.

Proposed by Alderman Smyth
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

that the report be noted and that the Council would write to NI Water.

ACTION BY: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

5.5 L/LEI/SD/018 Health Intervention Report Q1 2026-27

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with a Quarter 1 update on Council's Health Intervention Action Plan for 2026–27.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were advised that Council approved the Health Intervention Action Plan 2022–27 in November 2022. A copy was circulated for Members' reference.

The Action Plan aimed to increase regular and sustainable participation in physical activity across all age groups and supported the wider objective of addressing health inequalities among vulnerable and inactive groups.

3. Key Issues

Officers continued to lead and coordinate the delivery of a wide range of Council-led health intervention programmes, working with partner organisations to support effective implementation of the Action Plan.

During Quarter 1 of 2026–27, these programmes recorded a total of 8,956 participant engagements against a Q1 target of 7,219. A breakdown of performance against targets was provided as below:

Programmes	26/27 Annual Target	Q1 Target	Q1 Actual
Physical Activity Referral Scheme (PARS)	170	45	44
Move More Cancer Rehabilitation and Rehabilitation Programme	90	25	17
Age Friendly (Live Long, Fall's Prevention, Walking Netball, Aqua Fit and Nordic Walking)	23,000	5,750	7093
Exercise for Mental Health Programme	2000	500	577
Respiratory Rehabilitation and Maintenance Programme	450	115	217
Cardiac Rehabilitation and Maintenance Programmes	1200	300	165
Programmes for People with a Disability	700	175	183
Pre-Post Natal (new)	200	25	111
Veterans	25	4	2
Substance Use	20	5	0
Neurological	100	25	125
Other (Health Fares, outreach)	1000	250	422

4. New Developments

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2026–27, Officers would continue to expand the reach and impact of the Health Intervention Programme and pilot new areas of health outreach, including obesity and menopause support.

Following engagement with partners within the Northern Health & Social Care Trust and Public Health Agency, Officers were advised of the complexities associated with delivering substance use support within a group-based setting. Officers were therefore working with local organisation, Inspire Wellbeing, to develop and deliver a substance use focused programme during Quarter 2.

Officers were undertaking a review of the current Health Intervention Action Plan in preparation for the development of the new Health Intervention Action Plan 2027–32. A stakeholder engagement event would be held during Quarter 2 to help inform the key priorities and areas of focus for the new Action Plan.

Council had secured £12,517.54 from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to pilot a Weight Management Programme for individuals with a Body Mass Index of 40+. This cohort were outside the eligibility criteria for the GP referral scheme; therefore, the pilot would provide an important intervention for those who may otherwise have limited access to structured support for weight management.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Council directly employ three Health Intervention Officers to support delivery of the Action Plan. This work was part-funded through external sources, with the table below outlining confirmed external funding for 2026–27.

Programme	Funded by	Total
Physical Activity Referral Schemes (PARS)	PHA	£33,506
Weight Management Programme	NHLP	£12,517.54
Walking Football/Netball Programme TBC	NHSCT	£3,000
Falls Prevention Steady and Strong Programme	NHSCT	£1,870
Move More (Cancer Rehabilitation Programme)	Macmillan	£5,000
Total		£55,893.54

A Member welcomed the positive work being delivered through the Health Intervention Action Plan and highlighted the ongoing importance of promoting, encouraging and enabling increased participation in physical activity among women and girls.

Proposed by Councillor Logue
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.6 PK/GEN/022, PK/GEN/057 IRELAND'S BEST KEPT TOWN AND GREEN FLAG AWARDS 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on Ireland's Best Kept Town Competition and the Green Flag Awards for 2026.

2. Ireland's Best Kept Town

Ireland's Best Kept Town was a prestigious all-island competition that brought together top-ranking towns and villages from Northern Ireland's Best Kept competition and the Republic of Ireland's Tidy Towns initiative. This year's Awards Ceremony was held at Riddel Hall, Belfast, on June 24, 2026, and included shortlisted category winners from across the island of Ireland, including entries from Donegal, Westmeath, Wicklow, Galway and throughout Northern Ireland.

Antrim Town was named Best Kept Large Urban Centre and crowned the overall winner of the Ireland's Best Kept Town Awards 2026. This achievement marked the first time Antrim had received this prestigious accolade and reflected the dedication, hard work and collaboration of local residents, community groups, businesses and partner organisations. The award recognised a shared commitment to enhancing the town, fostering civic pride and creating a welcoming, attractive environment.

3. Green Flags

The Green Flag Award was an internationally recognised accolade that signified excellence in the management, maintenance, and community involvement in parks and open spaces. The programme in Northern Ireland was managed by Live Here Love here, formerly known as 'Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful'.

To achieve Green Flag status, a site must have had a management plan that met strict criteria relating to horticultural standards, cleanliness, environmental management, biodiversity, community involvement and safety.

This year, a total of 23 council-managed sites and 10 community spaces across the Borough had been awarded the internationally recognised Green Flag accreditation.

Park / Open Space	Green Flag Awarded by Type
Antrim Castle Gardens	Heritage
Sentry Hill Historic House	Heritage
Antrim / Belmont and Six Mile Cemetery	Council - Parks
Antrim Lough Shore Park and Gateway	Council – Parks
Antrim and Newtownabbey Crematorium	Council – Parks
Ballyclare Cemetery	Council - Parks

Ballynure Old Graveyard	Council - Parks
Jordanstown Loughshore Park, Hazelbank Park & Gideon's Green	Council – Parks
Kilbride Cemetery	Council – Parks
Lilian Bland Park	Council – Parks
Mallusk Cemetery	Council – Parks
Monkstown Jubilee Centre	Council – Parks
Mill Race Trail	Council – Parks
Newtownabbey Way	Council – Parks
Randalstown Riverside Walk	Council – Parks
Rashee Cemetery	Council – Parks
Sixmilewater Park	Council - Parks
Valley Park (V36 and Glas-na-Braden Glen)	Council – Parks
Wallace Park	Council – Parks
Crumlin Glen	Council – Parks
Threemilewater Park	Council – Parks
Whiteabbey Glen	Council – Parks
Crematorium	Council – Parks
Clotworthy Courtyard at Antrim Castle Gardens	Community
Duneane Community Garden	Community
Ballyeaston Church Ruin	Community
Elevation Randalstown	Community
Toome Linear Park	Community
The Sovereign Complex, Rathfern	Community
Monkstown Village Community Garden	Community
Neilsbrook Fold	Community
Maine Fold - Randalstown	Community
Sentry Hill Community Garden	Community

Members commended Parks staff on the exceptional number of Green Flag awards achieved.

Proposed by Councillor Gilmour
Seconded by Alderman Smyth and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.7 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 4 – APRIL 2026 TO JULY 2026

1. <u>Purpose</u>

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the financial performance for the Directorates reporting to the Operations Committee for

Period 4 - April 2026 to July 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

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

3. Summary

As at period 4:

The Estates and Recreation Directorate had a favourable variance of £20k, or 0.5%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

Employee costs were favourable for the period as staff structures were reviewed; however, Facility Costs and Leisure Memberships were adverse.

The Environment Services and Sustainability Directorate had a favourable variance of £76k, or 0.8%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

Employee costs were also favourable. Recycling Costs and Income from Recycling were both higher than the budget for the period.

A report on the financial performance, employee costs, highest areas of expenditure and income, and the financial performance by Heads of Service was circulated for Members' information.

The overall financial position of the Council would be presented to the Policy & Governance Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Logue
Seconded by Alderman Smyth and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

6 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

6.1 ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR – BARBICAN GATE ALLEY

In response to a Member's query regarding antisocial behaviour and vandalism at the Barbican Gate Alley, Antrim, the Director of Estates and Recreation advised that staff were aware of issues at this location and would consider potential interventions to resolve those issues.

A Member sought confirmation as to whether the area at the Barbican Gate and underpass was included in Community Safety Warden patrol routes and suggested that there may also be opportunities to implement physical adjustments that might also reduce the incidence of antisocial behaviour.

ACTION BY: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

6.2 MULLIGANS RESTAURANT – ALLEN PARK – DISABLED PARKING BAYS

In response to Members' queries regarding the misuse of designated disabled car parking spaces, by drivers failing to display a valid Blue Badge, across the Council estate, the Director of Estates and Recreation advised that Officers would continue to raise awareness of the issue engagement, education and, where appropriate, enforcement. A further report would be brought back to a future Operations Committee meeting.

ACTION BY: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

6.3 GRASS CUTTING AND SIGNAGE

A Member raised concerns regarding the poor standard of grass cutting at the entrance to Antrim Town, specifically noting that both sides of the carriageway at the top of the town had become an eyesore.

In response, the Head of Parks advised that officers were progressing a comprehensive review of Council's grass cutting operations across the Borough with the intention of a report to a future Operations Committee in advance of the 2027 grass cutting season.

A Member requested that DfI Roads be invited to attend a future meeting of the Operations Committee to discuss Members concerns regarding DfI Roads approach to verge maintenance across the Borough and that correspondence be sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive highlighting the importance of regular and effective grass cutting and vegetation/weed control across their estate.

A Member also requested that officers review and engage with community groups on the placement, retention of Council signage, including legacy award citations, on grass verges throughout the Borough.

Members welcomed the new signage promoting responsible dog ownership ('dogs on leads') and a Member requested that this signage be installed along the Six Mile River Walk. The Director of Environment Services confirmed that new signage was scheduled to be installed in this location and undertook to check the position and keep Members informed.

ACTION BY: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability/Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks

6.4 WHITEABBEY VILLAGE – NORTH ENTRANCE

A Member commended the Head of Parks on the excellent horticultural works completed at the northern entrance to Whiteabbey Village and noted that the works were appreciated by local residents and businesses in the area.
A Member expressed disappointment regarding the persistently poor standard of external maintenance and presentation of a privately owned adjacent

commercial property (including a convenience foodstore). Members highlighted previous residents' concerns that the commercial site was detracting from Council's recent environmental improvement works and reiterated specific concerns regarding the site perimeter wall and planting areas and potential planning breaches relating to excessive external signage. The Head of Parks advised that he would contact the site owners, or their managing agents, regarding the issues highlighted by Members.

ACTION BY: Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks Operations

6.5 MUGA PITCH – BAWNMORE

A Member highlighted a previous engagement with residents in Bawnmore and requested that officers provide an update to a future Operations Committee meeting, on issues related to land ownership and associated matters impacting the provision of a MUGA in that area and outline next steps and indicative timelines in that regard.

ACTION BY: Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks, Operations

6.6 GREEN FOOD WASTE BAGS

In response to a Member's query regarding the provision of green food waste bags, the Director of Environment Services and Sustainability advised that arrangements had been in place for residents on assisted lift collections to contact the Council and have the green food waste bags delivered directly to their homes.

ACTION BY: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

6.7 PARKING CONGESTION – FAIRFIELDS ANTRIM

A Member noted that complaints had been received from residents regarding significant parking congestion in Fairfields, Antrim, during a recent event at the Education Authority Centre. Residents reported that they had been unable to access or leave their properties due to vehicles parked along the street. The Member acknowledged previously installed signage, regarding parking and residents' access, had not resolved the issue.

The Member acknowledged that the road/area in question was not part of the Council estate but requested that officers make further enquiries regarding responsibility or other potential interventions to discourage inconsiderate parking in the vicinity.

The Director of Estates and Recreation undertook to make further enquiries with the Department for Infrastructure and update the Member accordingly.

ACTION BY: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

6.8 FLY TIPPING, LITTERING AND DOG FOULING

A Member raised concerns regarding the scale of fly-tipping, littering, and dog fouling. The Director of Environment Services and Sustainability responded that a collaborative plan between Waste Operations and the Enforcement Team had been under development since it was raised at the May Operations Committee and advised that a report would be brought to a future meeting for Members' feedback.

ACTION BY: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Alderman Smyth 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 PK/GEN/197 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES QUARTERLY UPDATE

1. Purpose

This report provided an update on

(i) burial capacity across Council's cemeteries and an analysis of cremation usage performance;
(ii) path improvement works within Carnmoney Cemetery and
(iii) the proposed new Valley Park Cemetery project.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that quarterly updates were routinely presented to the Operations Committee outlining the current burial capacity across Council-owned cemeteries. In addition to this, supplementary information had been included in the report relating to the performance of the crematorium, with particular focus on cremation activity and overall levels of usage. The report also provided an update on improvement works within Carnmoney Cemetery and progress associated with the proposed new cemetery provision at Valley Park.

3. Current Position

Burial capacity at 31 July 2026 for Council's cemeteries and Gardens of Remembrance were detailed below:

Cemetery	Previous Report To 31 March 2026	No. of plots remaining To 31 July 2026	Current average no. of plots sold Per Year based on 3yr average)	Estimated remaining burial capacity (years)
Ballyclare	450	424	100	4.2
Rashee*	243	236	15	15.7
Sixmile	2013	1991	80	24.9
Crumlin	659	655	25	25
TOTAL	**3365**	**3306**	**220**	**15**

Garden of Remembrance Plots *(for burial of ashes only)*	Previous Report To 31 March 2026	No. of plots remaining To 31 July 2026	Average no. of plots sold (based on 3 year average)	Estimated remaining burial capacity (years)
Carnmoney	20	11	55	0.4
Ballyclare	112	112	5	15
Mallusk	15	15	0	10
TOTAL	**170**	**138**	**60**	**6.9**

Following the initial investigative works undertaken in relation to Rashee ('new') cemetery, Officers had engaged with an archaeologist to oversee the planned programme of test excavations. These works were scheduled to take place in early autumn (September-October).

The archaeologist would be present on site to supervise and monitor the proposed excavations. This stage of investigative work represented an important step in the overall process and would assist in verifying the preliminary findings identified through earlier surveys and assessments.

The test excavations would provide a more detailed understanding of any archaeological constraints within the area and would help determine the extent to which land surrounding the souterrain, within the surveyed boundary, may be affected.

Upon completion of the investigative works, Officers would be better informed to identify specific implications for future cemetery operations and layout inc. number of burial spaces likely to be impacted.

Officers would report the outcome of the investigations to Members at the earliest opportunity and would ensure that they were kept fully informed of progress, key findings and any implications arising from the works throughout the duration of the process. A Member noted his concern regarding any test excavations in Rashee ('new') cemetery and highlighted the importance of a cautious approach in any such work.

4. Crematorium Performance

The current cremation rates for Council's Crematorium, recorded up to and including 30 June 2026, were set out below. The data provided an overview of cremation activity for the second quarter, including a breakdown of usage by residents and non-residents.

Month	Overall	Residents	Non-Residents
April	149	46	103
May	123	28	95
June	123	42	81
Total	**395**	**116**	**279**

Based on current usage levels, residents account for approximately 29.37% of all cremations undertaken at the Crematorium, while non-residents represented the remaining 70.63% of overall cremation activity.

5. Update on new 'Valley Park Cemetery' (working title only)

Officers had confirmed that Council Capital Programme Stage 0 (RIBA Stage 1) Feasibility Report, prepared by Doran Consulting Ltd, had recently been completed for two adjacent sites within Valley Park, to assess their suitability for the development of a new cemetery. Within the report, these locations were identified as Sites 11A and 11B (circulated).
The feasibility assessment concluded that:

- No technical or environmental constraints identified to date would render either site unsuitable for cemetery development.
- Both sites were considered capable of accommodating a viable cemetery scheme, subject to further surveys, investigations and technical assessments.
- Site 11A was considered the preferred location for the principal burial ground, as it was not affected by any statutory or proposed nature conservation designations.
- Site 11B was considered best suited to a supporting role, providing opportunities for access, parking, drainage attenuation, and landscape and ecological enhancements, rather than serving as the primary burial area.

The consultant had recommended progressing to Council Capital Programme Stage 1 (RIBA Stages 2 and 3), with Site 11A developed as the principal burial ground and Site 11B supporting the wider cemetery infrastructure and environmental requirements.

The following surveys and investigations would be progressed as necessary and when permitted, as part of the next stage of the feasibility assessment:

- Ground Penetration Radar Survey to identify the location of underground services

- Intrusive Ground Investigation Works
- Tier 3 Habitats Regulations Assessment
- Archaeological Impact Assessment
- Tree Survey
- Contaminated Land Risk Assessment
- Traffic Assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Drainage Assessment

This phase also included the preparation of a concept design and layout plan to support submission of a Pre-Application Notice (PAN) to the Planning Authority, together with the development of indicative budget cost estimates to inform future decision-making.
Officers would provide Members with a further update on the project following satisfactory completion of the preceding investigative works.

6. Update on Carnmoney Cemetery Improvement Works

Members were reminded that Council had previously approved improvements to the existing roadways and pathways within Carnmoney Cemetery. These areas had experienced significant deterioration over time due to sustained levels of traffic and pedestrian activity, natural weathering compounded by increasingly frequent adverse weather conditions in recent years and the normal wear and tear arising from heavy plant machinery. The condition of the existing roadways and paths had now reached a stage where resurfacing works were required.

The works were scheduled to commence in Q3 2026-27 and would be undertaken on a phased basis, prioritising the areas most affected by deterioration. The initial phase (in the current financial year) would focus on Zones 1 and 2 (circulated), where drainage issues and surface conditions had been identified as requiring urgent attention. Subject to normal approval processes (business case and financial), further works were expected to be completed in 2027-28.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Parks noted that specialist teams would be on site at Rashee ('new') cemetery and the proposed new cemetery sites in Newtownabbey over the next month. He confirmed that an update on these works would be included in the next Bereavement Services Quarterly Update report.

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Alderman Smyth and agreed that

the report be noted.

ACTION BY; Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks

Councillor Logue left and returned to the Chamber during Item 7.2

7.2 IN CONFIDENCE WM/WM/037/VOL 3 OFFENSIVE WEAPON SURRENDER SCHEME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval to participate in the Department of Justice's Offensive Weapon Surrender Scheme with specialised secure collection bins at designated Household Recycling Centres.

2. Introduction

Council had received correspondence, dated 30 June 2026, from officials in the Department of Justice requesting its participation in an Offensive Weapon Surrender Scheme in the autumn. A copy of the correspondence was circulated for Members' information.

3. Main Report

As part of The Offensive Weapons Act 2019, the Department of Justice (NI) planned to make the private possession of a range of offensive weapons illegal. The possession of these items in a public place was already an offence. These offensive weapons included zombie knife, machete, flick knife and ninja sword and images as shown in the DoJ letter.

If the law changed to ban items that were previously legal to own, owners should be provided with a safe and legal way of disposing of said items before they become illegal. As a result, the DoJ intended to operate a "Surrender & Compensation Scheme" in 17 designated police stations and had requested

that Councils provided locations for "Community Surrender Bins" at Household Recycling Centres across Northern Ireland.

It was proposed specially designed wheelie bins would be located in both Newpark and O'Neill Road Household Recycling Centres. Recycling Centre Staff would have a very limited role except for signposting the location of the bins and there would be no additional cost to Council. If approved, it was envisaged that the Community Surrender Bins would be in location from October 2026 for three months.
While there had been no schemes in the life of this Council, the two legacy Councils did participate in similar initiatives to remove dangerous objects and on this basis, it was recommended that Council participates in the Department of Justice's Offensive Weapon Surrender Scheme.

4. Summary

The Department of Justice had requested that local authorities assist in the introduction of new legislation to remove offensive weapons from the community by installing Community Surrender Bins at Newpark and O'Neill Road Household Recycling Centres in the Borough. There would be no cost to Council and very limited involvement of Council staff with the bins envisaged to be in location for three months from October 2026.

In response to a number of Members' queries, the Director of Environment Services and Sustainability advised that risk assessments would be completed by Council staff and discussions were ongoing with our Insurers to ensure full cover was in place.

Proposed by Alderman Smyth
Seconded by Councillor Gilmour and agreed that

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council participate in the Offensive Weapon Surrender Scheme by installing Community Surrender Bins at Newpark and O'Neill Road Household Recycling Centres for a period of three months from October 2026.

ACTION BY: Michael Laverty, Director of Environmental Services and Sustainability

Alderman Bradley left the Chamber during Item 7.3

7.3 IN CONFIDENCE L/LEI/SMW/005, FI/GEN/028 L/LEI/CLC/002 SIXMILE LEISURE CENTRE AND CRUMLIN LEISURE CENTRE - REPLACEMENT OF FITNESS EQUIPMENT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the Business Case and use of the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework to replace selected fitness equipment at Sixmile Leisure Centre and Crumlin Leisure Centre. The preferred option required capital investment of £[redacted] and

reduced recurring operating costs by £[redacted] over the seven-year appraisal period.

2. Introduction/Background

This proposal followed previous Council approval for the replacement of fitness suite equipment at Sixmile Leisure Centre, originally approved as part of the Council's fitness equipment replacement plan in November 2016 and subsequently progressed through a report to the April 2018 Operations Committee. The Sixmile project was completed in October 2019 and this report sought approval for the next lifecycle replacement phase, reflecting the age, condition and ongoing operational importance of the equipment.

In 2024, Crumlin Leisure Centre received Group Cycle bikes transferred from Valley Leisure Centre, extending the useful life of equipment originally purchased in 2017 and ensuring value for money from the Council's previous investment. While the equipment had been maintained under manufacturers' service contracts, it was now beyond its expected life cycle, increasing the risk of downtime, repair costs and parts obsolescence.

The proposed replacement reflected the Council's established approach of targeting capital investment where it supported service performance, customer satisfaction and long-term value for money. Recent improvements across the leisure estate demonstrated the link between modern fitness provision, customer experience and membership performance. Crumlin Leisure Centre had achieved 9% membership growth since April 2025, while Valley Leisure Centre had achieved 3% growth following investment in cardiovascular equipment. The 2025 customer satisfaction survey also reinforced the importance of equipment condition, with satisfaction on availability and condition of equipment at 93% for Crumlin, compared with 83% at Sixmile. The proposed replacement would reduce equipment downtime, improve reliability for users and support retention and growth across the Borough.

3. Proposed Project

As detailed in the Business Case (circulated), three options were evaluated, with the preferred choice being Option 3: the replacement of cardiovascular equipment at Sixmile Leisure Centre and the replacement of all Group Cycles at Crumlin Leisure Centre. The estimated capital cost of the preferred option was £[redacted], with total recurring costs of £[redacted] over seven years, compared with the current seven-year projection of £[redacted]

This option would enable Sixmile and Crumlin Leisure Centres to provide comparable fitness provision with other leisure centres across the Borough, both in terms a more consistent customer experience and ensuring users had access to modern, connected equipment across the Council's leisure estate. The preferred option best met the project objectives by improving customer experience, supporting membership growth, reducing equipment downtime, improving maintenance certainty and providing a more consistent fitness offer across the Borough.

A Section 75 Equality Screening form was circulated for Members' reference.

4. Procurement

The proposed equipment would be procured via the ESPO framework. Use of the ESPO framework was recommended as the preferred procurement route as it provided a compliant, efficient and proportionate route to market for specialist fitness equipment. The framework had already been publicly advertised and competitively tendered in accordance with procurement regulations, avoiding the need for the Council to undertake a separate full tender exercise.

This approach would reduce procurement timescales and administrative burden while maintaining appropriate governance, transparency and value for money. The framework also provided access to established suppliers, standard terms and conditions, and support arrangements relevant to the supply, installation and maintenance of modern fitness equipment.

5. Financial Implications

The preferred option required capital investment of £[redacted], to be funded through the 2026/27 Estate Lifecycle Project fund.

As detailed in the Business Case, the preferred option had projected operating costs of £[redacted] over the seven-year appraisal period, compared with £[redacted] under the status quo. This represented a total operating cost reduction of £[redacted] over the appraisal period. The full financial appraisal, including maintenance, licence costs and projected income assumptions, was set out in the circulated Business Case.

Proposed by Councillor Logue
Seconded by Councillor O'Hagan and agreed that

a) The Business Case for the replacement of selected fitness equipment at Sixmile Leisure Centre and Crumlin Leisure Centre be approved.

b) The use of the ESPO framework be approved to procure the replacement equipment, with the preferred option requiring capital investment of £[redacted] and reducing recurring operating costs by £[redacted] over the seven-year appraisal period.

ACTION BY: Conor McCallion, Leisure Development Manager

Alderman Bradley returned to the Chamber during Item 7.4

7.4 IN CONFIDENCE WM/arc21/4/VOL11 arc21 JOINT COMMITTEE PAPERS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the June and August Joint Committee meetings.

2. Introduction

The arc21 Joint Committee met on a monthly basis, and each month the papers were reviewed by the Operations Committee.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

All previous papers had been noted

4. Main Report

The papers for the arc21 Joint Committee Meetings were included and circulated for Members information:

25 June – 28 August

Members were reminded that these documents were confidential and may be legally privileged or otherwise protected from disclosure so therefore Members should not disclose this information to any third party and the information must be kept secure.

5. Summary

The main issues from the June and August meetings were:



[redacted]

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Alderman Smyth and agreed that

the report be noted.

ACTION BY: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

7.5 IN CONFIDENCE FI/GEN/028, L/LEI/SMW/005 LIFECYCLE PROJECT – INSTALLATION OF REPLACEMENT SAUNA AND STEAM ROOM FACILITIES AT THE SIXMILE LEISURE CENTRE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the lifecycle project to replace the sauna and steam room facilities at the Sixmile Leisure Centre. This project was contained within the capital expenditure programme for 2025/2026.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that, in June 2025, Council had approved an estimated Lifecycle Programme budget of £[redacted] (excl. VAT) for the installation of replacement sauna and steam room facilities at Sixmile Leisure Centre.

The existing sauna and steam room facilities had reached the end of their operational lifespan. Significant investment would be required to return them to a safe, operational and serviceable condition. This report outlined proposals for the installation of new sauna and steam room facilities in a new location adjacent to the swimming pool. The proposed facilities would provide a modern, energy-efficient and cost-effective solution for customers and the Council.

To support the efficient delivery of projects of this nature, Council established the Framework for the Provision of Mechanical Services in May 2025. The framework enabled officers to procure specialist mechanical and plumbing

services directly at tendered rates or via a further competition, ensuring a compliant and efficient procurement process. The first ranked Contractor on the Framework, Precision Mechanical Contractors Ltd, had been appointed to undertake the works as their tendered rates offered the best value for money under the Framework.

A separate procurement exercise was underway for the accompanying civil works associated with this project. [redacted] These works would be assessed following the anticipated submission deadline of 4 September 2026 and although not available at the date this report was published for the Operations Committee meeting, the outcome of the quotation process was expected to be available by the date of the Committee meeting.

3. Current Position

The existing sauna and steam room facilities had reached the end of their economic and operational life. The sauna had been decommissioned since approximately September 2024 due to the deteriorated condition of its fabric, mechanical components and control systems. Although the steam room remained operational, its age and condition had resulted in increased maintenance requirements, recurring faults, and reduced reliability. These issues had adversely affected service delivery and customer satisfaction, reducing confidence in the reliability, availability and overall quality of the provision.

Returning the existing facilities to a safe, operational and serviceable standard would require significant investment, with no assurance of long-term reliability, performance or value for money.

A specification for the installation of new sauna and steam room facilities, located adjacent to the swimming pool, was prepared by a specialist consultant and costed at just under £[redacted] (excl. VAT) by Precision Mechanical Contractors Ltd in accordance with their tendered rates.

To minimise disruption to customers and leisure centre operations, the new sauna and steam room facilities would be delivered as prefabricated units. This approach would reduce on-site construction activity, shorten installation times and support a more efficient installation process. The sauna and steam room package included a 12-month warranty period. Following expiry of the warranty period, future maintenance requirements would be assessed and incorporated within the site's planned maintenance budget.

Based on the costs received to date, it was anticipated that the overall project would remain within the budget of £[redacted] (excl. VAT), as previously approved by Council.

4. Further Works

The project was anticipated to be completed within the 2026/2027 financial

year, and the programme would be refined following the conclusion of the procurement stage.

Detailed delivery arrangements would be developed to ensure the works were completed efficiently and with minimal disruption to customers and leisure centre operations. Officers would work with the appointed contractors to coordinate delivery and maintain service continuity throughout the construction period.

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Councillor Gilmour and agreed that

the update to the Sixmile Leisure Centre Sauna and Steam Room facilities Lifecycle Project, including the appointment of Precision Mechanical Contractors Ltd via the Framework for the Provision of Mechanical Services at a cost of approximately £[redacted] (excl. VAT) and the ongoing quotation for accompanying civil works, be noted.

ACTION BY: Peter Elliott, Lead Estate Services Officer

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Councillor Logue 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 8.10pm.

Council Minutes have been redacted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation, and legal advice.