



MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE HELD IN THE ROUND TOWER CHAMBER, ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE ON TUESDAY 14 APRIL 2026 AT 6.30 PM

- In the Chair** : Councillor B Webb
- Members Present (In person)** : Alderman L Clarke
Councillors –S Cosgrove, H Cushinan, P Dunlop, H Magill, V McWilliam, and A O’Lone
- Members Present (Remote)** : Councillors – M Goodman, N Kelly, A McAuley and T McGrann
- Non Committee Members: (Remote)** : Councillor L O’Hagan
- Officers Present (In person)** : Director of Finance – J Balmer
Head of Finance – R Murray
Head of Organisation Development – L Millar
Head of Human Resources – J Clarke
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson
Member Services Manager – A Duffy
- Officers Present (Remote)** : Head of ICT – G Smyth

CHAIRPERSON’S REMARKS

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

1 APOLOGIES

Aldermen P Bradley and M Cosgrove

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

NONE

Councillor McGrann joined the meeting during the presentation.

3 PRESENTATION

3.1 CCS/EDP/029 EQUALITY SCHEME 2026-2030 PRESENTATION

1. Purpose

A presentation was delivered by the Head of Organisation Development on the Council's updated Equality Scheme, alongside the Equality Action Plan (EAP) and Disability Action Plan (DAP) for the period 2026–2030.

2. Equality Scheme, Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan

The presentation outlined key priorities, statutory obligations, and proposed actions aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and addressing disability-related barriers across Council services.

The Chairperson and Members expressed their thanks to the Head of Organisation Development for her comprehensive presentation.

Proposed by Councillor Dunlop
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

the presentation be noted.

NO ACTION

4. ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 CCS/EDP/029 DRAFT EQUALITY SCHEME 2026-2030, EQUALITY ACTION PLAN AND DISABILITY ACTION PLAN

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend that Members approved the draft Equality Scheme 2026-2030, draft Equality Action Plan and draft Disability Action Plan for consultation.

2. Background

Members were advised that the Council's Equality Scheme, Equality Action Plan, and Disability Action Plan were due for review.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 required the Council, when carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland, had due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine categories of persons specified within the legislative framework. The Council also had

regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, or racial group.

3. Draft Equality Scheme 2026-2030

The Council's Equality Scheme described the arrangements that, as a public authority, the Council established and applied as a means of fulfilling the statutory requirements of Section 75(1) and (2), i.e., the duties to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.

The draft Equality Scheme 2026–2030 was circulated.

4. Draft Equality Action Plan and Draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2030

The Council's Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan had been comprehensively reviewed to ensure continued alignment with the Council's statutory obligations and corporate priorities.

As part of this review, the Council undertook engagement with relevant stakeholders and internal services to ensure that the proposed actions were robust, evidence-informed, and reflective of current and emerging needs.

The revised Plans present a strengthened framework through which the Council would continue to advance equality, accessibility, and inclusion during the period 2026–2030.

The draft Equality Action Plan and draft Disability Action Plan 2026–2030 were circulated.

5. Consultation

The Scheme and Actions Plans would be subject to a 12-week public consultation, which would commence in May 2026. Following consultation, the final Equality Scheme and Action Plans would be brought back to Members for approval.

The approved Equality Scheme, Equality Action Plan, and Disability Action Plans (2026–2030) would be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and reported on annually.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor McWilliam and agreed that

the Draft Equality Scheme 2026-2030, Draft Equality Action Plan and Draft Disability Action Plan be approved for consultation.

ACTION BY: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

4.2 CCS/EDP/11 EQUALITY SCHEME FIVE YEAR REVIEW

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the Five-Year Review of the Councils Equality Scheme for submission to the Equality Commission, for the period 2020-2025.

2. Background

Members were reminded that under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Council was required, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine categories of persons noted within the legislative framework.

The Council must also have had regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Council's Equality Action Plan included arrangements for training staff, assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity, and monitoring any adverse impact of those policies that had been adopted.

The Council must have provided a Five-Year Review to the Equality Commission on the success of their equality scheme and outline how those arrangements had been applied and to assess how effective they had been in supporting the Council to comply with the Section 75 duties.

The Five-Year Review concluded that the Council made measurable progress in advancing equality and inclusion. While challenges remained, the foundations put in place over the past five years provided a strong platform for continued improvement. The next phase would focus on deepening community involvement, tackling persistent inequalities, and ensuring that fairness remained central to all Council activities.

The Five-Year Review document for the period 2020 to 2025 was circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

the Five-Year Review of the Equality Scheme for the period 2020-2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Claire Webb, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer

4.3 PT/CI/073 BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27 - ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the Organisation Development Directorate Business Plan 2026/27.

2. Background

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 put in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

Specifically, the duties in the Act relate to Section 84(1), 85(2) and 85(9) whereby the Council had a statutory duty to make arrangements to:

- Secure continuous improvement.
- Secure achievement of its improvement objectives; and
- Exercise its functions so that any Departmental specified standards were met.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In January 2026 the Council approved a strategic performance framework as part of the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2026/27 (draft for consultation).

4. Business Planning

Business planning played a vital role in the Council's performance management and delivery processes. It offered a more efficient and cohesive approach to monitoring and evaluating performance while improving overall visibility.

The purpose of the Directorate Business Plans was to:

- Demonstrate how each of the Directorates were supporting and achieving Council's priorities.
- Provide a clear sense of purpose of the Directorate and the challenges it faced.
- Illustrate how it was aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Measure performance and hold ourselves to account to ensure we deliver for the Council and its residents.

Business Plan for; Organisation Development Directorate was circulated.

5. Governance

Progress reports on the Council's Directorate Business Plans 2026/27 would be reported quarterly to CLT and biannually to relevant Committees.

Proposed by Councillor O'Lone

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Organisation Development Directorate Business Plan 2026/27 be approved.

ACTION BY: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

4.4 PT/CI/073 BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27 - FINANCE DIRECTORATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the Finance Directorate Business Plan 2026/27.

2. Background

Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 put in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

Specifically, the duties in the Act relate to Section 84(1), 85(2) and 85(9) whereby the Council had a statutory duty to make arrangements to:

- Secure continuous improvement.
- Secure achievement of its improvement objectives; and
- Exercise its functions so that any Departmental specified standards were met.

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- Illustrate how it was aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Measure performance and hold ourselves to account to ensure we deliver for the Council and its residents.

Business Plan for; Finance Directorate was circulated.

5. Governance

Progress reports on the Council's Directorate Business Plans 2026/27 would be reported quarterly to CLT and biannually to relevant Committees.

Proposed by Councillor Goodman
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Finance Directorate Business Plan 2026/27 be approved.

ACTION BY: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

4.5 **CCS/EDP/025 DUAL LANGUAGE STREET SIGN APPLICATIONS**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve and note the Dual Language Street Sign applications as followed:

Stage 1

- **Cargin Road, Toomebridge, BT41 3NS be approved.**
- **Hollybrook Gardens, Newtownabbey, BT36 3ZS be approved.**
- **Loup Road, Toomebridge, BT41 3TW be approved.**

Stage 2

- **Longlands Walk, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NQ be noted.**
- **Longlands Park, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NG be noted.**

Stage 3

- **No applications at stage 3 be noted.**

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that in accordance with the Dual Language Street Sign Policy, adopted by Council on 30 May 2022 (circulated), the following update outlined the current status of applications received.

3. Application Update

STAGE 1: PETITION VERIFICATION - there were three applications at Stage 1.

1. CARGIN ROAD, TOOMEBRIDGE, BT41 3NS
2. HOLLYBROOK GARDENS, NEWTOWNABBAY, BT36 3ZS
3. LOUP ROAD, TOOMEBRIDGE, BT41 3TW

Three new applications had been received for the above streets. Following a visit to the Electoral Office NI, the occupiers signing the petition were verified against the Electoral Register and satisfy the one-third threshold as required within the approved Policy. Approval was requested to proceed to Stage 2.

STAGE 2: RESIDENTS CANVASS – there were two applications at Stage 2.

1. LONGLANDS WALK, NEWTOWNABBEY, BT36 7NQ
2. LONGLANDS PARK, NEWTOWNABBEY, BT36 7NG

Two applications were at Stage 2 and canvass letters had been issued following a visit to the Electoral Office NI. An update was provided in the next report.

STAGE 3: STREET SIGN INSTALLATION – there were no applications at Stage 3.

Maps and costs were circulated for information.

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan
Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

that Dual Language Street Sign applications at:

Stage 1

- **Cargin Road, Toomebridge, BT41 3NS be approved.**
- **Hollybrook Gardens, Newtownabbey, BT36 3ZS be approved.**
- **Loup Road, Toomebridge, BT41 3TW be approved.**

Stage 2

- **Longlands Walk, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NQ be noted.**
- **Longlands Park, Newtownabbey, BT36 7NG be noted.**

Stage 3

- **No applications at stage 3 be noted.**

ACTION BY: Claire Webb, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer

4.6 G/MSMO/1 SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES PAYABLE TO COUNCILLORS 2026-27

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the updated Scheme of Allowances Payable to Councillors 2026-27.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that Council was required under the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 to make a scheme for the payment of allowances to Councillors and Committee Members in respect of each year. The scheme may be amended at any time.

3. Key Issues

The current Scheme of Allowances for 2025/26 was approved by Council in November 2025.

The revised Scheme of Allowances for 2026/27 (circulated) effective from 1

April 2026 had been revised to incorporate an increase in the Dependant's Carers' Allowance. This allowance was linked to the National Living Wage which from 1 April 2026 increased to £12.71 per hour and had therefore been increased in the scheme to this amount for standard care and to £25.41 per hour for specialised care. The maximum monthly amounts had also been revised to reflect the increase in hourly rates.

There were no other changes to allowances at this time.

Any future notifications from the DfC in relation to changes to the allowances payable for the 2026/27 financial year should be reported to Members for their approval.

Proposed by Councillor McWilliam
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed that

the updated Scheme of Allowances Payable to Councillors for 2026/27 be approved.

ACTION BY: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 G/DPFI/2 QUARTERLY REPORT ON FOI/EIR/DPA REQUESTS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the Quarter 3 statistics relating to FOI/EIR/DPA requests.

2. Introduction/Background

A report had been prepared on requests received and completed in the third quarter of the year (1 October to 31 December 2025) under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) and the Data Protection Act (DPA) and this was circulated.

3. Summary

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

- The number of requests received was higher than the number in the same period the previous year – an increase of 52%.
- Of the 128 requests received, 79 were under FOI, 42 under EIR and 7 under DPA.
- 120 requests were completed within the quarter.
- 92% of the requests received within the quarter 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 Environmental Health (36), Finance (32), Planning (21), Waste (16) and HR (16).
- Five appeals were received during the quarter. The Council's original decision was upheld on 3 occasions and additional information was provided on 2 occasions. One appeal was underway at the end of the quarter.
- No complaints to the ICO were notified within the quarter.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Cushinan and agreed that

the Quarter 3 statistics relating to FOI/EIR/DPA requests be noted.

ACTION BY: Helen McCreight, Lead Information Governance Officer

5.2 CCS/EDP/028 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CONFERENCE 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the delivery of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Conference for parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) on Wednesday 27 May 2026.

2. Background

Council continued its commitment to improving inclusion, accessibility, and support for families across the Borough. Parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) consistently reported challenges in navigating services, securing appropriate educational support, and accessing reliable information.

To address these needs, officers, working closely with the Mayor, proposed the development and delivery of a half-day EDI Conference focused on shining a light on parents and carers of SEN children, making them feel seen, and providing advice and support on key topics.

The Conference would also strengthen partnership working across statutory bodies, the community/voluntary sector, and Council services.

3. Conference Details

Title:	We See You – Stronger Together
Date/Time:	Wednesday 27 May 2026, 10.00am–1.00pm
Venue:	Theatre at The Mill

The Conference would include keynote speakers, panel discussions and an information marketplace, alongside dedicated support spaces to ensure accessibility for all attendees. The conference agenda would be circulated to Members, staff, and the Community in due course.

4. Financial Implications

Costs would be met from within existing budgets, as agreed through the rate setting process.

Proposed by Councillor Cushinan
Seconded by Councillor Magill and agreed that

delivery of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Conference for parents and carers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) on Wednesday 27 May 2026 be noted.

ACTION BY: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

6 **ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS**

There were no any other relevant business taken at this point.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Dunlop 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** FI/ICT/4 **WIDE AREA NETWORK (WAN) UPGRADE**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the procurement and implementation of a new Wide Area Network (WAN) solution to replace the Council's existing WAN contract, which was approaching the end of its term. The proposed investment would ensure continued, resilient and secure network connectivity across Council sites and support the effective delivery of Council services.

2. Introduction/Background

The Council operated a Wide Area Network (WAN) that provided network and internet connectivity across its major sites throughout the Borough. This network underpinned day-to-day Council operations, enabling access to corporate systems, shared applications and digital services.

The existing WAN contract was nearing expiry. This presented a timely opportunity to review the current arrangements and transition to a modern WAN solution that better reflected the Council's operational needs and future service demands. Continuing with the current provision would require entering

a new contractual commitment for a service model that offered limited resilience, flexibility and security when compared with modern alternatives, while costs continued to increase.

A refreshed WAN solution would deliver improved network resilience and business continuity, reducing the risk of service disruption arising from connectivity failures or site outages. It would also strengthen the Council's cyber security posture and provided improved performance, scalability and flexibility to support evolving service delivery models and new ways of working across the organisation.

The full business case for the WAN upgrade was circulated for Members' consideration.

3. Options Considered

The business case considered two options:

Option 1 – Status Quo (Do Nothing)

Continue with the existing WAN arrangement or enter a like-for-like replacement. Under this option, annual costs were expected to continue increasing, while the Council remained reliant on a legacy network solution with limited resilience, constrained flexibility and security capabilities that no longer reflect modern standards. This option does not address growing operational, business continuity or security risks.

Option 2 – Procure a New WAN (Preferred Option)

Procure and implement a modern WAN solution designed to improve network resilience, enhance security, and provide greater flexibility and value for money over the life of the contract. This option addressed increasing cost pressures, strengthened business continuity, and improved long-term sustainability.

The preferred option arising from the business case was Option 2 – Procure a New WAN.

4. Pricing

Indicative costs associated with each option were summarised below.

Installation Costs	Option 1	Option 2
Upfront Costs	£nil	
Year 0		
Year 1		
Year 2		
Year 3		

Year 4	████████	████████
Total Project Costs (5 Years)	████████	████████

*Annual 10% increase out of contract costs

The preferred option required an initial capital investment but delivered lower ongoing annual costs when compared to the Status Quo.

5. Procurement

The proposed WAN solution would be procured using the Northern Ireland Councils Networks Services contract, providing a compliant and efficient route to market. The collaborative procurement for this contract was led by Armagh City, Banbridge, & Craigavon Borough Council on behalf of itself and nine other councils, including Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.

The procurement opportunity was made available on eTendersNI on 7 April 2022 and tenders were opened via the portal on 9 June 2022. The tenders were evaluated on the basis of quality (75%) and cost (25%) and used a financial model that was bespoke for each Council. The contract was awarded to the highest scoring tenderer, Eircom(UK), in October 2022 and was in place for up to 10 years.

This use of this established contract ensured adherence to public sector procurement regulations and the Council's internal governance requirements, while reducing procurement timescales and associated risk. The contract enabled access to a pre-qualified supplier capable of delivering resilient, secure and scalable WAN solutions, while ensuring value for money and contractual flexibility to accommodate future changes in service demand.

6. Financial Implications

The proposed investment could be funded from existing approved capital provision and existing ICT revenue budgets, with no requirement for additional funding. While Option 2 required an initial capital investment, it delivered lower ongoing annual costs than the Status Quo and represented improved value for money over the life of the contract.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

- a) Option 2 – Procure a New WAN, as outlined in the enclosed business case be approved; and**
- b) the award of a contract for a new Wide Area Network solution, procured via the Northern Ireland Councils Networks Services contract in line with**

the tendered rates and indicative costs for Option 2 detailed in this report be approved.

ACTION BY: Graham Smyth, Head of ICT

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor O'Lone

Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed

that the remainder of Committee business be taken in Open Session.

The Chairperson advised that audio-recording would recommence at this point.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 7.08pm.

MAYOR

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.