MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE HELD IN THE ROUND TOWER CHAMBER, ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE ON WEDNESDAY 7 MAY 2025 AT 6PM

In the Chair	:	Alderman Boyle
Members Present (In person)	:	Aldermen – P Bradley, L Clarke and J Smyth Councillors – A Bennington, J Burbank, M Cooper, S Cosgrove and H Magill,
Members Present (Remote)	:	Councillors – H Cushinan, A McAuley and L O'Hagan
Non-Committee Members: (In person)	:	Councillor B Webb
Non-Committee Members: (Remote)	:	Councillor M Brady
Officers Present (In person)	:	Director of Organisation Development (Interim) – H Hall Deputy Director of Finance – J Balmer Head of Finance – R Murray Head of Human Resources (Interim) – J Clarke ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson Member Services Manager – A Duffy
Officers Present (Remote)	:	Director of Governance and Finance – S Cole Deputy Director of Governance – L Johnston

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

In the absence of the Chairperson the Vice-Chairperson welcomed everyone to the May Meeting of the Policy and Governance Committee and reminded all present of recording requirements.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor O'Lone

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

Councillor Brady joined the meeting remotely during Item 3.1.

3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 CCS/EDP/10 INCLUSIVE SEASONAL PROGRAMME AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) SCHOOL SUMMER SCHEME FUNDING

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval from Members for the Inclusive Seasonal Programme and the Special Educational Needs School Summer Scheme Funding.

2. Council Decision

Members were reminded that the Council's Equality Action Plan (EAP) and Disability Action Plan (DAP) both feature actions to be achieved such as "Continue to improve access to leisure, play and recreation across the Borough for people with a disability."

Additionally, the Council approved in April 2018, the funding of up to £5,000 for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Schools in the Borough to support equitable access to Summer Schemes and Programmes across the Borough for children and young people with special needs.

3. Review of Delivery Model

Members would know the Inclusive Summer Scheme programme was a much-valued programme which was delivered in partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation.

An evaluation exercise was carried out following the Summer 2024 programme which elicited the following feedback.

- 99% customer satisfaction with the Inclusive Summer Scheme programme.
- 100% would recommend the Inclusive Summer Scheme to a friend.

A sample of Individual comments received were as follows:

- *"It's so well organised and as parents we feel we can trust the staff 100% to keep our child safe and cared for giving our daughter such a good time."*

- *"The communication with leaders was fantastic and I (as a ridiculously anxious parent!) Was absolutely confident in the care, skills, knowledge and understanding of the leaders from day one."*

- *"There was a great variety of activities available, with choice/opt-in/out options – very creative use of space!"*

Some constructive feedback was given which included:

- *"A week is too long."*

- *"Opportunities for shorter activities throughout the year e.g. family day events where children could participate with their siblings and parents."*

- *"Provision at sites across the Borough."*

In addition to this the Mae Murray Foundation conducted their own consultation with similar feedback which was circulated for Members' information.

Mindful of the feedback it was proposed that the traditional "two week" delivery model was revised to reflect the feedback.

4. Revised Inclusive Summer Scheme Programme

The Inclusive Seasonal Programme details were:

Programme	Location	Dates
Summer Scheme	Antrim Forum	Wednesday 9th July 2025 Thursday 10th July 2025
	Crumlin Leisure Centre	Wednesday 16th July 2025
	Mossley Pavilion	Wednesday 20th August 2025 Thursday 21st August 2025
Family Days	Antrim Castle Gardens	Friday 18th July 2025
	Theatre at the Mill	Tuesday 22nd July 2025
	Lilian Bland	October 2025
Easter Scheme	Antrim Forum	March 2026 (2 dates)
	Crumlin Leisure Centre	April 2026 (2 dates)
	Mossley Pavilion	April 2026 (2 dates)

The updated seasonal programme would:
- Improve accessibility for our residents by providing options throughout the year at locations across the Borough.

- Provide one-to-one specialised care for up to twenty-five children (per day) with complex disabilities/medical conditions.

- Deliver a range of activities tailored to meet their specific needs such as inclusive wheelchair games, sensory play, arts and crafts and guest facilitators.

- Family days would provide a further option for children with complex disability/medical needs to enjoy a bespoke day of fun, alongside their families.

5. Special Educational Needs (SEN) School Funding Programme

In addition, it was proposed to continue with the funding programme to Special Educational Needs (SEN) Schools in the Borough of £5,000 each to deliver a Summer Scheme/Programme.

This supports equitable access to Summer Schemes and Programmes across the Borough for children and young people with special needs. The Accessibility and Inclusion Officer would contact the schools to encourage uptake of this funding.

6. Financial Implications

The costs associated with the Inclusive Summer Scheme Programmes are:

- Inclusive Summer Scheme in partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation - £15,000.

- Special Educational Needs (SEN) School Summer Scheme Funding - £25,000 (based on all five schools applying).

All costs are within agreed budget.

In response to a Member's query regarding a Summer Scheme programme in Ballyclare, the Director of Organisation Development (Interim) clarified that work was still ongoing with Mae Murray Foundation to secure more dates and that she would report back directly to the individual Member.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

a) The Inclusive Seasonal Summer Scheme delivered in partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation be approved at a cost of £15,000.

b) The Council continues to support equitable access to Summer Schemes and Programmes across the Borough for children and young people with special needs via a contribution of £5,000 to each Special School in the Borough to deliver a Summer Scheme/ Programme (maximum cost of £25,000) be approved.

ACTION BY: Ellen Boyd, Accessibility and Inclusion Officer and Helen Hall, Director of Organisation Development (Interim)

3.2 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE UPDATE APRIL 2024 – MARCH 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to note the final position for Managing Attendance for the 2024/25 reporting period, and to approve the Managing Attendance Action Plan 2025/26.

2. Managing Attendance Update Summary

Absence at the end of 2024/25 was above target by 2.31 days with 14.31 average days lost per employee against a target of 12 days.

Further details were provided in the Managing Attendance Performance Summary circulated. A Managing Attendance Action Plan 2025/26 had been developed for Members' approval.

The Director of Organisation Development (Interim) responded to Members' queries in relation to managing and improving absence.

Proposed by Alderman Smyth
Seconded by Councillor Bennington and agreed that

a) the final position for Managing Attendance for the 2024/25 reporting period be noted, and the Managing Attendance Action Plan 2025/26 be approved.

b) going forward the quarterly absence report would include additional data on types of sickness and an absence ranking per Directorate

c) a proposal would be brought to a future Committee for Members consideration in relation to a fresh approach to occupational health support.

d) a benchmarking exercise be completed in the future on the Worksmart initiative launched on 1 April 2025 considering the impact on attendance.

ACTION BY: Victoria Stewart, HR Systems and Analytics Manager and Helen Hall, Director of Organisation Development (Interim)

Councillor Brady left the meeting remotely at this point.

4 ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 FI/FIN/9 PROMPT PAYMENT PERFORMANCE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to note the Council's quarterly prompt payment performance.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that the Department for Communities (DfC) issued revised guidance (Local Government Circular 19/2016) on prompt payments and the recording of invoice payments in November 2016. This guidance requested Councils to record specific performance targets of 10 working days and 30 calendar days and continue a cycle of quarterly reporting on prompt payment performance by Councils to the DfC and its publication on their website.

3. Prompt Payment Performance

Council's prompt payment performance for the period **1 January 2025 to 31 March 2025** was set out below:

The default target for paying invoices, where no other terms are agreed, is 30 days.

(N.B. 30 days target is 30 calendar days and 10 days is 10 working days).

During the above period, Council paid invoices totalling £16,103,376.

Council paid 6,199 invoices within the 30-day target (91%).

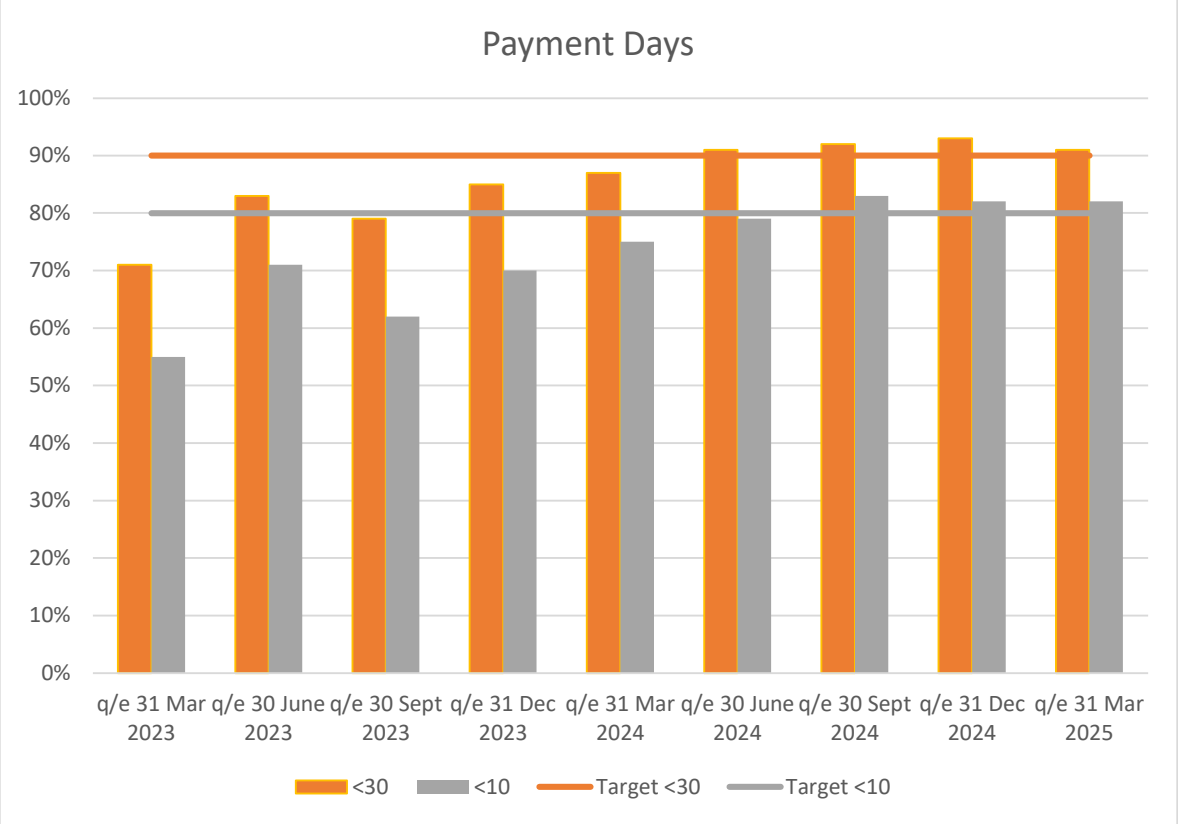
Council paid 5,553 invoices within the 10-day target (82%).

Council paid 588 invoices outside of the 30-day target (9%).

Council had set a target of paying 90% of invoices within 30 days and 80% within 10 days.

This compares to previous quarterly results as below:

Period	**Total Number of Invoices Paid**	**% Paid Within 30 Days**	**% Paid Within 10 Days**
Target		**90%**	**80%**
q/e 31 March 2023	5,558	71%	55%
q/e 30 June 2023	7,050	83%	71%
q/e 30 September 2023	6,498	79%	62%
q/e 31 December 2023	7,074	85%	70%
q/e 31 March 2024	5,776	87%	75%
q/e 30 June 2024	5,533	91%	79%
q/e 30 September 2024	4,871	92%	83%
q/e 31 December 2024	4,849	93%	82%
q/e 31 March 2025	6,787	91%	82%



The performance presented graphically highlights the performance metrics for the above.

The table and graph above show the performance improvement over the last two years and how it had been maintained throughout 24/25.

Similarly, the RAG weekly status report showed the continued high performance over the last quarter to the end of March.

Period	No of invoices	% Paid Within 10 Days	11-30 Cum	30 plus Cum	% Paid Within 30 Days
30/12/2024 - 05/01/2025	332	77%	19%	5%	95%
06/01/2025 - 12/01/2025	641	78%	12%	10%	90%
13/01/2025 - 19/01/2025	648	90%	4%	5%	95%
20/01/2025 - 26/01/2025	208	89%	5%	6%	94%
27/01/2025 - 02/02/2025	692	74%	12%	13%	87%
03/02/2025 - 09/02/2025	456	82%	8%	10%	90%
10/02/2025 - 16/02/2025	485	84%	9%	7%	93%
17/02/2025 - 23/02/2025	429	77%	12%	11%	89%
24/02/2025 - 02/03/2025	526	81%	10%	8%	92%
03/03/2025 - 09/03/2025	424	88%	6%	6%	94%
10/03/2025 - 16/03/2025	554	79%	12%	9%	91%
17/03/2025 - 23/03/2025	339	89%	6%	5%	95%
24/03/2025 - 29/03/2025	977	81%	9%	10%	90%

There was now a full complement of staff within the Finance section and work was ongoing with all departments to maintain performance.

Service improvements had included:

- Additional reporting capability to monitor performance.
- Staff training/refresher sessions
- Process review for high volume suppliers.

The prompt payment performance for Councils in Northern Ireland was published quarterly by the Department for Communities (DfC). The prompt payment performance for the quarter ended December 2024 was circulated; Council's performance for Quarter 4 of 2024/25 against the average performance for the other Councils for Quarter 3 (December) of 2024/25 was set out in the table below:

Council	**% Paid Within 30 Days**	**% Paid Within 10 Days**
Antrim & Newtownabbey BC (Quarter 4 24/25)	91%	82%
All Councils (Quarter 3 24/25)	92%	71%

4. Supplier Balances

	March 2025	**December 2024**
	£	£
Creditors Control Account	243,596	599,109
% of quarterly spend	1.5%	4.8%

The outstanding amount due to suppliers would fluctuate markedly depending on the timing of payments, invoice value and timelines of verification. The low value of the outstanding amount was consistent with the payment performance for the quarter.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Magill and agreed that

the Council's quarterly prompt payment report be noted recognising the performance improvement over the full year.

NO ACTION

Councillors Cushinan and O'Hagan joined the meeting remotely at Item 4.2.

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to inform Members on the Quarter 4 statistics relating to FOI/EIR/DPA Requests.

2. Introduction/Background

A report had been prepared on requests received and competed in the fourth quarter of the year (1 January to 31 March 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 lower than the number in the same period the previous year – a decrease of 34%.

- Of the 97 requests received, 69 were under FOI, 24 under EIR and 4 under DPA.

- 84 requests were completed within the quarter.

- 100% 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 (23), Governance (21), Planning (19) and Finance (16).

- One appeal was received during the quarter. Council's original decision was upheld.

- No complaints to the ICO were notified within the quarter.

- One complaint notified in Quarter 1 in relation to the Kells BESS was closed. The ICO decision notice stated that while Council was entitled to rely on EIR regulation 12(5)(e) - commercial or industrial information - the public interest in maintaining the exception did not outweigh the public interest in disclosure. The ICO required Council to disclose the withheld information while redacting personal data.

- One complaint notified in quarter 2 in relation to a noise annoyance investigation was also closed. The Commissioner's decision was that Council was entitled to rely on regulation 12(4)(b) of the EIR (manifestly unreasonable) to refuse to comply with the request but Council must provide the complainant with advice and assistance for each part of their request to help them submit a less burdensome request.

Proposed by Alderman Bradley
Seconded by Councillor Burbank and agreed that

a) Members note the Quarter 4 statistics relating to FOI/EIR/DPA Requests.

b) subject to legal consideration, future quarterly Committee reports on FOI/EIR/DPA statistics, include approximate costs associated with responding to requests.

ACTION BY: Helen McBride, Information Governance Manager and Liz Johnston, Deputy Director of Governance

4.3 CCS/EDP/025 DUAL LANGUAGE STREET SIGN APPLICATIONS

1. Purpose

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

Stage 1	**Manse Terrace, Newtownabbey, BT36 5UJ be noted**
Stage 2	**Glen Manor View, Newtownabbey, BT36 7GE be noted** **Longlands Mews, Newtownabbey, BT36 7FR be noted**
Stage 3	**No applications be noted**

2. 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 outlines the current status of applications received.

3. Application Update

STAGE 1: PETITION VERIFICATION

One application had been received at Stage 1.

1. MANSE TERRACE, NEWTOWNABBEY, BT36 5UJ

The occupiers signing the petition for the street above had been verified against the current Electoral Register and do not satisfy the one-third threshold as required within the approved Policy.

STAGE 2: RESIDENTS CANVASS

Two applications had been received at Stage 2.

1. GLEN MANOR VIEW, NEWTOWNABBEY, BT36 7GE
2. LONGLANDS MEWS, NEWTOWNABBEY, BT36 7FR

Canvass letters had been issued to residents of the above streets with May 2025 return dates and the outcome would be reported to Members in due course.

STAGE 3: STREET SIGN INSTALLATION

There were currently no applications at Stage 3.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor McAuley and agreed that

the Dual Language Street Sign applications be noted as follows:

Stage 1
- **Manse Terrace, Newtownabbey, BT36 5UJ, be noted**

Stage 2
- **Glen Manor View, Newtownabbey, BT36 7GE, be noted**
- **Longlands Mews, Newtownabbey, BT36 7FR, be noted**

Stage 3
No applications at Stage 3, be noted

NO ACTION

4.4 HR/ER/002 CORRESPONDENCE - DISSOLUTION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STAFF COMMISSION

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to note the correspondence received from the Department for Communities regarding the Dissolution of the Local Government Staff Commission.

2. Background

The Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) was established as a statutory body under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

In October 2013, following consultation on the future of the Commission, the then Environment Minister announced that the Commission, having implemented its important role in the reorganisation of local government programme, would no longer be required. It was subsequently agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive, at their meeting on 19 June 2014, that the Commission would be wound up on 31 March 2017.

When the NI Assembly was suspended in 2017, the necessary Dissolution Order was not in place to wind up the Commission as planned and its work was currently ongoing.

In December 2023, the Department for Communities informed the Commission that the provisional date for dissolution is 31 March 2027.

Council had written to the Minister on a number of occasions to express its view that the Commission should be dissolved immediately.

3. Previous Decision of Council

At the February 2025 Policy and Governance Committee it was agreed that Council would again write to express its dissatisfaction with the requirement to meet the continuing financial commitment and reiterate that the Commission should be wound up immediately.

4. Correspondence

The circulated response had been received from the Department for Communities for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington
Seconded by Councillor Magill and agreed that

the correspondence received from the Department for Communities regarding the Dissolution of the Local Government Staff Commission be noted.

NO ACTION

4.5 FC/FA/8 ANNUAL REVIEW OF PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide a review of the Council's Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management activities for the 2024/25 financial year for noting.

2. Introduction

Members were reminded that Council measures and manages its capital expenditure, borrowings and investment activities with reference to the CIPFA Prudential Code. This report provided an update on these activities that took place during the 2024/25 financial year.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

Council approved the Prudential Indicators for 2024/25 to 2026/2027 and the Treasury Management Strategies for 2024/25 in February 2024.

Under the Prudential Code and the Code of Practice on Treasury Management in the Public Services, Council was required to monitor and review its prudential indicators. The key objective of which was to ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of Council were affordable, prudent and sustainable and that treasury management decisions were taken in accordance with good professional practice.

Council's Treasury Management Policy required quarterly and annual reports on treasury management activities.

This report compared the approved Prudential Indicators with the outturn position for 2024/25 and the annual report on Council's borrowing and investment activities for 2024/25.

A copy of the annual report was circulated for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Bennington
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Members were advised that any Other Relevant Business (AORB) may be taken at this point.

There were no AORB raised at this point.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Councillor Cosgrove and agreed

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

6 ITEM IN CONFIDENCE

6.1 IN CONFIDENCE FI/PRO/TEN/602 COLLABORATIVE TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF INTERNAL AUDIT SUPPORT SERVICES

CONTRACT PERIOD 2 JUNE 2025 – 31 MAY 2026 WITH THE OPTION TO EXTEND FOR UP TO A FURTHER 24 MONTHS (SUBJECT TO PERFORMANCE AND REVIEW)

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to obtain approval for the appointment of a suitably qualified and experienced organisation to provide internal audit support services where required by Council.

2. Introduction/Background

A collaborative tender exercise was undertaken for the provision of internal audit support services. The procurement was led by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon Borough Council also participating. The contract would include the delivery of ad hoc assignments and the provision of advisory support as and when required by Council. The anticipated level of

annual spend on this contract for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council was approximately £[redacted]

This tender opportunity was made available on eTendersNI on 18 February 2025. One tender response was opened via the eTendersNI Portal on 11 March 2025 and referred to the evaluation panel for assessment. The tender was evaluated on a two-stage basis as follows:

STAGE 1 – SELECTION STAGE

The tender was evaluated on a pass/fail basis for tenderer's professional conduct, economic and financial standing, previous relevant experience, expertise of personnel, membership in a recognized accountancy institute, and declarations and form of tender. The tender met the requirements of Stage 1 of the evaluation process and proceeded to Stage 2.

STAGE 2 – AWARD STAGE

Quality & Commercial Assessment
The tender was evaluated on the basis of methodology and approach to meeting the requirements (20%), environmental objectives (10%), and cost (70%). The recommendation was as follows:

Supplier	Quality Assessment (out of 30%)	Cost Assessment (out of 70%)	Total % Score	Estimated Total Annual Cost per Council for 25 days of support each (£) (excl. VAT)
SCC Chartered Accountants Ltd	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

While there was only one tenderer, the costs were in line with market rates and officers are content that they represent value for money.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Alderman Clarke and agreed that

having achieved a score of [redacted] SCC Chartered Accountants Ltd. be appointed to provide internal audit support services at the tendered rates for the period of 2 June 2025 – 31 May 2026, with an option to extend for up to a further 24 months.

ACTION BY: Melissa Kenning, Procurement Manager

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Burbank
Seconded by Alderman Smyth and agreed

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

The Chairperson advised that the 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 6.25pm.

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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.