



31 March 2022

Committee Chair: Alderman P Michael

Committee Vice-Chair: Councillor T McGrann

Committee Members: Councillors – M Cooper, H Cushinan, R Foster, S Flanagan, N Kelly, A McAuley, M Magill, B Mallon, N Ramsay, V Robinson, M Stewart, B Webb and R Wilson

Dear Member

MEETING OF THE POLICY & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Policy & Governance Committee will be held in The **Chamber, Mossley Mill on Tuesday 5 April 2022 at 6.30pm.**

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqui Dixon".

Jacqui Dixon, BSc MBA
Chief Executive, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council

For any queries please contact Member Services:

Tel: 028 9034 0048 / 028 9448 1301

memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

A G E N D A

1 APOLOGIES

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3 PRESENTATION

3.1 Legitimate – online abuse

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 Review of FOI Policy

4.2 Climate Change Working Group minutes

4.3 Scheme of Allowances Payable to Councillors 2022-23

5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

5.1 Budget Report – February 2022 Period 11

5.2 Agency staff update

5.3 Elected Member Development Working Group Minutes

5.4 Managing Attendance

5.5 Extension to Local Government Remote Meetings Legislation

5.6 COVID-19 Funding Support 2021/22

5.7 JobStart Scheme Closure

6 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

6.1 Salary Sacrifice Pension AVC Scheme

6.2 Procurement Tender Reports and Award of Contracts

7 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

**REPORT ON BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE
POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING ON
TUESDAY 5 APRIL 2022**

3. PRESENTATION

3.1 PRESENTATION – LEGITIMATE – ONLINE ABUSE

Members are advised that a presentation by Caoimhe Donnelly, Head of Operations for Legitimate will be provided via Zoom.

Legitimate is a free to use platform providing the option of a safer way to communicate with the public and press on social media. It eliminates trolling and abuse, as a verified identity/profile will be required for users to engage. All social media posts can be controlled through this one site, if desired.

Prepared by: Member Services

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 G/IG/007 REVIEW OF FOI POLICY

The purpose of the FOI Policy is to ensure that the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are adhered to and in particular that:

- A significant amount of routinely published information about the Council is made available to the public as a matter of course through the Publication Scheme;
- Other information not included in the Publication Scheme is readily available on request and such a request is dealt with in a timely manner; and
- In cases where information is covered by an exemption, consideration is given as to whether or not the information should be released.

A review of the Council's policy is now required under a two-year review cycle.

The review has identified a number of minor amendments as being required:

- update regarding changes in organisational structure (Deputy Chief Executives, Directors and Deputy Directors)
- inclusion of Rural Needs and Data Protection Impact Assessment statements in accordance with the Policy Framework template.

The amendments to the policy have been approved by CLT. The draft policy with the amendments incorporated is **enclosed**.

RECOMMENDATION: that the reviewed FOI Policy is approved.

Prepared by: Helen McBride, Information Governance Manager

Agreed by: Liz Johnston, Head of Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance & Governance

4.2 G/BCEP/009 CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP MINUTES

The minutes of the eighth Climate Change Working Group, which took place on 8 March 2022, are enclosed.

In summary, Members were updated on progress made to mitigate against climate change including:

- A presentation by Dr Jade Berman from Climate NI
- Parks and Leisure update on their Action Plan
- Revised Energy Action Plan
- It is proposed that all Elected Members be invited to the June Climate Change Working Group meeting to hear an update on the Peace Plus Geothermal Project, when a presentation on the scheme will be given by Geological Survey Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDATION: that the minutes of the Climate Change Working Group be approved.

Prepared by: Liz Johnston, Head of Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance & Governance

4.3 G/MSMO/1 SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES PAYABLE TO COUNCILLORS 2022-23

Members are reminded that the Council is required under the Local Government (Payments to Councillors) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 to make a scheme for the payment of allowances to councillors and committee members in respect of each year.

Circular LG 10/2022 Consolidated Councillor Allowances – Updated March 2022, **enclosed**, has been received from the Department for Communities reflecting an increase in the maximum rates for Basic and Special Responsibility Allowance from 1 April 2021 and an increase in the maximum rates for Dependants' Carers' Allowance applicable from 1 April 2022. The Council's Scheme of Allowances Payable to Councillors has been updated to show the new maximum rates applied from the valid dates.

All previously agreed Special Responsibility Allowances have been increased by 1.75% in line with the increase in the Basic Allowance.

A review of the scheme of allowances is currently being undertaken and any amendments shall be reported to Members, along with any future notifications from the Department for Communities in relation to changes to the allowances payable for the 2022-23 financial year, for approval.

RECOMMENDATION: that the Scheme of Allowances Payable to Councillors for 2022-23 be agreed.

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance & Governance

5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

5.1 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – FEBRUARY 2022 – Period 11

A budget report for February 2022 – Period 11 is enclosed for Members' information.

The Council's financial position at the end of February 2022 shows a favourable variance of £1.19m.

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

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

5.2 HR/HR/019 AGENCY STAFF UPDATE

Members are reminded that agency staff are used across the Council to provide temporary cover for absence such as:

- Maternity leave
- Secondments
- Sickness absence
- Vacant posts

The use of agency staff is subject to a rigorous approval process, which requires the approval of the Corporate Leadership Team and there is budgetary provision for the majority of posts filled via departmental salary budgets, salary contingency and grant funding.

The table **enclosed** at Appendix 1 provides an update for Members on the use of agency staff as at February 2022 as compared to February 2021. It excludes limited ad-hoc agency cover, which is necessary to provide operational cover, at short notice.

Appendix 2 **enclosed** sets out expenditure on agency workers in February 2022.

The cost of agency staff has increased for the period of 1 April 2021 to 28 February 2022 at 7% of all staffing costs compared to 3.9% for the same period last year. It should be noted that agency expenditure was significantly reduced last year following the release of agency workers in May 2020. This year's costs have also increased due to the late application of the April 2020 pay award and the respective back charges incurred.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Victoria Stewart, HR Systems and Data Analyst

Agreed by: Jennifer Close, Head of Human Resources

Approved by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development,

5.3 G/MSMO/27 ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP MINUTES

Members are advised that a meeting of the Member Development Working Group took place on Monday 14 March 2022 and a copy of the minutes is enclosed for Members' information.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Sarah Fenton, Organisation Development Officer

Agreed by: Jennifer Close, Head of Human Resources

Approved by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development

5.4 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the management of attendance from April 2021 – February 2022 (summary **enclosed**).

April 2021 to February 2022 - Attendance Update

Members are advised that absence at the end of February 2022 was 13.36 average days per employee against a target of 11.12 days. The annual corporate target for absence is 12 average days per employee.

Whilst COVID related absence is excluded from these figures it does include days lost for employees who were not in receipt of sick pay for part of their absence. No additional cost is incurred by the Council during the 'no pay' periods.

If days lost to employees who were not in receipt of sick pay were not included in these figures, the average days lost per employee at the end of February 2022 would have been 12.31 days.

Reasons for absence

In February, long term cases (in excess of 20 days) accounted for 88% of absence, representing 19 employees (17 employees in January). Stress remains the main cause for long term cases, currently representing 55% of these absences which is a small increase from 53% in January.

Short term cases account for 12% of absence which is a small decrease on the previous month. The main reason for short term cases remain minor illnesses including colds and infections, both of which are typical of the season.

In February, 64% of employees had achieved 100% attendance.

Actions to improve absence levels

HR Business Partners continue to work with Heads of Service and Managers to monitor absence cases, and to do all that is possible to proactively accomplish employee health and wellbeing in order to improve the ongoing management of attendance.

Actions include:

1. The Head of Human Resources and Human Resources Manager have held meetings with relevant Deputy Chief Executives, Deputy Directors/Heads of Service to schedule 9 formal case reviews and to agree next steps for any further complex cases. These targeted meetings will continue on a bi-monthly basis.
2. Virtual meetings or telephone calls will be undertaken with absent employees for regular contact
3. Identification of plausible return to work options e.g. alternative duties across the organisation.

4. Timely referrals to Occupational Health and use of Physio provision where appropriate
5. Promotion of the new wellbeing resource tool, 'STAYWELL across the organisation in addition to the ongoing support services from Inspire and the courses available through Northern Trust Recovery College.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Victoria Stewart, HR Systems and Data Analyst

Agreed by: Jennifer Close, Head of Human Resources

Approved by: Debbie Rogers, Director of Organisation Development

5.5 FI/GEN/015 EXTENSION TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT REMOTE MEETINGS LEGISLATION

Members are advised that correspondence **enclosed** has been received from the Department for Communities in relation to the extension to Local Government Remote Meetings Legislation.

Section 78 (local authority meetings) of the Coronavirus Act 2020 contained the provision to provide Councils with the flexibility to hold meetings by remote or hybrid means during the Coronavirus emergency.

This was scheduled to expire on 25 March 2022, however the Department has now brought forward legislation to extend the expiry by six months under provisions of section 90(2) of the Coronavirus Act. The current arrangement will continue to apply until the 24 September 2022.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Denise Lynn, PA to the Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

5.6 FI/GEN/019 COVID-19 FUNDING SUPPORT 2021/22

Correspondence has been received from the Department of Communities detailing a further allocation of COVID-19 funding. Council will receive £1,567,502 out of £17M allocated to Councils for exceptional losses and Covid related costs.

The correspondence **enclosed** also stipulates the accounting treatment to ensure consistency in the preparation of Financial Statements to the 31st March 22 across all Northern Ireland Councils.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Agreed by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

5.7 ED/ED/202 JOBSTART SCHEME CLOSURE

Members are advised that correspondence has been received from the Department for Communities in relation to the Jobstart Scheme Closure.

The JobStart Scheme has been an integral component of the Department's COVID-19 response to support young people who, because of the impact of COVID-19, had fallen out of the Labour Market and were at risk of long-term unemployment.

The Scheme was scheduled to run for a one-year period. Closure and associated timescales details are outlined further within the **enclosed** correspondence.

RECOMMENDATION: that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Denise Lynn, PA to the Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance

Agreed by: Sandra Cole, Deputy Chief Executive of Finance and Governance