



2 September 2026

Committee Chair: Councillor E McLaughlin

Committee Vice-Chair: Alderman L Clarke

Committee Members: Aldermen – P Bradley and J Smyth

Councillors – M Cooper, S Flanagan, R Foster, J Gilmour,
N Kelly, L Kirkpatrick, AM Logue, A McAuley,
V McWilliam, L O'Hagan and S Ward

Dear Members

MEETING OF THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Operations Committee will be held in the **Round Tower Chamber, Antrim Civic Centre on Monday 7 September 2026 at 6.30 pm.**

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Baker".

Richard Baker, GM MSc
Chief Executive, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

PLEASE NOTE: Refreshments will be available in the Café from 5.20

For any queries please contact Member Services:

Tel: 028 9448 1301

memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

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4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 PK/GEN/223 HORTICULTURAL GRANT AID PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is 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 are reminded that Council previously approved the Horticultural Grant Aid Programme that offers 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 will 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, has been **enclosed** for Members' information and consideration as part of the decision-making process. Members are reminded that funding is subject to satisfactory monitoring and evaluation.

4. Financial Position

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

The financial position is 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 will be issued shortly, with submissions to be assessed and presented for consideration at a future meeting of the Operations Committee.

5. Recommendation

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

Prepared by: Anna Boyle, Funding Unit Manager and Nadine Campbell, Parks Development Manager

Agreed by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance and Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks Operations

Approved by: John Balmer, Director of Finance and John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

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

1. Purpose

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

2. Background

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

The proposals cover:

- 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 apply across the UK and have been developed in collaboration with the devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The overall aim is to reduce the appeal of these products, particularly among children and young people, while supporting adult smokers to quit.

Further details of the consultation can 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 remain significant public health concerns across the UK. Although adult smoking prevalence continues to decline, the scale of tobacco use remains 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 remains 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 introduces 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 are working together to implement the Act and develop the regulations required to support it.

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

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

The consultation focuses 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 include 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 imitate other products.
- New restrictions on the retail display of products – including proposals to restrict where vaping, nicotine, herbal smoking and certain tobacco-related products can be displayed in shops.

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

A draft response (enclosed) is included 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 are:

- 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 is 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 is 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 are intended to reduce the appeal of these products, particularly to children and young people, while supporting adults to quit smoking.

The proposed response supports 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 supports clear consumer information and appropriate exemptions for specialist premises.

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

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the draft consultation response be approved.

Prepared by: Christina McErlean, Deputy Head of Environmental Health (Commercial)

Agreed by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for a Council's 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 will apply in full from 1 August 2030. The Regulation represents 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 will apply in Northern Ireland. The UK Government is 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 are also reflected in the new EU Regulation. These include 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 can be found at:

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

3. Key Issues

The EU Toys Regulation introduces some key changes which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Updated approach to chemicals: The existing restrictions on carcinogenic, mutagenic and toxic substances are expanded to cover additional substances considered particularly harmful to children. These include endocrine-disrupting chemicals, substances that can adversely affect the respiratory system and chemicals that are toxic to the skin or other organs. The Regulation also strengthens the approach to chemical risk assessment and restrictions on certain substances in toys.
- Digital Product Passport (DPP): Toys placed on the EU market will be required to have a Digital Product Passport, providing information about

the toy's compliance and safety characteristics. The DPP will replace much of the functionality currently provided through paper-based documentation and is intended to make relevant product information more readily accessible to consumers, businesses, customs authorities and market surveillance authorities. Information associated with the DPP will 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 takes 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 may be prohibited where they present 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 places additional obligations on economic operators and online marketplaces in relation to toy safety information. Online marketplaces will 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 reflects the increasing importance of online sales channels in the toy market and the need to ensure that consumer protection requirements apply effectively regardless of how a product is purchased.
- **Responsibilities across the supply chain:** The Regulation strengthens and clarifies the responsibilities of manufacturers, importers, distributors etc.. This is intended to improve traceability and ensure that appropriate safety and compliance information is available throughout the supply chain.
- **Market surveillance and enforcement:** The new framework is 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 are sold through online marketplaces or cross-border supply chains.

The UK Government is 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 actors 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 are aligned with those which apply to products in

Northern Ireland.

A draft Council response (enclosed) is 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 is broadly supportive of taking a similar approach across the UK as the EU Toy Safety Regulation is intended to strengthen toy safety standards, improve consumer protection and, support enforcement activity.

The following key points are 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 supports stronger measures relating to harmful chemicals, product traceability, Digital Product Passports and toys sold through online marketplaces.
- Enforcement capacity: Effective implementation will 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 are needed to support effective market surveillance and enforcement.
- Online marketplaces: Greater accountability for online marketplaces is supported to help ensure that only safe and compliant toys are available to consumers.
- Business engagement: the draft response proposes 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 need to have access to the information, training and resources necessary to carry out their functions effectively.

4. Summary

The proposed response is 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.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the draft consultation response be approved.

Prepared by: Christina McErlean, Deputy Head of Environmental Health (Commercial)

Agreed by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

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 is 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 will be affected as follows:

- I. the main sports hall and ancillary halls to 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 will re-open on Wednesday 12 May 2027.

The pitches can remain open, being independently operated from the pavilion, and MORE members will be informed of the alternative facilities at Sixmile and Ballyearl.

4. Recommendation

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

Prepared by: Paula Robinson, Executive Officer to the Director of Estates and Recreation

Agreed by: Deaglan O'Hagan, Head of Leisure Operations

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is 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 are **enclosed**.

A table setting out details and recommendations for the 5 applications **enclosed** for Member's reference. Upon approval of the listed grants, the remaining balances in each funding category are outlined below:

Category	Budget	No. of apps. to date	Approved spend to date 2026-27	2 nd 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 is £170,000. The eligible amount requested from the 5 applications who met the criteria was £14,850. Should the £14,850 be approved, this will leave a remaining balance of £64,953 for the 2026-27 financial year.

4. Summary

The overall budget for the 2026-27 programme is £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.

5. Recommendation

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

Prepared by: Anna Boyle, Funding Unit Manager and Conor McCallion, Leisure Development Manager

Agreed by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance and Deaglan O'Hagan, Head of Leisure Operations

Approved by: John Balmer, Director of Finance and John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 EH/PHWB/014 BREASTFEEDING WELCOME HERE SCHEME

1. Purpose

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

2. Introduction

The Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme promotes breastfeeding-friendly environments for mothers when they are out and about, recognising the significant health and wellbeing benefits of breastfeeding for both mother and baby. Northern Ireland has comparatively low breastfeeding rates, and the scheme aims 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 sign up to the regional Public Health Agency Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme.

4. Key Issues

The Breastfeeding Welcome Here Scheme provides reassurance to mothers that they are welcome to breastfeed within participating premises. Membership of the scheme requires organisations to:

- Accept breastfeeding in all public areas of the premises;
- Ensure that mothers are 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 has committed to meeting all of the scheme's criteria. All Council buildings are now displaying the Breastfeeding Welcome Here window sticker and are 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 have also promoted the scheme to relevant businesses

across the Borough. The Council website contains a list of businesses that have signed up to the scheme and provides a link for businesses interested in joining:

<https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/residents/community-initiatives/breastfeeding-welcome-here/>

5. Summary

Members are advised that all Council premises have 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 have also promoted the scheme across the Borough and raised awareness through staff training, community engagement and outreach to local businesses.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: James O'Kane, Health and Wellbeing Manager

Agreed by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Age Friendly Over 50s Summer Scheme which is 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 are reminded that Environmental Health leads the Council's Age Friendly agenda, which aims to make the Borough a better place in which to age.

During the summer months, many community groups and programmes for older residents pause their activities. This can 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 is 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 is great for social interaction; it's very welcoming and great fun."

A social media video was also produced, featuring residents participating in the programme and highlighting the range of activities available. The video can 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 will 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 provides a dedicated Age Friendly section, which includes 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 will continue to develop opportunities throughout the year to support older residents, promote wellbeing, reduce social isolation and strengthen connections within communities.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: James O'Kane, Health and Wellbeing Manager

Agreed by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

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 is 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 are 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 are limited to recovering only those costs directly associated with processing HMO licence applications and are unable to recover the wider costs of administering, regulating and enforcing the licensing regime.

Members noted 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 is (enclosed) for Members' information.

3. Key Issues

A response has now been received from the Minister for Communities and is included (enclosed) for Members information.

In the response, the Minister acknowledges 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 advises 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 acknowledges Council's proposals for legislative change to introduce a revised fee structure, including provision for compliance and enforcement activity. The Minister has confirmed that the Department intends 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 advises 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 concludes 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 has acknowledged Council's concerns and confirmed that it will commence policy development to consider potential legislative changes to the HMO fee framework. No commitment has been given at this stage regarding legislative amendments or interim financial support.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

Approved 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 is to advise Members that Northern Ireland Water has published its 2025 Drinking Water Quality Report for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and demonstrates compliance with the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 in the Borough.

2. Background

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

The annual Drinking Water Quality Report (**enclosed**) provides details of water quality performance for each Water Supply Zone and reports compliance with the standards prescribed by the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017. The report also highlights any significant drinking water quality events and outlines 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 records 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 continues 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.

3. Summary

The 2025 Drinking Water Quality Report demonstrates that drinking water supplied throughout Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough continues 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 demonstrates that Northern Ireland Water continues 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.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Colin Kelly, Head of Environmental Health and Wellbeing

Approved by: Michael Laverty, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability

5.5 L/LEI/SD/018 HEALTH INTERVENTION REPORT Q1 2026-27

1. Purpose

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

2. Introduction/Background

Members are advised that Council approved the Health Intervention Action Plan 2022–27 in November 2022. A copy is **enclosed** for Members' reference. The Action Plan aims to increase regular and sustainable participation in physical activity across all age groups, supporting the wider objective of addressing health inequalities among vulnerable and inactive groups.

3. Key Issues

Officers continue 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 is provided 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 will continue to expand the reach and impact of the Health Intervention Programme and will pilot new areas of health outreach, including obesity and menopause support.

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

Officers are 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 will be held during Quarter 2 to help inform the key priorities and areas of focus for the new Action Plan.

Council has 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 is currently outside the eligibility criteria for the GP referral scheme; therefore, the pilot will provide an important intervention for those who may otherwise have limited access to structured support for weight management.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Council directly employs three Health Intervention Officers to support delivery of the Action Plan. This work is 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

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Kevin Madden Sport and Physical Activity Manager and Conor McCallion Leisure Development Manager

Agreed by: Deaglan O'Hagan Head of Leisure Operations

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

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 is 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 is a prestigious all-island competition that brings 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 marks the first time Antrim has received this prestigious accolade and reflects the dedication, hard work and collaboration of local residents, community groups, businesses and partner organisations. The award recognises a shared commitment to enhancing the town, fostering civic pride and creating a welcoming, attractive environment.

3. Green Flags

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

To achieve Green Flag status, a site must have a management plan that meets 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 have 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

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Nadine Campbell, Parks Development Manager

Agreed by: Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks Operations

Approved by: John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is 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 will be presented to the relevant Committee. All financial reports will be available to all Members.

3. Summary

As at period 4:

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

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

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

Employee costs are also favourable. Recycling Costs and Income from Recycling are 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 Head of Service is **enclosed** for Members' information.

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

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Approved by: John Balmer, Director of Finance, Michael Lavery, Director of Environment Services and Sustainability and John News, Director of Estates and Recreation

6 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Any Other Relevant Business (AORB) may be taken at this point.