

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

20 January 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby invited to attend a hybrid Meeting (in person and via Zoom) of Ards and North Down Borough Council which will be held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor on **Thursday 26 January 2023 commencing at 7.00pm.**

Yours faithfully

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council

A G E N D A

1. Prayer
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Mayor's Business
5. Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the Month of January 2023 (Copy attached)
6. Minutes of Council meeting dated 21 December 2022 (Copy attached)
7. Minutes of Special Council meeting dated 12 January 2023 (Copy attached)
8. Minutes of Committees
 - 8.1. Minutes of Audit Committee dated 15 December 2022 (Copy attached)
 - 8.2. Minutes of Meeting of Environment Committee dated 4 January 2023 (Copy attached)
 - 8.3. Minutes of Meeting of Place & Prosperity Committee dated 5 January 2023 (Copy attached)
 - 8.3.1 Matter Arising Item 6 Pipe Bands Championship (Report attached)
 - 8.4. Minutes of Meeting of Corporate Services Committee dated 10 January 2023 (Copy attached)
 - 8.5. Minutes of Meeting of Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 11 January 2023 (Copy attached)

- 8.5.1 Matter arising Item 9 Kinnegar to Donaghadee Additional Public Engagement (Report attached)
9. Consultation Documents
- 9.1 Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan. The consultation closes on 16th March 2023. Document available at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-offshore-renewable-energy-action-plan>. (Correspondence from Department for the Economy attached)
10. Resolutions
- 10.1 Workers Legal Rights to Tips – Notice of Motion from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (Correspondence attached)
11. Request for Deputation from Greenspaces Bangor and North Down (Report attached)
12. Nominations to Working Groups (Report attached)
13. Coronation Community Grants response to NOM (Report attached)
14. Schedule of Meetings for 2023 – Further Update (Report attached)
15. Independent Reporting Commission Fifth Report – Letter of response (Report attached)
16. Whole Systems Approach to Obesity (Report attached)
17. Response to Notice of Motion in relation to Cost-of-Living crisis (Report attached)
18. EQIA on the flying of the Union Flag (Report attached)
19. Sealing Documents
20. Transfer of Rights of Burials
21. Notice of Motion Status Report (Report attached)
22. Notices of Motion
- 22.1. Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman Wilson and Councillor Douglas

This Council acknowledges the environmental and health benefits associated with the recent increase in cycling and declares Ards & North Down a cycling friendly borough. The Council also recognises that people who cycle are among the most vulnerable road users, and tasks officers with producing a report detailing ways in which we can help improve safety. The report should include possible sources of

funding, potential partnerships, and ways in which we can promote good relations between users of different forms of transport.

22.2 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Woods and Councillor Dunlop

That this Council notes its declaration of a climate emergency in 2018 and the passage of the Climate Change Act 2022; agrees the need to reduce emissions to ensure happy and healthy communities and engages with community and government partners with the aim of piloting 'car free' days in our City, towns and villages.

22.3. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Irwin and Councillor Walker

That this Council values the contributions and opinions of our younger residents and works to engage with them to ensure we represent their views alongside those of other sectors in our community. Officers are tasked to identify at least one issue during 2023 for full consultation with Youth Voice and subsequently provide a report outlining possible roadmaps that might lead to the development of a Youth Council. Additionally, this Council agrees to extend an invitation to Youth Voice to make a deputation to outline the work they are undertaking.

22.4. Notice of Motion submitted by Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Cathcart

Building on the practice of other council areas, that this council tasks officers to liaise with DfI Roads as a matter of urgency to offer its assistance in providing self-service grit piles for residents and to post locations of such grit piles on the council website

22.5. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Adair and Councillor Edmund

That this Council writes to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure expressing concern that the provision of a footpath at Shore Road Ballyhalbert is currently not considered a priority by the Department following the completion of a feasibility study which demonstrated need. That the Council highlights the road safety concerns raised by residents for pedestrians using the Shore Road from the village to the residential developments including Park Homes and St Andrew's. That Council requests that the Department for Infrastructure makes the installation of a footpath a priority and commits to deliver the scheme as a matter of urgency.

22.6 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor T Smith and Councillor Brooks

This Council supports local residents who have started a petition which calls for a pedestrian crossing on Moat Street, Donaghadee, near to the Spar store. This road can be extremely busy and residents have real safety concerns when trying to cross it. Not only do many people use this area to cross to shop at the Spar store, others need to cross the road to get children to and from the local schools.

This Council will write to the Department of Infrastructure and call on them to listen to local residents, take on board their concerns and take the necessary steps to install a pedestrian crossing in this vicinity.

22.7 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Moore and Alderman McDowell

This Council notes its previous sponsorship of the Community Asset Transfer request from Branch Out Community Group and welcomes the agreement from DfI to lease the woodland area to the group for 1 year. Officers will:

- Write to DfI to express council's support for the work of Branch Out on the DfI-owned site and how it complements The Big Plan for Ards and North Down.
- Write to the EA to express council's support for their work on the EA-owned site, adjacent to the woodland.
- Bring back a report, identifying what can be offered to support the work of Branch Out including, but not limited to, providing advice, support, equipment and finance.
- Engage directly with Branch Out to identify what support is needed.

22.8 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cummings and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter

This Council honours the 50th Anniversary of the UDR CGC Greenfinches following the introduction of the Ulster Defence Regiment Bill in July 1973, which permitted the recruitment of women into the regiment, recognising those who joined within the Borough, and brings back a report to outline how the Corporate Services Committee can work with local UDR Associations along with other relevant bodies to support anniversary events in the Borough.

22.9 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Morgan and Councillor McRandal

The prolonged cold weather spells just before Christmas and last week resulted in icy, slippery, and dangerous footpaths and car parks in the Borough's City and town centres. It is not acceptable that in such circumstances the Council does not have a plan or the resources or facilities to grit these areas to enable residents to walk safely to and from the main shopping areas or fall when they step out of their cars onto ice. It is proposed that officers bring back a report with costs to outline what steps can be taken to ensure that Council car parks and footpaths in the City and town centres are gritted when the weather is forecast to have heavy snowfall or prolonged freezing weather conditions

22.10 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor McAlpine and Councillor Greer

That this Council agrees to write to the Department for Communities to request confirmation of what action can be taken by their Historic Environment Division to protect Kircubbin Harbour, a listed Historic Monument of Northern Ireland from neglect and lack of maintenance by its private owner and to encourage the Department to utilize those powers to fix Kircubbin Harbour before further collapse and damage occurs to it or the nearby public road.

Circulated for Information:

- a) NI Housing Council January 2023 Bulletin and Minutes dated 8th December 2022 (copies attached)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

23. Request from NI Water to use the Coastal path at Stricklands for access to carry out emergency works at Carnalea (Report attached)
24. Extension of the Office Furniture Contract (Report attached)
25. Tender Award for Internal Audit Services (Report attached)
26. Response to Notice of Motion in relation to the Northern Ireland Protocol OPSS (Report attached)
27. Response to Notice of Motion in relation to Priory Surgery - Department of Health (Report attached)
28. Tender for Conway Square Seating (Report attached)
29. Extension of the Bangor Marina Operating Contract (Report attached)

MEMBERSHIP OF ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	Councillor Gilmour
Alderman Carson	Councillor Greer
Alderman Gibson	Councillor Irvine
Alderman Irvine	Councillor Irwin
Alderman Keery	Councillor Johnson
Alderman McDowell	Councillor Kennedy
Alderman McIlveen	Councillor MacArthur
Alderman Smith	Councillor McAlpine
Alderman Wilson	Councillor McClean
Councillor Adair	Councillor McKee
Councillor Blaney (Deputy Mayor)	Councillor McKimm
Councillor Boyle	Councillor McRandal
Councillor Brooks	Councillor Moore
Councillor Cathcart	Councillor Morgan
Councillor Chambers	Councillor Smart
Councillor Cooper	Councillor P Smith
Councillor Cummings	Councillor T Smith
Councillor Douglas (Mayor)	Councillor Thompson
Councillor S Dunlop	Councillor Walker
Councillor Edmund	Councillor Woods

LIST OF MAYOR'S/DEPUTY MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS
FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY 2023

Monday 9 January

12:20 hours Deputy Mayor – Launch of Castlereagh's School Programme –
Mount Stewart, Newtownards

Thursday 12 January

13:45 hours Visit to Strangford Integrated College – Carrowdore
15:30 hours Video Recording for the Waterfront Development – McKee
Clock, Bangor

19:00 hours **Deputy Mayor** – Glenlola 125 Exhibition Launch – The Long
Gallery, North Down Museum, Bangor

Saturday 14 January

11:00 hours Visit to Crawfordsburn (ScoutsNI) Centre – Crawfordsburn
Country Park

Tuesday 17 January

09:20 hours Photoshoot – Promotion of the Maritime Conference – City Hall,
Bangor
10:00 hours Good Relations Holocaust Exhibition – Bangor Carnegie Library

Wednesday 18 January

10:00 hours Meeting with Volunteer Services Manager HSC – Mayor's
Parlour – City Hall, Bangor
12:00 hours Meeting Transitions Coordinator, Kilcooley PS – Mayor's
Parlour, City Hall, Bangor

Thursday 19 January

11:30 hours Visit by Sensory Support Services – Mayor's Parlour, City Hall,
Bangor
13:30 hours Photoshoot – Habitat Management Taskforce – Scrabo Country
Park, Newtownards

Friday 20 January

12:00 hours Reception for Albert Morrow and Family – Mayor's Parlour, City
Hall, Bangor
17:00 hours 75th Anniversary of ND & Ards Road Safety Committee – Craig
Room, City Hall, Bangor

Saturday 21 January

- 09:30 hours Launch of Bangor Repair Cafe – North Down Community Hub, Main Street, Bangor
- 12:00 hours Billiards International Match NI vs England – Billiards Club, Queen’s Hall, Newtownards

Monday 23 January

- 18:30 hours Ards & North Down Cycling Campaign Committee Meeting – Hamilton Road Hub, Bangor
- 19:00 hours Personal Testimonies from Genocide Survivors – Online

Tuesday 24 January

- 10:25 hours Ards and North Down Job Fair 2023 – Ards Blair Mayne Wellness and Leisure Complex, Newtownards
- 19:00 hours Northern Ireland Regional Ceremony to Mark Holocaust Memorial Day – Belfast City Hall
- 19:00 hours **Deputy Mayor** – Personal Testimonies from Genocide Survivors – Online

Wednesday 25 January

- 12:00 hours Mayor to meet with Holocaust Survivor – Mayor’s Parlour, City Hall, Bangor
- 13:00 hours Meet with District Governor of Rotary Ireland – Bangor Golf Club
- 14:00 hours Tree Planting – Genocide in Srebrenica – Walled Garden, Bangor
- 14:30 hours Handover of The Sheriffs – Montalto House, Montalto Estate, Ballynahinch
- 19:00 hours Ulster Scots Heritage Evening – Ards Arts Centre, Conway Square, Newtownards
- 19:00 hours Holocaust Event – City Hall, Bangor

Thursday 26 January

- 19:00 hours Personal Testimonies from Genocide Survivors – Online

Friday 27 January

- 09:15 hours Breakfast at Habitat ReStore – Portaferry Road, Newtownards
- 12:30 hours 100th Birthday Lunch for Morell Murphy – Mayor’s Parlour, City Hall, Bangor
- 19:00 hours Personal Testimonies from Genocide Survivors – Online

Saturday 28 January

- 10:30 hours Renaming of Room – Hollywood Library
- 12:00 hours Community Tree Planting Weekend – Castle Park, Bangor

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting of the Ards and North Down Borough Council was held at the City Hall, The Castle, Bangor and via Zoom, on Wednesday, 21st December 2022 commencing at 7.00pm.

In the Chair:	The Mayor (Councillor Douglas)	
Aldermen:	Carson Gibson Irvine Keery	McIlveen (via Zoom) M Smith (via Zoom) Wilson (via Zoom) McDowell
Councillors:	Adair Blaney Boyle Brooks Cathcart Chambers Cooper (7.08pm, via Zoom) Cummings Dunlop (via Zoom) Edmund Gilmour (20.10) Greer S Irvine Irwin Johnson (via Zoom)	Kennedy MacArthur McAlpine McClellan McKee (via Zoom) McKimm McRandal (via Zoom) P Smith T Smith Thompson Walker (via Zoom) Woods (via Zoom)

Officers: Chief Executive (S Reid), Director of Finance and Performance (S Christie), Director of Regeneration, Development and Planning (S McCullough), Head of Assets and Property, Director of Community & Wellbeing (G Bannister), Corporate Communications Manager (C Jackson) and Democratic Services Officers (H Loebnau & S.McCrea)

1. PRAYER

The Mayor (Councillor Douglas) welcomed everyone to the meeting and commenced with the Chief Executive reading the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors Moore and Smart and apologies for lateness from Councillor Greer and Alderman Keery.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor asked for any Declarations of Interest and the following were made:

Councillor McKimm - Item 7: Regeneration & Development Committee dated 8 December 2022.

Alderman Irvine, Councillors Blaney and Chambers – Item 21: Request to Consider Leisure Contract Extension.

Councillor Cathcart – Item 22: Call-In Rescinding Motion on Office Rationalisation.

NOTED.

4. MAYOR'S BUSINESS

With the news that Alderman Girvan was to resign at the end of the year, the Mayor joined Members in wishing her every success in the future, mention was made of Alderman Girvan's accolades such as championing the Comber Farmer's Market and the many other issues that she has tackled across the Borough.

In reflection over the past few weeks, the Mayor spoke of the significant, historical nature of events such as the conferment of City status of Bangor through the Letters Patent being presented to Council by the Princess Royal. In finality, she wished a happy Christmas to all staff, colleagues and Members.

(Alderman Keery arrived at 19:05)

Alderman McDowell recollected Alderman Girvan's efforts in the creation of a Farmer's Market at Comber amidst adversity and efforts on the regeneration of Comber and the Columban Way, thanking her for her past efforts.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman McDowell, seconded by Alderman Girvan, that the Mayor's comments be noted.

5. MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR ENGAGEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 2022

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor Engagements for the month of November 2022.

Of those engagements, the Mayor drew attention to the partnership between SERC Hospitality students and Bangor Foodbank which had allowed for the delivery of 400 lunches and dinners. Thanks were extended to Burr House who had taken donations that resulted in hundreds of food hampers and gift bags.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Gibson, seconded by Councillor Blaney, that the information be noted.

6. MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2022

(Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above minutes.

Councillor Adair proposed, seconded by Alderman Girvan, that the minutes be adopted.

In regard to issues of accuracy, Alderman Girvan advised that she was present at the meeting and as such, an edit to the document should be made to reflect it.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Adair, seconded by Alderman Girvan, that the minutes be adopted.

7. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES

7.1 Planning Committee dated 6 December 2022

(Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above minutes.

Alderman Gibson proposed, seconded by Councillor McRandal, that the minutes be adopted.

Alderman Gibson explained that this had been the first hybrid meeting for the Planning Committee and wished to thank Members, Officers and the public who had joined.

Alderman McIlveen queried a Notice of Motion that had been deferred to the Planning Committee, mention of which had not been made upon the agenda and asked when it would be heard. The Mayor advised that this would be heard at the February Planning Committee.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Gibson, seconded by Councillor McRandal, that the minutes be adopted.

7.2. Environment Committee dated 7 December 2022
(Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above minutes.

Alderman McDowell proposed, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the minutes be adopted.

Councillor T Smith, in relation to Item 4 of the December Committee, wanted to confirm that the community had gone with option 3 in the proposal and wanted to confirm if the increase of 46% on option 1 was subject to the rates setting process. The Director of Environment had advised that an indicative amount of £200k had been suggested on the first round of budgets which was a typical amount. Councillor T Smith referenced the decision to go with a more expensive option and asked what would happen if the Council had been unable to afford it. The Head of Assets and Property reminded Members that they would have the opportunity during the next round to raise or lower targets as needed. Councillor P Smith agreed with Councillor T Smith on wishing to see the overall figures and their effects on the rate setting process. He explained that he had wanted to make an amendment to Item 4, to proceed with the original Officer's recommendation of 7.1.

Councillor P Smith proposed, seconded by Councillor T Smith, that the recommendation of Item 4 be changed to reflect the original Officer Recommendation (7.1 on the related report).

Councillor P Smith believed that the lower option was the most prudent choice at this time whilst Councillor T Smith reminded Members that if additional funds were found during the rate setting process, Members could look towards additional monies to be allocated.

Alderman McIlveen recalled similar circumstances where an item had come to Council with a request to amend the recommendation had been placed. Though he supported this amendment, he asked what the purpose of bringing reports to the table would be if further decisions were still required/ that such changes be requested amidst works being carried out already. He wondered why committees that did not deal with rates were making decisions in regard to budgets. The Chief Executive explained that practice would normally dictate such reports contain the caveat of, '*subject to the rates process,*' meaning that it would be reviewed at the estimates stage. The normal approach would be for committees to receive a greater detail for discussion, providing a response for staff to move on with the matter as part of the wider rates process.

Councillor Boyle recalled concerns of some Members at the Environment Committee which he had accepted under the rates setting process but concluded that he was happy with the amendment despite understanding the difficulty of making the associated cuts. Councillor Cummings agreed, stating that there had been a limited

discussion about finances at the committee and though all Members would wish for as much work to be carried out for their respective DEAs, it fell upon them to be prudent in such decisions now and in the future. Alderman McDowell also agreed the amendment was the best option given circumstances.

Councillor P Smith referenced page 7, Item 5 of the report regarding recycling rates and praised the increased record of recycling the first quarter of the year as well as kerb side performance. Whilst reviewing statistics, he asked if Officers could provide more information on HRC performance.

The Head of Assets and Property advised that he would bring requested information to the Councillor after the meeting.

NOTED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor P Smith, seconded by Councillor T Smith, that the minutes be adopted with amendment made to Item 4 to reflect the original recommendation of the Officer.

7.3. Regeneration and Development Committee dated 8 December 2022
(Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above minutes.

Councillor Walker proposed, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the minutes be adopted.

As an issue of accuracy, Councillor Irvine asked for a correction to be made on page four where it should have read, '*Councillor S Irvine.*'

(Councillor McKimm left the Chambers at 19:28 due to a Declaration of Interest.)

Councillor Boyle expressed disappointment that the facility would not be placed at Portaferry. He recalled three years ago where an attempt to get a feasibility study had been rejected and despite the best efforts of Members, two schemes with an investment potential of more than £700k had been lost to Portaferry. He praised the Regeneration and Development team and hoped that funding would become available in the future that the Council could deliver a future supported widely by the local community given what Councillor Boyle referred to as a dilapidated part of the town. Councillor Adair was also supportive of the scheme and believed it had been a missed opportunity for Portaferry and also Portavogie for its 3G pitch which, if it had have been progressed in the past would not be delayed as it had been now. Councillor Adair believed Members had to be prepared for when funding would become available again and when the rates setting process was in progress to move forward with such schemes.

NOTED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Walker, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the minutes be adopted.

7.4. Corporate Services Committee dated 13 December 2022
(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above minutes.

Councillor McKimm returned to the meeting at 19:35

Councillor P Smith proposed, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the minutes be adopted.

As a point of accuracy, Councillor McKimm directed Members to paragraph two of the Delegation from Credit Unions and advised that his comment relating to John Hume as, '*an architect of peace and credit union movement,*' should be corrected to John Hume being, '*the architect of the Credit Union Movement.*'

Alderman McIlveen proposed an amendment to Item 6 of the Corporate Services Committee minutes, seconded by Councillor T Smith. The amendment being as follows:

“Council notes with disappointment the lack of progress in delivery of the aims of the Notice of Motion passed unanimously by Council in March 2018 reiterates its desire to deliver on that proposal; recognises that being dementia friendly is distinct from being age friendly; and agrees:

- 1. That progress on obtaining dementia friendly status and other dementia friendly reporting is moved to Community and Wellbeing as a standalone item and is not a subsection of an age friendly report*
- 2. That a Dementia Champion is designated from within Council staff to oversee the progress on obtaining dementia friendly status and the mainstreaming of dementia friendly services and policies within Council and that a Dementia Champion is appointed from the members of Council to act as link between the Council and those living with dementia, their families and carers in the delivery of support, advocacy and services.*
- 3. That while the Council should be a partner in the delivery of dementia friendly work within the community planning process, that Council's requirement to ensure the needs of people affected by dementia and their carers are considered in all aspects of the Council's work (as per the original decision of Council) is implemented.*
- 4. That Council continues to work towards Dementia Friendly accreditation for the Borough in partnership with relevant partners as envisaged by the original motion which does not preclude dementia friendly work being delivered through community planning*
- 5. That Council explores the cost of new training (both in person and digitally) for staff and roll this out as part of Council's training programme*
- 6. In relation to both Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly, that officers explore developing a written guidance/procedure for how to integrate health equity*

across all policies and to align with the current policy screening requirements and identify what additional resource would be required to implement this.”

Alderman McIlveen reminded Members of a tabled motion in March 2018 at Council that acknowledged carers/healthcare staff and noted the Ards and North Down Borough had the highest number of individuals affected by dementia. Alderman McIlveen had tabled that motion as he believed recognition was required for those who were affected by the disease of a family member, not just the sufferer themselves. The motion had passed unanimously and a decision had been made to have it included in the age-friendly strategy which Alderman McIlveen believed had ignored the motion and three of its action points with no focus on family or carers. As there had been no progress in five years on the delivery of a dementia-friendly borough, he wished to reaffirm it and reminded Members that the Motion was for a working partnership and not for efforts to be passed onto the care of the Trusts solely.

Councillor T Smith agreed that the Council had to do more. Alderman Armstrong-Cotter also agreed, citing relatable experience of a friend whose sister had been lost to dementia. She believed a Member Champion was now needed and that regular updates should be required similar to that of the Fair-Trade Borough. Councillor MacArthur recalled attending an age-friendly meeting where she found the situation quite emotional and believed a key part of the amendment was in relation to families and carers who carried out many care elements for those suffering from dementia. Councillor P Smith explained how his own mother had been diagnosed with vascular dementia and that doctors had informed him of its hereditary nature. With the Ards and North Down Borough having an age profile predominantly being that of an older population, it meant that dementia had affected the Borough more than other areas and it was prudent that a strategy was required.

The Mayor reminded Members that Item 7.4.1 of the agenda would be discussed in-committee.

NOTED.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor P Smith, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the minutes be adopted. Additionally, upon the proposal of Alderman McIlveen and seconding of Councillor T Smith, an amendment was made to Item 6 of the Corporate Services Committee to, *“Council notes with disappointment the lack of progress in delivery of the aims of the Notice of Motion passed unanimously by Council in March 2018 reiterates its desire to deliver on that proposal; recognises that being dementia friendly is distinct from being age friendly; and agrees:*

- 1. That progress on obtaining dementia friendly status and other dementia friendly reporting is moved to Community and Wellbeing as a standalone item and is not a subsection of an age friendly report***
- 2. That a Dementia Champion is designated from within Council staff to oversee the progress on obtaining dementia friendly status and the mainstreaming of dementia friendly services and policies within Council and that a Dementia Champion is appointed from the members of***

Council to act as link between the Council and those living with dementia, their families and carers in the delivery of support, advocacy and services.

- 3. That while the Council should be a partner in the delivery of dementia friendly work within the community planning process, that Council's requirement to ensure the needs of people affected by dementia and their carers are considered in all aspects of the Council's work (as per the original decision of Council) is implemented.***
- 4. That Council continues to work towards Dementia Friendly accreditation for the Borough in partnership with relevant partners as envisaged by the original motion which does not preclude dementia friendly work being delivered through community planning***
- 5. That Council explores the cost of new training (both in person and digitally) for staff and roll this out as part of Council's training programme***
- 6. In relation to both Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly, that officers explore developing a written guidance/procedure for how to integrate health equity across all policies and to align with the current policy screening requirements and identify what additional resource would be required to implement this."***

7.5. Community and Wellbeing Committee dated 14 December 2022
(Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Copy of the above minutes.

Councillor Edmund proposed, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the minutes be adopted.

As an issue for accuracy, Councillor Edmund pointed out an error on page 44 of the Community & Wellbeing Committee minutes, though as this was part of in-committee, it would be discussed later in tonight's meeting.

Councillor Adair, as an issue for information directed Members to Item 22's response to a Notice of Motion for Loughries Play provision and explained that he was proposing to make the following amendment, seconded by Councillor Boyle, '*That Council note the report and review Play Provision in Loughries in 2024.*'

Councillor Adair thanked Officers for their efforts on the report and explained that he had brought the issue of a lack of play provision due to there being no safe footway to Carrowdore or Newtownards. With the inclusion of a school and church with a local builder having erected several turnkey houses within which young families resided, there was a need for play provision. He cited the statement of requiring 100 dwellings in order to meet the criteria for play provision and that Loughries, at the time of writing, consisted of 98 dwellings. Councillor Adair had been made aware that a local developer had received planning permission for a further ten dwellings in the area which upon completion would meet the requirements for play provision and as such, sought for Council to revisit the issue in 2024. Councillor Adair informed Members that the play provision was not a request for a tier one or tier two play park,

but for a safe area that would allow children to play traditional games without the need of travelling, the sentiments of which Councillor Boyle agreed.

Councillors Edmund, McAlpine and Thompson supported the amendment.

Councillor Woods, in relation to Item 20 on page 22 asked if the model under the policy allowed for a corporation to secure limited liability and if other groups acting on behalf of entities for governance and financials would require their own bank accounts. The Director of Community & Wellbeing explained that those acting on behalf of other smaller organisations would take on the responsibility of a constitution. Councillor Woods asked if that would mean the policy allowed for incorporation if the group wished for it. The Director of Community & Wellbeing advised that he would check with the Head of Service and refer back to her.

Councillor Woods proposed an amendment to Item 20 of the minute, seconded by Councillor McKee, *'that Council consults on the 'Friends of' Groups Policy with currently operating groups, in order to best progress 'Friends of' Group volunteering activities throughout the Borough.'*

Councillor Woods believed such would allow time for consultation for those individuals and umbrella organisations that may require an adjustment period, citing terms and conditions and legalities that some groups may not be aware of. Councillor MacArthur recalled that the Head of Parks and Cemeteries had mentioned a friends group being in existence and that a consultation had occurred. Furthermore, she had spoken to a range of groups within her DEA who had been positive to the idea of a friends group and that a query had been raised as to larger community organisations representing the friends group which the Director had said could happen. As such, Councillor MacArthur believed there was no need for the amendment as the issues had already been dealt with in the Committee.

The Amendment being put to the vote: 8 FOR and 17 AGAINST, the amendment fell.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the minutes be adopted.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 DfC Consultation documents – Advance Notice of Listing – 'Former First Trust Bank, 74 High Street, Hollywood'. Consultation closes 13th January 2023**
(Appendix XIII – X)

There was no proposal so no response will be issued.

9. COMMONWEALTH DAY 2023 (Appendix XI and XII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Head of Administration as outlined below.

The Royal Pageant master had written to the Council to invite the City of Bangor to participate in the celebration, as part of Commonwealth Day 2023, of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the Commonwealth by the late Queen Elizabeth II.

If it was to be agreed to participate, the Pageant master would provide Council free of charge with the Commonwealth of Nation's Flag of Peace, featuring the White Dove of Peace in its bottom right-hand corner. As detailed on the attached Guide (Appendix 1), it was envisaged that participating cities would have a short 30-minute ceremony on the morning of 13 March 2023 which would end with the raising of the Flag of Peace. The Pageant master's office had offered to assist with sourcing a Town Crier, Cornet Player and Bugler for the ceremony, which they had suggested would be at no cost to Council because these individuals wanted to be involved in this occasion on the day as well.

The ceremonial aspect would require minimal budget which could be covered in existing civic event budget.

The Pageant master advised in his correspondence that some cities had just asked to receive their free flag as they were unable to have a ceremony, but wanted to ensure their city, residents etc, were still represented in this important anniversary, and this 'Commonwealth tribute' to the late Queen.

As regards the flying of the Flag of Peace by Council on 13 March 2023, this would be permissible under the current Council Flag Policy (July 2021) which provides:

Flags commemorating specific days or events (to include Commonwealth Flag, Armed Forces Day Flag or Red Ensign) be flown at Castle Park, Bangor and Conway Square, Newtownards. Additional flags may also be considered that have a national significance at one or both sites. (Council approval will be required for these on a case-by-case basis).

RECOMMENDED that Council:

1. Agrees to fly the Commonwealth of Nation's Flag of Peace on 13 March 2023 at Castle Park, Bangor; and
2. Holds a ceremony for Commonwealth Day in the City of Bangor on 13 March 2023.

Councillor P Smith proposed, seconded by Alderman Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor P Smith spoke of the positivity of Commonwealth Day but pointed out that it appeared Northern Ireland's flag had been missed on the certificate.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor P Smith, seconded by Alderman Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

10. REQUEST TO LIGHT UP COUNCIL BUILDINGS FOR, 'DRY JANUARY, FEEL GOOD FEBRUARY CAMPAIGN

(Appendix XIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Head of Administration as outlined below.

Requestor

Paul Wolfe – South-Eastern Connections Team (ASCERT)

Reason for request

To raise awareness of the Public Health Agency campaign – “Dry January, Feel Good February”

Dates and colours

Lighting up Ards Arts Centre / Ards Town Hall and McKee Clock purple on 17th January 2023 and annually thereafter.

Background information

“Dry January Feel Good February” was a Public Health Agency campaign which ran annually to promote abstaining from alcohol during the month of January to promote better health during February. This campaign was delivered within the South-Eastern Trust area by the South Eastern Connections team which was part of ASCERT. The Connections Team were employed by ASCERT, a drug and alcohol charity.

ASCERT started in 1998 as a community response to concerns about drug misuse in the Lisburn area of Northern Ireland, growing over the years to become a regional service provider.

In the following years the charity expanded its work into other areas across Northern Ireland. They developed services that focused on community development approaches, education and training and then interventions for young people and families. Over the years they had established a broad range of projects and services that had been targeted towards young people, adults and families in the greatest need.

ASCERT was, at the time of writing, one of the leading and best-known charities that addressed drug and alcohol and other related social issues, with services across all Northern Ireland. They had accumulated an extensive experience of evidence-based service development, planning and delivery across a range of disciplines and provided direct services to more than 10,000 people each year. Those services were providing support to communities, young people, adults and families throughout Northern Ireland, which helped them to deal with the impact of their own or someone else's alcohol or drug use or other issues like mental health, suicide prevention or offending. Alongside this direct support, they were the main provider of training services in the areas of drugs, alcohol and suicide prevention, supporting the professional development of practitioners within the statutory and community/voluntary sectors.

They had advised that they would be working with several organisations within Ards and North Down to promote this particular campaign and would be set up in Bangor train station on 17th January 2023 to engage with local people.

Does it meet policy requirements

Yes - request had been received from a non-profit making organisation based in the Borough to mark a significant occasion.

It was to be noted that an existing fault with the lighting system had meant that the current light up schedule was unable to be amended, and no new light ups could be added. Officers were working with external partners to determine costings for repairs to the system and a further report was to be brought back on future options in the new year for Members' consideration.

However, readers should note that there is a possibility that none of the lights on Council buildings were working at the time of the request.

RECOMMENDED that the Council accedes to the request to light up Council buildings purple on 17th January 2023 in support of the "Dry January Feel Good February" campaign, and annually thereafter.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Alderman Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

11. PLACE AND PROSPERITY AND CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE – TERMS OF REFERENCE

(Appendix XIV and XV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report as outlined below.

Background

Following agreement at the meeting of the Council on 24 August to commence a minor restructure at Director level, it was agreed that there would be limited amendments to the responsibilities and the Terms of Reference of the Committees, and their titles as follows:

- Corporate Services Committee (removal of capital projects)
Finance, Human Resources & Organisational Development, Transformation and Administration
- Place and Prosperity Committee (new title for the Regeneration and Development Committee)
Regeneration, Capital projects, Economic Development and Tourism

Terms of Reference

With regard to the Place and Prosperity Committee, the Terms of Reference were to be updated to reflect the name change. A small change was also to be made to the Committees overall purpose and objectives to incorporate Capital Projects.

With regard to the Corporate Services Committee, the only change to its Terms of Reference was to be the removal of Capital Projects from its list of overall purpose and objectives.

A revised version of the Terms of Reference was available in Appendix 1.

Readers should be aware that the Planning Committee, Community and Wellbeing Committee and Environment Committee remained unchanged.

RECOMMENDED that Council approve the changed wording to the Terms of Reference as outlined in the report.

Councillor Gilmour proposed, seconded by Councillor McKimm, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman McDowell and Councillor Smart wished it to be noted that they be recorded as against the change to Place and Prosperity Committee.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Councillor McKimm, that the recommendation be adopted.

12. SEALING DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED: - (On the proposal of Councillor Adair, seconded by Alderman Gibson)

THAT the Seal of the Council be affixed to the following documents: -

- a) Grant of Rights of Burial: Nos 14430-14475
- b) Duplicate Right of Burial:
Movilla cemetery Section 47 Grave 13
- c) Queen's Parade Deed of Variation Agreement

13. WITHDRAWN

14. CONFERENCES

14.1 Local Government Conference 2023 (Appendix XVI and XVII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: Report as outlined below.

The 2023 Local Government Conference organised by NILGA and SoLACE NI was to be held on 23 February in the Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh.

The theme for the conference was Responding to Future Challenged and would have focused how local government should innovate and collaborate across all sectors to achieve its ambitions. NILGA and Solace NI encouraged Councillors and Officers to attend.

Tickets were priced at £99 for Councillors and Officers.

Members who represented Ards and North Down Borough Council on NILGA at the time of writing were: Councillor Boyle, Alderman Carson, Councillor Dunlop, Alderman Gibson, Councillor MacArthur, Alderman McDowell, Councillor Cummings and Councillor Wilson.

The Chief Executive was to attend and that did not require separate approval by the Council.

RECOMMENDED that Council consider nominating a Member(s) to attend the Local Government Conference 2023.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor T Smith, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the conference be noted.

15. NOTICE OF MOTION STATUS REPORT

(Appendix IIXX and IXX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Chief Executive detailing that the Status Report in respect of Notice of Motions was attached.

This was a standing item on the Council agenda each month and its aim was to keep Members updated on the outcome of Motions. Please note that as each Motion was dealt with it would be removed from the report.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Thompson, seconded by Alderman Gibson, that Council notes the report.

16. NOTICES OF MOTION

16.1. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS' WOODS AND DUNLOP

That this Council notes its declaration of a climate emergency in 2018 and the passage of the Climate Change Act 2022; agrees the need to reduce emissions to ensure happy and healthy communities and engages with community and government partners with the aim of piloting 'car free' days in our City, towns and villages

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Adair, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Place and Prosperity Committee.

16.2. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS THOMPSON & ADAIR

That Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Abbey Road Millisle to ensure they can be used and enjoyed by the local sporting clubs and community of Millisle.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Adair, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

16.3. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS DOUGLAS AND WALKER

That this Council adopts the White Ribbon Pledge to 'Never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls', agrees to sign the Pledge, and tasks Officers to bring back a report outlining how we can amalgamate existing relevant policies, undertake the Listen, Learn, Lead programme within the Council, 3 and identify effective routes to encourage other agencies and organisations in our Borough to engage with the White Ribbon Project.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Dunlop, seconded by Councillor Walker, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Corporate Services Committee.

16.4. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS CATHCART AND MACARTHUR

That this Council expresses concern with the number of residential and commercial bins left on public footways in the Borough long after the bin collection date. Bins left on public footways are not only unsightly, they can lead to hygiene and contamination issues, as well as safety concerns, forcing pedestrians onto the road due to the blocking of a footway. This Council notes its own lack of enforcement powers to tackle this issue and expresses concern at the Department for Infrastructure's reluctance to use its own enforcement powers. Accordingly, this Council agrees to write to the Department for Infrastructure asking the Department to engage with Councils with the aim of creating appropriate enforcement powers to tackle this issue. Council Officers, will in the meantime, bring back a report to the appropriate committee detailing action that the Council can take under current powers to try address the issue of bins left on public footways.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Cathcart, seconded by Councillor MacArthur, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Environment Committee.

16.5. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS IRVINE AND COOPER

That this council supports all NHS staff who provide unstinting and unwavering service and will write to all trusts in Northern Ireland assuring them of our support for their industrial action and their objectives of safe staffing levels and adequate remuneration in the current cost of living crisis, in line with other government and council employees.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Adair, seconded by Councillor Thompson, that the Notice of Motion be referred to the Corporate Services Committee.

CIRCULATED FOR INFORMATION

a) December Housing Council Bulletin & November Housing Council Minutes (Correspondence attached)

b) Independent Reporting Commission Fifth Report (report attached)

Councillor Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Cooper, that the December Housing Council Bulletin and November Housing Council Minutes be noted.

In regard to the Fifth Report, Councillor Cooper proposed, seconded by Councillor T Smith that Council writes to the IRC to ask does the IRA Council still direct Sinn Fein policy and strategy.

Councillor Cooper believed his proposal was self-explanatory whilst Councillor T Smith stated that the IRA and Sein Fein were two sides of the same coin.

Alderman McIlveen thought the proposal highlighted an issue within the report in that it was largely opinion based on peace rather than informing Members of what was actually happening.

A vote took place with 21 FOR and 4 AGAINST. The proposal was carried.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Adair, seconded by Councillor Cooper, that the December Housing Council Bulletin & November Housing Council minutes be noted. Additionally, on the proposal of Councillor Cooper, seconded by Councillor T Smith, that Council writes to the IRC to ask if the Commission is of the opinion that the IRA Council still directs Sinn Fein Policy and Strategy.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Alderman Gibson, that the public/press be excluded from the undernoted items of confidential business.

7.4.1 MATTER ARISING – ITEM 7: EQUALITY CONSULTATIVE PANEL (Appendix XX)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION*****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

7.4.2 MATTER ARISING – 21: PURCHASE OF LAND AT 9 HARBOUR ROAD, GROOMSPORT

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION*****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

7.5.1 COMMUNITY & WELLBEING CORRECTION

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION*****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

17. LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP TENDERS (Appendix XXI)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION*****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

**18. TENDER SOCCER PITCH RENOVATION WORKS FOR
SUMMER 2023 AND FLORAL CONTAINERS FOR 2023**
(Appendix XXII)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

19. TENDER EXTENSION REPORT – INSURANCE SERVICES
(Appendix XXIII)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

20. BLACK LIGHT ADVENTURE ZONE
(Appendix XXIV)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

21. REQUEST TO CONSIDER LEISURE CONTRACT EXTENSION
(Appendix XXV and XXVI)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

**22. CALL-IN RESCINDING MOTION ON OFFICE
RATIONALISATION**
(Appendix XXVII – XXX)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*** ***

****NOT FOR PUBLICATION****

SCHEDULE 6 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Council holding that information)

READMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Gilmour, seconded by Alderman Girvan, that the public/press be readmitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 22:30

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid special meeting of Ards and North Down Borough Council was held on Thursday, 12 January 2023 commencing at 6.30pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: The Mayor (Councillor Douglas)

Aldermen:

Armstrong-Cotter	McDowell
Carson (Zoom)	McIlveen
Gibson	Smith, M
Irvine, W	Wilson
Keery	

Councillors:

Adair (Zoom)	Kennedy
Blaney	McKee (Zoom)
Boyle	McKimm
Cathcart	McRandal
Cummings	Moore
Dunlop	Morgan
Edmund	Smart
Gilmour	Smith, P
Greer	Smith, T
Irvine, S (Zoom)	Thompson (Zoom)
Irwin	Walker
Johnson (Zoom)	

Officers: Chief Executive (S Reid), Director of Finance and Performance (S Christie), Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Director of Place (S McCullough), Head of Communications and Marketing (C Jackson) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster and R King)

1. PRAYER

The Mayor (Councillor Douglas) welcomed everyone to the meeting and then invited the Chief Executive to read the Council prayer.

NOTED.

2. APOLOGIES

The Mayor sought apologies at this stage and noted apologies had been received from the Deputy Mayor, Alderman M Smith, Councillor Chambers, Councillor McAlpine, Councillor McClean and Councillor Woods.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor sought Declarations of Interest at this stage and none were declared.

(Alderman Wilson joined the meeting – 6.33pm)

NOTED.

4. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR IRWIN AND ALDERMAN MCDOWELL

That this Council recognises the significant Cost of Living hardship facing the many residents in Ards and North Down and directs officers to urgently complete a report outlining options for how we can best support our residents. This should include consideration of a potential hardship fund following liaison with counterparts in other District Councils in Northern Ireland around the nature and delivery of similar schemes, and liaison with local organisations and charities who specialise in delivering financial support around how Council can best provide support their services. This Council will also write to the Department of Communities and the Northern Ireland Office to request that funding is provided to Councils (and that it is ring-fenced in the 2023/24 budget) to assist with the implementation of any such support schemes. Given the urgency of the matter, this report should be ready for the meeting of Full Council on 26th January 2023.

Councillor Irwin proposed, seconded by Alderman McDowell that the notice of motion be adopted.

Speaking to the proposal, Councillor Irwin thanked the Mayor for granting the request for the Special Council meeting and Members for attending the meeting which she appreciated had been called at short notice. She felt however that the matter was crucial enough to justify it taking place.

Outlining the Notice of Motion, Councillor Irwin referred to the impacts of the financial crisis and the contact that members had received from struggling constituents.

The phrase of having to choose between heating and eating had been used so much recently, she feared it at risk of becoming a sound bite with the reality of that statement being lost. That was however the impossible choice far too many people were having to make.

Councillor Irwin therefore was asking officers to urgently complete a report outlining the options for how the Council was best placed to provide support to ratepayers. The motion outlined a number of options, from a hardship fund to working with those locally who specialised in providing this kind of support. The Motion did not want to draw any red lines or make any commitments without ensuring that due diligence was completed, and Members could make an educated decision based on which options, if any, could provide useful support to those who needed it, while ensuring Council got the best value for its ratepayers.

Continuing, she told Members not to forget that ratepayers, including those who were currently experiencing extreme financial difficulties could very possibly end up being the ones funding this support. Members would be aware of the status of the ongoing rates process. This was why Council needed to ensure that anything it decided to do was supported by proper evidence and, if it would affect the rates, it was even more important that Council ensured that the support would make a worthwhile difference to those who required it.

Councillor Irwin thanked Councillor Woods for her initial attempt to bring the issue of Council providing support to ratepayers to the table. However, she could not support the amendment that she would be bringing forward, for the reasons outlined. Council should not be ruling anything in or out and making decisions which could have such a significant impact on all ratepayers, without ensuring that it had done its due diligence and had the proper evidence to back it up. Members would note the original motion already referred to the potential for a hardship fund. Councillor Irwin wanted officers to do some work behind the scenes to determine what that might look like, as there were too many questions at this point, there was too much left undetermined to make a responsible decision.

There was a beneficial position where two Councils in Northern Ireland were already in the process of designing and implementing hardship schemes. This Council, she felt, should be speaking to Belfast City Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council to hear of their experiences of designing these schemes – what issues they had come across, any mistakes made or things they would have done differently. This was a huge opportunity for us to learn from their experience and get a head start on determining what a hardship fund would look like or indeed if there could be more efficient and beneficial ways that Council could provide support.

The beginning of the £600 energy support payments should absolutely be welcomed, despite the fact people in Northern Ireland were left waiting far longer than they should have been due to the lack of an Executive or Assembly to ensure the scheme could be tailored to Northern Ireland's separate energy market. However, it was clear that people were extremely likely to fall through the net here. The need for ID to cash in vouchers was already leading to a rush on requests for electoral ID cards that the Electoral Office was struggling with. Government should be ensuring that people were able to easily access the support they were entitled to, not least to prevent people feeling they had to turn to illegitimate means of support.

In closing, she added that Members would note the request that a report outlining options be brought to the Council on 26th January, less than two weeks away. She appreciated that officers worked extremely hard and were already under pressure given the ongoing rates process, however given the significant and urgency of this issue, she believed that two weeks would give enough time for options to be evaluated and provided to Councillors while also making sure that the can was not kicked down the road for too long while residents continued to struggle.

The seconder, Alderman McDowell, added that the conditions some of the Borough's residents were finding themselves in due to the "Cost of Living" crisis were extremely concerning. People were really struggling financially, and it was the Council's job as

elected representatives to do as much as they possibly could to help ease peoples' burden during these difficult times.

With that in mind, it was his sincere hope all parties could come together in support of this Motion and recognise the need for extra assistance for residents in these challenging economic circumstances. The urgent report was to allow Members to consider all the options and not make the mistakes other Councils had done.

Council also needed to decide what level of funding it could make available and how it could get it to the people who needed it as quickly as possible. But as Council was spending public money, it must set fair criteria and monitor it to ensure that it went to the right people.

Alderman McDowell believed that Charities could provide better outcomes with the funding, and they would have the volunteers and administration to get it to those most in need. The £600 Fuel Payment that would be delivered in January would help most families. But some would fall through the net and not receive any payments, or their payments may have been delayed for months.

He took issue over the way the Government was treating Northern Ireland residents. Other Councils across England and Wales had received funding to set up a hardship fund, to enable Councils to help those that were suffering the most from the cost of living crisis. He understood that the funding for Northern Ireland Councils through the Barnett Consequential, had been sent to Northern Ireland, but had not reached the Councils. Was the Government trying to punish Councils and its residents for what was happening at Stormont.

He believed that it was financially prudent to ask for an urgent report from Officers to decide on the right level of funding, the risks and benefits and how Council was going to distribute any funding. This was not a delaying action, it would not delay any funding to get to those that needed it, but Council would have a better scheme for its residents. He also hoped that during the next two weeks the Government would do the right thing and provide Councils with the funding to set up a 'Cost of Living' Hardship Fund as they had done elsewhere in England and Wales.

In closing, Alderman McDowell urged fellow Councillors to support this Notice of Motion.

Councillor McKee proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Dunlop to remove, 'consideration of a potential hardship fund' in line 4, adding in 'should include the creation of a hardship fund from Council resources'. Remove, 'around how Council can best provide their support services', and add in 'to vulnerable people'.

Proposing the amendment on behalf of the Council's Green Party grouping, Councillor McKee explained that the majority of his speech had been written for the December Council meeting, for a different motion, a motion that had called for something tangible to be done, to be created, and to be delivered. Unfortunately, it wasn't agreed by Members for that particular motion to be heard.

As a result, he and his Green Party colleagues were bringing forward this amendment to the current Notice of Motion being proposed by the Alliance Party, and his amendment was seeking support for this Council to commit to actually do something for the Borough's residents who were in need, and not just consideration and a report.

People were experiencing somewhat of an unperfect storm. We were emerging from COVID-19 which had adversely impacted on vulnerable people already facing hardship, changes in the job market, stretches on household financial situations and budgets, costs rocketing, food, gas, oil and electric all increasing, and many people were being plunged into fuel poverty with the rising cost to live here.

The current climate for households had been described by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as presenting the most significant challenge to living standards for many years.

There was a growing gap between what people had and what people needed for a decent standard of living. Short term support measures were therefore vital. Emergency support from Westminster had been, incredibly slow and to this date still had not arrived in Northern Ireland.

But at the end of all this, this was about people in our Borough who were making choices about whether or not they could afford to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner and whether they put their heating on. This was the reality, this was poverty. This was not acceptable. This was something he and his colleagues believed required an emergency response. £600 would not fix this, even in the short term.

If this amendment was successful, Ards and North Down would not be the first council to introduce a hardship fund, which was the true heart of this amendment. Councillor McKee did not believe giving consideration to a potential hardship fund was enough.

Derry City and Strabane District Council and Belfast City Council had already introduced hardship fund schemes for residents recognising the dire situation that many were in.

In the other council areas, eligibility criteria had included entitlement to Free School Meals, debt with an energy provider, a vulnerable person living in the household, recent unemployment or workers on a zero-hours contract and receipt of means tested benefits.

The Referrals for emergency support could be made by local support organisations and advice agencies, possibly support from schools, churches or charities could be utilised, with even the possibility that an individual could make a self-referral.

Provided that checks for eligibility for the scheme were conducted, a successful and fair delivery of a scheme could be achieved. The key element was that Council needed engagement with the other Councils to learn from their experience. Every Council area was different and that was why his Party had not been prescriptive in how the hardship fund should be distributed.

He added that it was important that hardship funding be targeted towards those with the greatest need, with household income threshold of £40,000 recommended by the Joseph Roundtree Foundation as being needed for a minimum acceptable standard of living.

Everything Council did in its response should be based on need, he added. We live in a very unequal society and those with the greatest need for help should be eligible for it and should be the focus, especially at a time of crisis such as this, when they needed it most.

In closing, he stated that Council had stepped up to provide an emergency response at the onset of the pandemic and therefore nothing was stopping it from doing the same now.

(Alderman Armstrong-Cotter joined the meeting – 6.44pm)

The seconder, Councillor Dunlop, stated that in August 2022 this Council had written to the Department for Communities seeking a special fund for Councils to help to alleviate the cost-of-living pressures on those less fortunate throughout Northern Ireland.

The response from the Director of Voluntary and Community Division in October and noted by Council in December had been disappointing - but not surprising. The lack of a functional Executive continued to undermine credibility in governance but despite any debates within the Council chamber, Councillor Dunlop was confident that all Members agreed that the neediest citizens of the Borough required help and required it now. As a credible functioning delivery body this council could make a difference not only to constituents' enjoyment of life but to their faith in local democracy.

He added that Members knew people had been under significant pressure for years. The Green Party would welcome an energy strategy that focused on retrofitting homes to reduce energy demand and alleviate cost pressure in a more sustainable manner and possibly with a Climate Act that could still happen. Nevertheless, in the short term, a fix was needed, and those on the lowest incomes and in greatest need, required it now.

Council had signed up to the United Nations Development Goals – they were embedded in its Corporate Plan and strategies and policies were now being developed that sought to achieve those goals.

He referred to the first two goals; No poverty and No hunger – those objectives were set within the Council's statutory core as a democratic publicly elected body with a corporate responsibility. It was within Council's means, and it was its duty to address the challenges its constituents faced where possible.

Rising energy prices, welfare cuts and stagnant wages were causing people to struggle. These were ongoing issues that were societal, deep rooted, and avoidable.

He added that where other levels of government have failed and continue to fail, local government needed step up now.

Alderman McIlveen advised that he would be supporting the substantive Motion as it did not restrict the Council to a hardship fund but also looked at alternatives including working with other organisations that could allow a more effective response.

He was mindful that Council was currently in a rate setting process and trying to strike a balance that supported both businesses which provided employment and wages, and ratepayers and the services that were being provided in incredibly difficult times.

In any decision that the Council made it was important to remember that there would be impacts. He was not entirely sure that the funding that had been paid to Councils in England and Wales, as referred to by Alderman McDowell, had gone through the Barnett Consequential process. Councillor McKee had referred to Council 'stepping up' during the Covid-19 pandemic but that had been possible only because of large sums of funding coming from Central Government and had caused no additional burden on the ratepayer. The fund that the Green Party desired however, would impact directly on the ratepayer.

Referring to the original motion, he felt there was merit in looking at schemes that the Council could support though he was doubtful around the two week timescale for the report and he felt that perhaps an interim report would be more realistic.

Schemes in the north west and in Belfast had operated on a first come first served basis and the focus on greatest need had not been met in that approach, he felt. He was also mindful of administration costs and audit consequences.

Councillor P Smith believed that while there was some difference over solutions as to how the Council could deliver support, everyone was here with the best of intentions to help those in need. It was important to acknowledge the impact that the rise in inflation had had on the community over the last six months, particularly on essential costs, and the phrase 'heat or eat' had been banded around by the press but for some it was a reality.

(Alderman Carson and Councillor Johnson joined the meeting – 6.55pm)

The Green Party amendment called for a hardship fund to be created by Council resources, but Councillor P Smith could not support that for a variety of reasons which he outlined. Firstly, it was not the Council's function to provide this type of funding and he did not believe Council had the capability to administer a hardship fund effectively. The cost of administering and the lack of targeting as demonstrated by other Councils was concerning. Council was in a difficult rate setting process and spending the amount needed to make a difference would require in the region of £750,000 which would impact upon Council's services.

Any decision impacting on the next financial year would also be taken after the rate setting process had been completed so it would therefore create an unbudgeted commitment in what would already be a difficult financial year. He alluded to the

experience of Belfast City Council and the meeting it had earlier in the week which highlighted some difficulties with a first come first served approach which would be applied in Ards and North Down, creating a lottery as to who would receive financial support. He felt there were better ways in targeting resources immediately and would elaborate further in an amendment that his party intended to propose later in the meeting.

Councillor Boyle agreed that all Members wanted to find a solution, but he had difficulty with the Green Party's amendment and swayed towards the original motion as it was open to options, called for information and did not tie the Council in to anything at this stage. He too was mindful that a hardship fund would need to be paid for directly by the Council and doing that would have impacts.

The original motion would also provide opportunity to look at the experiences of the other Councils which he too understood to be concerning. He was aware of online application systems crashing and a high household income threshold, in Derry City and Strabane, set at £40,000, which had led to significant demand. In Belfast there had been a £60,000 limit set which had led to even higher demand. The timeframe for the follow-up report was tight and it would be dependent on other organisations responding which could delay it and the information needed was so important. This was a massive undertaking, but he would support the original notice of motion to gather as much information as possible in order to get the scheme right. He felt that the Alliance Party should reconsider the timeframe on the report given those concerns.

Councillor T Smith felt that while he could not support the Green Party amendment, although Councillor Woods deserved credit for attempting to bring it to Council in the first place. He was sceptical over the timeframe for the report as called for in the original motion, and he was mindful that the rate setting process would be completed in the next month and there was nothing mentioned in that process in relation to setting up a hardship fund. It was also important not give people false hope and he suspected that there would be very little for a cost-of-living hardship fund given the Council's financial situation. He felt that keeping rates down and maintaining existing services were therefore the priority unless any money was coming from central Government which he highly doubted given the level overspend reported at the NI Executive.

Councillor McKimm pointed to the need that existed and the conversations he had had with constituents, highlighting examples of people in their late 80s permanently turning off their heating. A young mother with two children he had met was going home to a house without electricity and she was concerned that social services would take her children away. While there was no doubting the need though, it was the lack of funding available that was the main factor. Councillor McKimm referred to recent contact and meetings with people from the charity and voluntary sectors around cost of living, and while fully committed those organisations were in financial crisis too and he therefore expressed caution about trying to lean on those organisations to deliver while they were trying to meet their own commitments and struggling to pay their bills.

Central Government Departments too had emphasised on many occasions there was no funding available and given a reported NI Government debt of £660m, Council should not expect to turn to any of the Government Departments for support. In addition, he could support Council providing this funding by ravaging its reserves or going to the ratepayer – the current rate setting process would already require some difficult decisions. A hardship fund therefore was not something he could support, and he had therefore heard nothing so far on how Council could respond sensibly to the needs that had been identified.

Councillor Cathcart recalled difficult conversations around those needs expressed by constituents, but he felt that the direction of travel for this needed to come from Central Government, particularly given the ability to borrow which was not an option for the Council. It was not the Council's responsibility to support people by taking money off other people. There would be people sitting slightly above the recommended qualifying threshold who would already be struggling, and they would be asked to pay extra on their rates which was not acceptable. He pointed to organisations in the Borough already providing much needed support in every way apart from the hardship funding that Councillor McKimm had referred to. He highlighted the work of the social supermarkets which provided food and also had a wraparound service which signposted to educational opportunities, benefits and other support. There were two trials of the social supermarkets ongoing in the Borough and he felt it would be worth looking at ensuring everyone in the Borough had access to a social supermarket and ensuring that the current pilot operations continued into the longer term.

Pointing to the social supermarket model, Councillor Gilmour felt this was an example of what could be achieved with limited resources and if the Department for Communities could provide more of those schemes, then that was a more viable and sustainable solution than the Council taking money from the ratepayer. She would therefore be supportive of the original notice of motion.

She understood that another Council operated a hardship fund scheme and had used savings from an elected member pay freeze which would not apply to Ards and North Down given that members had not taken a pay rise for a number of years. Council needed to ensure any funding was delivered in a targeted way to those most in need but also be mindful of the administrative demands and costs. This again was all in the backdrop of a difficult rate setting process. She would therefore be supporting the original motion but felt that the timescale of a report was overly optimistic.

Summing up on the amendment, Councillor Irwin noted that there was concern from the Green Party that a report coming back was only kicking the can down the road but pointed to the many different qualifying criteria-related options raised by Councillor McKee in how referrals would be made and the logistics of providing the support. She therefore felt that it was responsible to take the two weeks and allow officers to put together a report to look at solutions. She felt that it was an urgent issue and that's why the proposal limited the report to two weeks. Therefore, the Alliance Party would not be supporting the amendment.

On being put to the meeting, with 2 voting FOR, 28 voting AGAINST, 2 ABSTAINED and 8 ABSENT, the amendment FELL.

Councillor P Smith indicated that he wished to propose a further amendment, seconded by Councillor Smart, that:

This council recognises the significant cost of living hardship facing the many residents in Ards and North Down and directs officers to urgently complete a report outlining how we can support our residents, as we did through the pandemic, by providing additional resources to those organisations already supporting struggling individuals and families locally. Those groups would include, but are not limited to, food banks within the Borough, The social supermarket, Advice Ards and North Down and St Vincent de Paul. The proposed fund would total in the region of £50,000 supporting those struggling financially, whilst maintaining the financial restraint required to retain existing public services, provided by Council. This Council will also write to the Department of Communities and the Northern Ireland Office to request that funding is provided to Councils (and that it is ring-fenced in 2023/24 budget) to assist with the implementation of any future support schemes. Given the urgency of the matter, this report should be ready for the meeting of Full Council on 26th January 2023.

Proposing, Councillor P Smith explained that his amendment removed reference to a hardship fund and liaison with other Councils on that process, and that was replaced with the providing of £50,000 grant support to organisations within the Borough who delivered essential services to those most in need.

He referred Members to his earlier comments around a Council funded hardship fund and reasons why he could not support it. He recalled how Council during Covid had given grant support to groups within the Borough to provide help to residents most in need and he pointed to the work of organisations that had a long and successful track record in delivering services and support at the coal face – the Food Banks, the new social supermarket, Community Advice Ards & North Down and St Vincent de Paul – there may well have been others.

Those groups could get help to those in need in a cost effective, targeted manner and on a needs basis whether that was for food, fuel or advice. It was better to use a process that was proven rather than inventing new costly and potentially untargeted processes.

While he was aware that in the past Council had administered grants from DfC to those organisations during Covid, Council had also supported many of those groups directly from its own funds, so a precedent had been set.

A £50,000 total fund was a figure that he believed was affordable but would also be able to make an immediate and significant impact in fighting need and helping people in the Borough.

Thankfully the roll out of the £600 fuel payments to households had commenced and this, along with the Government cap on fuel bills and the package of cost-of-living support would be helpful to the Borough's residents.

That along with the recent fall in petrol and gas prices along with the forecast reduction in inflation during this year he hoped would ease the burden on households to some degree.

Despite this though there would still be many who needed further support to get them through difficult times and he believed this was the most targeted and quickest method of support, as the payments could be made in the existing financial year. He asked Members for their support.

The seconder, Councillor Smart, believed that the amendment added much needed support to the organisations already doing great and essential work in a difficult time.

The money would hit the ground quickly and immediately target need. He had volunteered with a local food bank and the Salvation Army over recent weeks and felt that their work was second to none. He felt that those types of organisations were best placed to meet the needs of the community whether that be through food support or grants for energy and would deliver the best outcomes. He added that there was no other way of delivering handouts without putting the cost on to the ratepayer during this difficult time. This proposal found a reasonable balance in supporting need and stewarding public finances and services and while he noted that many Members had already signalled support for the original motion and welcomed a report with further information. If that was the desire of the Council, then it would be important that tangible outcomes for residents were identified before Council attached any cost to a scheme on to the ratepayer.

Alderman McDowell felt that many positive ideas and suggestions had come forward and that would help officers in putting together a report. It was still important to remember that the Government had a responsibility to provide some funding. The cost-of-living crisis was just as severe as Covid in its implications to ordinary people and businesses, so it was important not to give up on this being properly funded by Central Government. It had a responsibility, and he hoped the people of Northern Ireland were not being treated differently to those in England and Wales. He felt it would be irresponsible to pick a figure without any consideration where the money was coming from and therefore preferred to wait for two weeks for further information.

Councillor T Smith was supportive of the amendment. He realised that the Council's hands were tied financially and there would not be enough to do anything significant and while £50,000 was still a significant amount of money it was nothing compared to the difficulty that people were facing. It was important to be realistic and he felt that the Council was not the best organisation to be delivering it to those in need and he felt the charitable organisations referred to would be better placed to use this money. He referred to the local staff pay deal and installation of cameras to broadcast meetings and believed Council should commit £50,000 as proposed, given it had spent significantly more money in what he considered to be worse ways.

Councillor McKimm felt that the word 'realistic' summed up the debate and he felt the current amendment provided a realistic solution that was in line with the feedback he had received from charitable and voluntary organisations that were asking Council to

'help us to help them'. In terms of distributing the funds, he recalled a Housing Executive Fund that had worked on a first come first served basis and it had resulted in many problems with people in great need missing out. He would therefore warn against using that approach. The one issue that he had with all proposals that had been made however was the demands they were potentially placing on staff, particularly in the finance section, where officers were extremely busy in working towards finalising the rate setting process. He wondered if another Directorate would take this scheme on. In terms of a report coming back, he was confident that there would be no surprises in terms of finding any additional money that could be used. Therefore, he felt that the amendment made sense in enabling Council to do something pragmatic.

Alderman McIlveen felt that even if there was a spare £50,000 available for the proposed amendment, that money would otherwise be used to offset the rate, so it would still have an impact on the ratepayer whatever way it was looked at. He therefore preferred for officers to undertake research and come back with information for Members to make an informed decision rather than what he considered to be a knee jerk reaction. He appreciated the sentiment of the current amendment but would be supporting the original motion.

(The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Blaney, joined the meeting – 7.48pm)

Pointing to community projects undergoing in the Ards Peninsula, Councillor Thompson felt that funding should be used to support running costs in keeping people warm and providing hot food in community buildings for example. He felt that the two-week time frame for the report was unrealistic and urged caution going forward in light of the challenges of the rate setting process.

Councillor Kennedy did not doubt the sincerity of anyone who had contributed to the debate, but it was where sentiment met reality that led to difficult decisions. He felt that the amendment was too restrictive and was concerned about Council's capability of creating and delivering such a scheme. He felt it would be churlish not to embrace the Alliance Party's Notice of Motion and he appreciated it was robust and flexible in its wording and did not narrow the Council's ability in what it needed to do. It was important to manage expectations though and not let sentiment get the better of the Council. He spoke of the level of work involved in bringing a report back and felt it was unrealistic but he did not discount the opportunity for further information and voiced his support for the original Notice of Motion.

(Councillor Johnson left the meeting – 7.55pm)

On being put to the meeting with 10 voting FOR, 20 voting AGAINST, 1 ABSTAINED and 9 ABSENT, the amendment FELL.

Members indicated agreement to the substantive motion.

RESOLVED, on the proposal of Councillor Irwin, seconded by Alderman McDowell, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.56pm.

ITEM 8.1

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Audit Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Thursday 15 December 2022 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:-

In the Chair: Councillor Gilmour

Via Zoom

Councillors: Greer McClean (7.20pm)
McAlpine McRandal

Independent Member: Mr P Cummings

In Attendance: ASM (via Zoom) – J McCallion
Deloitte (via Zoom) – C McDermott
Deloitte (via Zoom) – D Kinsella
NIAO – A Allen

Officers: Director of Finance and Performance (S Christie), Head of Finance (S Grieve) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman (Councillor Gilmour) sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies were received from Councillors Chambers, Irwin, Thompson and the Chief Executive.

NOTED.

2. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting including the internal and external auditors to the Committee from the Northern Ireland Audit Office, ASM and Deloitte.

Continuing she also welcomed Councillors Chambers and McRandal as newly appointment members of the Committee.

NOTED.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman asked for any Declarations of Interest and the following were declared:

David Kinsella & Camille McDermott (Deloitte) – Item 11 – Internal Audit Contract Tender Update

NOTED.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

(a) Audit Committee Minutes from September 2022 (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above minutes.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Greer, seconded by Councillor McAlpine, that the minutes be noted.

(b) Follow Up Actions (FILE AUD02)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Finance and Performance detailing that in line with best practice, the purpose of the report was to make the Audit Committee aware of the status of outstanding recommendations or any outstanding actions from the previous Audit Committee meetings.

There was one item from the previous committee.

Item	Title	Action	Officer	Status
December 2021				
6a	External Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Escalate non-payment from Dfl for former ALC site 	Head of Finance	Outstanding due to communications from Council's solicitor

RECOMMENDED that the Committee notes the report.

At this stage Councillor Greer sought confirmation that the meeting was quorate as the Committee Chamber appeared to have no members present.

The Director confirmed that three members were attending the meeting via Zoom with the Chairman present in the Council Chamber, thereby deeming the meeting quorate and able to proceed.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Greer, seconded by Councillor McAlpine, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. EXTERNAL AUDIT

(a) Improvement Audit and Assessment Report (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Northern Ireland Audit Office summarising the work of the Local Government Auditor (LGA) on the 2022-23 performance improvement audit and assessment undertaken on Ards and North Down Borough Council.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

Mr Allen (NIAO) provided members with a brief synopsis of the report which had been previously circulated highlighting the salient points within it.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Greer, seconded by Councillor McRandal, that the recommendation be adopted.

(b) Final Report to Those Charged with Governance (Appendix III)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Northern Ireland Audit Office summarising the key matters from its audit of the 2021-22 Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) financial statements which must be reported to the Audit Committee, as those charged with governance.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

Mr Allen again provided members with a brief synopsis of the report which had been circulated to members highlighting the salient points within it. He drew members attention to the Unqualified Audit Opinion which had been given.

Councillor Greer asked what an Unqualified Audit Opinion meant for the Council.

In response Mr Allen advised that it meant there were no issues found and as such a clean audit opinion could be given to the Council in the form of an Unqualified Audit Opinion.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Greer, seconded by Councillor McAlpine, that the recommendation be adopted.

(c) Annual Audit Letter (Appendix IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Northern Ireland Audit Office summarising the results of the audit of the 2021-22 Statement of Accounts.

RECOMMENDED that the report is noted.

Mr Allen provided members with a brief synopsis of the report which had been circulated to members highlighting the salient points within it. Continuing he advised members that the publication of the Annual Audit Letter was a legislative requirement which the Council was required to meet. Mr Allen referred to several areas of interest

which had been included within the report including Absenteeism, Performance Improvement Audit & Assessment and the National Fraud Initiative.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor McAlpine, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. INTERNAL AUDIT

(a) Internal Audit Progress Report 2022/23 (Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from Deloitte summarising the internal audit progress, for the four areas referred to below.

Mr Kinsella (Deloitte) provided members with an overview of the above report, adding that he was content the Council was on track to complete its Audit Plan.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the report be noted.

(i) PCSP (Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above report.

Ms McDermott (Deloitte) highlighted the salient points and audit priorities within the report and noted there was one Priority 2 recommendation and one Priority 3 recommendation with an overall Satisfactory level of assurance given. Ms McDermott provided members with a brief synopsis of each of those Priority findings before seeking queries from members.

Councillor McAlpine referred to the Priority 2 recommendation and asked if that was an issue perhaps generally throughout the entire organisation.

In response Ms McDermott confirmed that all projects were required to keep the same documentation and added that this was more of an issue within the PCSP.

(Councillor McClean joined the meeting via Zoom – 7.20pm)

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the report be noted.

(ii) Strategic Financial Planning (Appendix VII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above report.

Ms McDermott highlighted the salient points and audit priorities within the report and noted there were three Priority 2 recommendations and two Priority 3 recommendations with an overall Satisfactory level of assurance given. Ms McDermott provided members with a brief synopsis of each of those Priority findings before seeking queries from members.

Councillor McAlpine referred to the Business Cases commenting that they seemed to take a long time to go through and as such she asked if there were any which were submitted annually rather than one offs.

In response the Head of Finance commented that those Business Cases referred to were more routine ones and going forward he would be encouraging budget holders to prepare Business Cases in advance in order to achieve greater collaboration.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the report be noted.

(iii) Treasury Management (Appendix VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above report.

Ms McDermott highlighted the salient points and audit priorities within the report and noted there was one Priority 2 recommendation and two Priority 3 recommendations with an overall Satisfactory level of assurance given. Ms McDermott provided members with a brief synopsis of each of those Priority findings before seeking queries from members at this stage.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, that the report be noted.

(iv) Half-Yearly Follow-Up Report (Appendix IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Copy of the above report.

Ms McDermott (Deloitte) provided members with an overview of the above report paying particular interest to the Summary Update which detailed the status of the implementation of internal audit recommendations. Members were advised that currently there were 65 open issues since the last follow up report was presented in March 2022, with 34 additional issues since that point. 21 issues had been closed since the March 2022 meeting. Issues remaining open as of 31 October 2022 were 78 with four of those being Priority 1 issues. Ms McDermott added that further details were included within the report and invited questions from members at this stage.

Mr Cummings expressed disappointment with what he had heard adding that in his view it was below satisfactory, with the list of open issues growing longer. He stated that the Covid 19 pandemic could no longer be blamed for this particularly as the issues appeared to be Council wide, with no sign of improvement. As the Committee's independent member, he expressed concern with this, adding that it was disappointing that the Chief Executive had been unable to attend the meeting to provide the Committee with some assurance on the matter.

Acknowledging Mr Cumming's concerns, the Head of Finance confirmed that a number of actions had been implemented to address the matter, adding that the delay was due to resourcing constraints and the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. Continuing he reported that staff had subsequently been recruited and a number of policies were under development which would help to address the issue. The Head of Finance added that he would also flag it up with his colleagues.

At this stage the Director reminded members that a number of years ago the outstanding recommendations were at a much higher level than this and action had been taken to address that including a much better reporting process involving the Internal Auditor. Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic improvements had been made but Covid undoubtedly had a negative impact upon that progress. He agreed that it now was a priority and confirmed the Chief Executive was aware of the number of outstanding recommendations being briefed as recently as earlier that day. The Director indicated that he would also raise the matter with his Corporate Leadership Team colleagues.

Mr Cummings indicated that he would welcome that assurance from the Chief Executive and continuing suggested that Heads of Service were brought to the next meeting of the Committee to be held to account if they had not responded to the Internal Auditors progress update request.

Thanking Mr Cummings for his comments, Councillor McRandal noted there were a few recommendations which had been outstanding for a long period of time and he asked if any progress had been made with those.

In response the Head of Finance confirmed his intention to take a new Draft Asset Management Policy to the Heads of Service Team in January 2023 which would then be put to the February 2023 meeting of the Corporate Services Committee. He added that he had also commenced work on a discussion paper on income and pricing which he hoped would be advanced prior to the end of the year. The Head of Finance added that he hoped that would assist to address several of the outstanding issues. Continuing he advised that following the commencement of his new Director he would hope to be able to undertake a review of the mileage and travel policy. He added that it was his intention to highlight the importance of such matters with his colleagues particularly as it had been raised by the Committee.

Councillor McRandal asked if an update could be provided on those outstanding issues which fell outside the remit of the Finance section.

The Head of Finance replied stating that detail was included within the report, and continuing he provided members with an overview of the process involved. He added that he had held discussions with the Internal Auditors with a view to strengthening the process currently in place to encourage more timely and rigorous responses.

At this stage Councillor McAlpine expressed concern that some Heads of Service had yet to respond and as such she suggested they should be asked to attend the next meeting of the Committee to provide an explanation.

In response the Director stated that he did not feel such a request was unreasonable and was something which could be built into the process.

Councillor McAlpine welcomed the Director's comments stating that she would just be concerned that in another six months' time they could be no further on. She added that Mr Cummings was right to raise the matter as some of the recommendations had been sitting for a considerable length of time.

The Director added that the response had improved significantly, and he did as a matter of course receive an update from the Auditors before the report was finalised. He agreed that it was unacceptable that no response was provided.

Councillor McAlpine agreed that a timely reminder should be issued and if no response was received then those Heads of Service be asked to attend a meeting of the Committee.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McAlpine, seconded by Councillor McRandal, that the report be noted and furthermore that appropriate officers be asked to attend the Committee for the next report if they had not provided updated responses to the auditors' requests.

7. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

(a) Interim Statements of Assurance (FILE SOA1)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Organisational Development and Administration stating that in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Strategy Heads of Service were required to provide Statements of Assurance. Assurance Statements comprised four main sections to be completed by each Head of Service following consultation with each of their Service Units. Period of this report, 1 April 2022 - 30 September 2022.

Findings

General – Identification of Risk, Monitoring and Control measures

No key issues had been declared as not having appropriate internal controls in place. All Services had confirmed that any risks identified had appropriate internal controls and any further actions taken, or to be taken, to adequately mitigate or resolve the risk had been identified.

Brexit and COVID 19 Pandemic Impacts

The impacts of both those issues had been previously reported. Actual and potential impacts, primarily financial and demands affecting staff, and / or service delivery, were reported across the Statements of Assurance.

Section 1 – Strategic and Operational Risk Management

Services report appropriate controls were currently in place and had identified satisfactory actions to review, monitor, control, mitigate and resolve issues, where appropriate.

The HR and Organisational Development Service had suspended Pride and Performance conversation and a working group had been appointed to compile a new appraisal scheme for the Council. Managers had been encouraged to continue ongoing coaching with their employees and submit any training recommendations in accordance with good practice in the interim.

The Waste and Cleansing Service had reported that a significant financial liability risk remained if the bidding process for the Residual Waste Treatment project was collapsed by the client (arc21). In the Assurance Statement report for October to March 2022 it was reported that Planning permission was refused by the DFI Minister; this was now subject to judicial review. All of this had significant implications for the future of arc21, in terms of delivering infrastructure for member Councils, this was further complicated by a member Council seeking to withdraw from the residual waste project and the Strategic Review of NI Council Waste Management Arrangements.

The Tourism section had added in greater review and risk assessment of inclement weather into event management plans and plans to further explore methods of assessing this risk and potential mitigation options in the future.

The Regulatory Services section had identified a training need to mitigate against the risk to officers from physical attack with the training to focus on de-escalation and avoiding physical assault.

Section 2 – Internal Control

Generally, there were no key issues arising to cause significant concern or requiring immediate action.

The Administration Service had reported that with the appointment of a Public Right of Way Officer the management of those was now in hand, reducing risk to the organisation in this area. The Service also reported that the Emergency Plan and Business Continuity Plan were aligned but work was to take place to detach those two aspects as different officers were responsible for each element. Further to this a lease/licence register was being reviewed and updated, a subgroup had been appointed to look into this.

The Environmental Health, Protection and Development Service had reported significant scrutiny of their work on food and consumer goods standards which was impacting on their resources.

Progress on Audit findings was reported to Committee separately, although they were reflected in the Assurance Statements. Services had recorded progress and plans to complete outstanding audit actions. Outstanding audit recommendations for six services were noted there.

The Communications and Marketing service unit had two outstanding Priority 2 findings and one outstanding Priority 3 finding related to the Social Media Audit conducted in 2021, those were being addressed.

The Human Resources and Organisational Development Service had three outstanding priority 3 recommendations relating to their service plan. Those were all being progressed.

Strategic Transformation and Performance had two Priority 1 findings, one Priority 2 findings and three Priority 3 findings outstanding raised by the Business Continuity

and Disaster Recovery Audit and the Business Technology Audit, all those findings were being progressed through an action plan.

Community and Culture Service had four priority 2 findings related to grants with an SLA administering, grant monitoring in general, declarations of interest and supporting documentation. In addition, the service also had four priority 3 findings relating to guidance documents for partnerships and elected members, grant advance payments and the need for the grants policy to be reviewed. All of those findings were in progress for implementation.

Finance Service had recorded one outstanding Priority 1 Audit finding relating to the provision of an Asset Management Policy, in addition there were twenty-two Priority 2 findings and twelve Priority 3 findings. Of those findings, many related to policy development that was previously on hold due to lack of staff resources. Policy development was in process for the majority of those policies with discussion papers out for consultation within finance on the Pricing and Income policy and wider within Council on the Travel and Subsistence policy. The Asset Management policy consultation had been completed and Finance were now drafting the policy and procedures related to it. There had not been progress yet on the proposed Budgeting policy as it was dependent on the previously mentioned policies being finalised.

Of the remaining non-policy related recommendations, action plans existed for all of those with set target dates for implementation.

Regulatory Services had one outstanding priority 2 recommendation which was to review their risk register. In addition, they had two priority 3 recommendations to reconcile payments daily and to sign off the assurance statement. All of those were in progress.

Section 3 – Governance

Administration had reported that there were currently two contentions Public Right of Way cases which were currently getting legal advice. As reported on the previous statement the further roll out of Te-Care software throughout Council departments was planned to improve the ability of officers to meet the requirements of the Council's complaints policy. A new version of the Model Complaints Handling Procedure would be available from March 2023 and would be launched with refresher training for all staff.

In addition, an issue had been identified with the Te-Care software system. Te-Care had a limited maintenance programme and GDPR concerns were currently being investigated. Those related to Data Erasure requests (concerns over the ability to fully erase a person from the multiple systems within the organisation) and Data Subject Access Requests (concerns over capture of all data available when employees were asked to reactively respond to requests v an automated computer system).

Assets and Property Services had provided an update to the extended tender of the sale of electricity from the wind turbine at Balloo Wood Bangor. The tender would be revised in accordance with the new energy market and aligned with the Energy Manager Joint Forum electricity contract to use the services of a utility broker.

The Strategic Transformation and Performance service had provided an update relating to the hire of vehicles for pandemic purposes in cleansing. As reported previously this had been flagged by External Audit as non-compliance. The service reports that this had been changed into a single tender action.

Communications and Marketing had reported two instances where the procurement policy was not followed, those being for Visit Belfast and for Clear Channel, in both cases this was due to them being the sole provider for those services.

The Leisure Service had reported that the potential financial position of the Council and difficulty recruiting staff may lead to an inability to return to pre-covid levels of service provision. In addition, the service was anticipating potential significant loss of income claims from Serco.

The Finance service had reported that the issues of the interaction of overtime and holiday pay were still unresolved as well as the implications of the McCloud and Sargent court cases, whilst being accounted for in financial statements for year end March 2022 had not been fully accounted for in employer pension contribution rates. In addition, the Council was facing substantial pay and utility cost pressures.

Regulatory Services had reported that there were concerns around income generation due to external factors in the property market impacting on home renovations.

Community and Culture had reported that issues had been identified in the Core system for October 2022 and in collaboration with Human Resources an investigation had begun.

Section 4 – Miscellaneous

The Finance Service had reported that workload and long-term sickness had inhibited the execution of service and governance improvements, that the absence of a corporate information management strategy was inhibiting service efficiencies and that combined with limited business technology equipment was inhibiting some staff working more effectively in a hybrid manner.

The Leisure Service had reported staff welfare was under strain throughout the service due to the demands being placed on officers due to financial constraints, Covid-19, governance and ongoing uncertainty around leisure provision. Continued difficulties in recruiting staff was placing a strain on those covering gaps over a long period of time.

The Director of Community and Wellbeing had made a comment regarding the Parks and Cemeteries Assurance statement that given the current financial pressures and the need to complete the agreed transformation process to save on costs and improve service quality and service governance and accountability, the phase 2 (restructure) would need to be expedited.

RECOMMENDED that the report be noted.

The Director informed members that in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Strategy, Heads of Service were required to provide Statements of Assurance. Assurance Statements comprised four main sections to be completed by each Head of Service following consultation with each of their Service Units twice yearly. He summarised the report highlighting the salient points contained within it adding that he was content all disclosure and mitigations had been made.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McRandal, seconded by Councillor McAlpine, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that there were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor McRandal, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

9. SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS UPDATE (FILE 231329)

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

10. FRAUD, WHISTLEBLOWING AND DATA-PROTECTION MATTERS

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

(Having declared an interest in the next item, David Kinsella and Camille McDermott were both put on hold via Zoom – 7.54pm)

11. INTERNAL AUDIT CONTRACT TENDER

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

(David Kinsella and Camille McDermott were both brought back to the meeting via Zoom – 7.56pm)

13. MEETING WITH NI AUDIT OFFICE & INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE IN THE ABSENCE OF MANAGEMENT

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

The Director of Finance & Performance, Head of Finance and Democratic Services Officer all withdrew from the meeting during the discussion of the item (7.57pm).

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McClean, seconded by Councillor McAlpine, that the public/press be readmitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.00 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Environment Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Wednesday, 4 January 2023 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Alderman McDowell

Aldermen: Armstrong-Cotter
Carson
M Smith

Councillors:

Boyle	Johnson
Cathcart	MacArthur
Cummings	McAlpine
Edmund	McKee
Greer	Smart
Irwin	Woods

Officers: Director of Environment (D Lindsay), Head of Waste and Cleansing Services (N Martin), Head of Assets and Property Services (P Caldwell) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of Interest.

NOTED.

3. PRESENTATION – ECO SCHOOLS WINNERS (LONDONDERRY PRIMARY SCHOOL)

The children of Londonderry Primary School, Newtownards, had prepared a presentation which was played to the meeting. The pupils explained the environmental work they had been carrying out in their school via Eco-Schools over the past ten years.

During the past year, the school had been awarded its fourth Green Flag and been granted Ambassador Status and was the only school in the Ards and North Down

Borough to hold that honour. To add to that, the school had been awarded Biodiversity School of the Year and Mrs Hutton, the school's Eco Teacher, had received an Eco Teacher of the Year award.

A short summary was provided on how the school had reached that success and its 'whole school' approach to outdoor learning and recycling had been among its greatest success. Sustainable living was firmly embedded in the school curriculum from primary one up to primary seven and the work included collection of litter, bird feeding, the watering and care of plants, Waste Week, which was usually themed around plastics and saving energy, and Walk to School Week. Every pupil was given the opportunity annually to upcycle a piece of clothing that they no longer needed, and a fashion parade of those garments took place around the school grounds. Parents of the pupils were provided with plenty of opportunities to get involved.

The pupils composted food waste, recycled paper and brought in batteries from home for recycling. Crisp packets were also recycled and one of the parents was able to do that to raise funds for a local charity. The pupils raised money within the school to fund some of their Eco projects, such as a school uniform sale to help with sustainability goals.

Over the years the pupils had gradually changed the school's outdoor area from being a plain space to one which now had trees and shrubs to encourage wildlife to flourish. There was an orchard of trees and blackberry bushes. A planted sensory area of plants and herbs had also been established and that encouraged insect life to thrive. The pupils also explained the 12-foot polytunnel they had put in place to encourage the growing of some food for use by the school.

They went on to explain the work of each year group such as making fruit crumble from the apples in the orchard, using the lettuce they had grown for sandwiches, growing potatoes and planting bulbs for Mothers' and Fathers' Day. All of this work was carried out using funds raised within the school itself. The presentation finished with pupils thanking the Members for allowing them to speak to the Committee.

The Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, Alderman McDowell, congratulated the children stating that they had made an excellent presentation outlining the very exciting work which was being done at Londonderry Primary School. He also praised the school and its pupils for the awards and recognition they had achieved regionally.

Councillor Boyle also asked to put on record his congratulations to the children of Londonderry Primary School and explained that he had been amazed to hear about what was going on there. This was an example of where other schools could be and he needed to keep reminding himself that these were young people, still at primary school, and yet they had captured his entire attention for the work they were doing. He stressed that this was a message to the Council on the importance of maintaining relationships with schools and organisations such as Live Here Love Here, so that benefits would continue into the future.

Councillor Cummings was in agreement and praised the school for its professional and informative presentation, and proposed that the Chair of the Committee write a letter of congratulations to all at Londonderry Primary School for their good work and achievements and with particular reference to Mrs Hutton who had taken a lead on Eco matters. He acknowledged that this was the only school in the Borough who held this Ambassador level status.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter seconded that proposal and believed the standard of the presentation should be acknowledged along with the school's unique achievement within the Borough. She had been massively impressed to hear of the work and knew that this was an excellent school and one of which Newtownards was rightly proud. She looked forward to further updates on the school's environmental activities.

Councillor Greer was in agreement and stressed that everyone involved should be acknowledged with a massive well done on what had been achieved. She added that the pupils who had presented to the Committee were great ambassadors for their school and that many adults could learn much from their good example.

Councillor Woods congratulated the school and the results of funding projects such as those spoke for themselves, and she believed it was crucial that the support should continue and help to promote sustainable and environmental education.

Councillor McAlpine also praised the pupils and wondered if the school could lead by becoming a case study for other schools locally to give longevity to the initiative and spread the impact that, in her opinion, would be too good an opportunity to waste.

The Director of the Environment explained that it was his belief that the Eco Schools Programme covered that sharing of information, which was one of the key strengths within the programme. Ambassador schools were involved in a good network of sharing ideas, but he thanked the Member for the point which was well made.

NOTED.

4. Q2 SERVICE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORTS

4.1 Waste and Cleansing Services (Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that Members would be aware that the Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil that requirement the Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
- Corporate Plan – published every 4 years (Corporate Plan Towards 2024 in operation)
- Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – published annually (for publication 30 September 2022)
- Service Plan – developed annually (approved April/May 2022)

The Council's 18 Service Plans outlined how each respective Service would contribute to the achievement of the Corporate objectives including, but not limited to, any relevant actions identified in the PIP.

Reporting approach

The Service Plans would be reported to relevant Committees on a quarterly basis as undernoted:

Reference	Period	Reporting Month
Quarter 1 (Q1)	April – June	September
Q2	July – September	December
Q3	October – December	March
Q4	January - March	June

The report for Quarter 2 2022-23 was attached.

Key points to note:

- There continued to be an encouraging trend in terms of landfill tonnage falling in comparison to the previous year (down by over 2000 tonnes), although the Council's recycling rate remained well below target.
- Budget overspend on staffing had been reduced to almost on target because of most Covid-19 prevention support measures being removed during the quarter.

Key achievements:

- The Cleanliness Pollution Index (LEAMS) score achieved increased from 76% to 89% during Q2, reflecting the extra cleansing measures put in place during the summer months.

Emerging issues:

- None

Action to be taken:

- Implementation of the agreed programmes of householder recycling engagement through our kerbside and HRC services.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Edmund that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor MacArthur congratulated the Council on the increase in the LEAMS score and was pleased that the Council was able to have the additional washer to clean the public realm areas. It was encouraging to note that the score awarded was the highest that had ever been achieved and was due to a good team effort on the ground.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

4.2 Assets and Property Services (Appendix II)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that Members would be aware that the Council was required, under the Local Government Act 2014, to have in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions. To fulfil that requirement the Council approved the Performance Management Policy and Handbook in October 2015. The Performance Management Handbook outlined the approach to Performance Planning and Management process as:

- Community Plan – published every 10-15 years
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Q2	July – September	December
Q3	October – December	March
Q4	January – March	June

The report for Quarter 2 2022-23 was attached.

Key points to note:

- Roadside audits were still suspended due to Covid-19. That would change in Q3 since the risk assessment for cleansing vehicles was updated.
- Quality Assurance rate for maintenance jobs was slightly behind target, due to staff shortages.
- Budget was overspent due to significant increases in diesel and utilities.

- Staff attendance was slightly below target due to several members of staff being off on long term sick.

Key achievements:

- Kircubbin CC refurbishment works complete
- Groomsport Boathouse refurbishment works complete
- Clandeboye house replacement windows complete
- Portaferry pathway resurfacing complete.

Emerging issues:

The increased cost of diesel and utilities would continue to be a problem throughout the year. In addition, contractors' costs and materials had also increased significantly.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

Proposed by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter noted that where targets had not been met that that had been explained within the report. The huge increases in diesel and utilities costs would need to be built into the Rates process for next year. It was easy to focus on problems, but she gave credit for the section achieving targets and exceeding those in many respects.

Seconding the recommendation Councillor Cummings asked if the Council was able to compete for better prices due to fluctuations in the markets for energy. The Head of Assets and Property Services explained that those were purchased through a public sector framework, with prices paid changing dynamically to reflect ongoing changes in energy and fuel market prices.

Councillor Boyle thanked officers for the achievement of completed work at Kircubbin Community Centre, Groomsport Boathouse, Clandeboye and Portaferry. He referred to the falling cost of fuel currently and hoped that it might become cheaper into the future.

The Director agreed and noted that it was very encouraging to see the direction of travel for diesel and utilities, but prices were still well above what had been envisaged last year when finalising the estimates for the current year.

Alderman M Smith thanked officers for the work that had been carried out at Clandeboye House, replacing windows.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. GRANT OF ENTERTAINMENT LICENCE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that an application had been received for the grant of entertainment licence as followed:

The Bull & Claw, 1 The Strand, Portaferry

Applicant: Mr Fraser Greenhill, 21 Croft Road, Holywood

Days and Hours: Monday to Sunday during the permitted hours when alcohol may be served on these premises under the Licensing (NI) Order 1996

Type of entertainment: Indoor dancing, singing and music or any other entertainment of a like kind.

The PSNI and NIFRS had been consulted and there were no objections.

RECOMMENDED that the Council grants the application.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. GRANT OF PAVEMENT CAFÉ LICENCE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the following application had been received for the grant of a Pavement Café Licence:

The Stormy Cup

Applicant: Mr Linus Menden

Venue: 25-27 New Street, Donaghadee

Day and hours of use:

Monday - Sunday 09.30 - 17.00

The application had been publicly displayed on the relevant premises for 28 days as required in the legislation. No objections had been received.

DFI Roads and the Planning Service had been consulted.

Under the agreed conditions of licence, the pavement cafe would be required to:

- only use the agreed area to be outlined in the licence
- provide only the approved furniture

- completely remove any furniture from the pavement at the end of each day's trading
- keep the area used for the café to be kept clean of litter and liquid spills

RECOMMENDED that the Council grants the above licence.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. CAR PARK STRATEGY UPDATE – PROPOSALS FOR CAR PARKING ENHANCEMENTS IN DONAGHADEE

(Appendices III – IX)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that Members would have been aware that the Council had approved a Car Park Strategy, and key work streams had been identified in terms of taking the implementation of the strategy forward. The single most significant impediment to substantive progress in that, was the fact that (as reported to the Committee previously), the legislation dealing with the transfer of former DfI car parks to Councils at RPA was defective. The defect meant that Councils lacked the legal power to rescind the existing Car Park Orders that were introduced by DfI when they made new ones.

That had a significant impact on the plans set out in the Strategy as the Council did not have the vires to alter arrangements for the operation and management of the car parks covered by the existing Order, until the old Order was rescinded and a new one was made. For example, one of the key things the Council could not yet do, was introduce the new tariff system in existing charged car parks, which was central to the financial viability of the planned car park redevelopment programme envisaged in the Strategy.

Whilst DfI had been aware of the legal problem for some considerable time, officers wrote to the Department again more recently and had now received assurance from the senior official dealing with the matter that work was actively in hand to seek to address the issue. A working group had been established with Council representatives to agree the way forward and prepare draft legislation to resolve the legal impediment. It had however been highlighted that approval of such draft legislation (giving Council the ability to have the existing Car Park Order rescinded and put new a Car Park Order in place), would require a fully functioning Assembly.

Whilst the Council awaited the resolution of the legal situation around that, it had in the meantime been progressing with an ongoing annual programme of car park repairs and maintenance under its Property Maintenance Strategy – although the funding in the Assets and Property Services budget for that was limited and at the time of writing only allowed for minor reactive repairs and one larger resurfacing scheme per year. Over the past four years, the following more significant car park resurfacing schemes had been completed:

- Community Centre, Greyabbey
- Banks Lane, Bangor
- Ballywalter Road, Millisle
- Harbour Plaza, Donaghadee (Majority funded by DfC)

Work had also been progressing around installation of EV charge point infrastructure in a number of off-street car parks, availing of external funding opportunities as reported recently to the Committee.

Donaghadee

One of the work strands identified in the Car Park Strategy was exploring options for enhancement of car park provision in Donaghadee.

The Car Park Strategy identified that whilst there were (significantly under-utilised) car parks in Donaghadee, it recommended that further discussions and consideration be given regarding parking provision in the town. During the work undertaken to develop the strategy, there was a strongly voiced concern from the Donaghadee Community Development Association that public car parking arrangements were in urgent need of review, particularly given the growing resident population of the town and its popularity as a visitor destination in the Borough.

Such a review was not something that was directly or immediately dependent upon the introduction of a new Car Park Order for the Borough, as the car parks in Donaghadee were not included in the charged car park estate – and for the time being, the Council had agreed not to extend charging to car parks that did not, at the time of writing, attract a charge. In that regard, officers had included in their preliminary Car Park Strategy implementation work, a review of car parking facilities and arrangements in Donaghadee.

Existing Off-Street Car Parking Provision/Capacity

The map attached illustrated that Donaghadee already had five car parks that could reasonably be defined and characterised as *town centre car parks*, all of which being a 2-3 minute walk to the heart of the town centre.

- Marina Car Park (large car park adjacent to Sir Samuel Kelly Lifeboat) (3 mins walk)
- William Street (3 mins walk)
- Harbour Court Car Park (beside Copeland Distillery) (2 mins walk)
- Crommelin Park (2 mins walk)
- The Moat (3 mins walk)

It could be seen clearly from the graphic representation of the existing car park locations in Donaghadee, that they did in fact collectively represent a very good spread of such facilities that were already there to support the town centre economy. In total there were at least 337 off-street car parking spaces within 2 or 3 minutes casual walking distance of the town centre, located north, south, east and west.

In the context of features identified in the Car Park Strategy as being key to the provision of high quality, effective public car park facilities, officers had identified a number of deficiencies which had historically led to significant under-appreciation and under-utilisation of Donaghadee town centre car park assets - and in turn some dissatisfaction with the public car park offering in the town. Those deficiencies included:

- Inadequate/non-existent roadside signage directing drivers to the car parks. That had to some degree contributed to a 'lost' or 'forgotten' public car park estate that visitors (and even some locals) did not realise was already there within a very short/convenient walking distance from the town centre.
- Poor standard of car park layout, surfacing, bay marking etc. That could lead to inefficient use of the car parking space available and in some instances a reluctance by prospective users to use the car park due to concern about safety etc.
- Poor car park infrastructure/aesthetics – lighting, visitor information signage, landscaping etc. Again, that could deter prospective users who viewed the aesthetic quality of the car parks as unattractive and perhaps unsafe to use.
- Poor directional signage for pedestrians from car park to town centre. That could be a barrier to use, as visitors in particular may not realise how close they were to the town centre and the most appropriate direct and convenient walking route when they left the car park.

Proposed Off-Street Car Park Improvements

In the context of sustainability, planning constraints and the limited availability of other site options in the vicinity of Donaghadee town centre that could be viably utilised, it was the officers' view that the optimum solution for the town in terms of improving the off-street car park offering was to rejuvenate, reimage and more effectively promote the substantial car park facilities that already existed as outlined above. It was proposed that a package of measures to address the deficiencies detailed above, could be used to maximise utilisation of the existing Donaghadee town centre car park assets. Those were detailed in appendices which showed drawings of each car park illustrating planned improvements to each. Those included where appropriate:

- Car park surface repairs/renewal
- Clear bay marking
- Disabled parking bays
- Coach parking bays
- Motorcycle parking bays
- New/enhanced lighting
- EV Charge Point
- New on-site information and directional signage
- New/enhanced landscaping features
- Other features to enhance the aesthetic appearance/attractiveness of the car park
- Street located directional signage to the town centre for pedestrians exiting the car park

In addition to those on-site car park enhancements, it was proposed that a scheme of roadside informational and directional signage would be designed and installed, with the agreement and approval of DfI. DfI had already been consulted informally on that and it was officers' belief that they would be agreeable in principle. Such a well-designed and presented scheme of roadside signage would facilitate the efficient and effective guidance of drivers towards and into the off-street car parks, dispelling any ignorance or confusion around the availability of some 340 off-street car parking spaces across five car park sites located just 2 or 3 minutes walking distance from the town centre. Signage would highlight the number of car park bays at each site and the walking distance from each site to the town centre.

Proposed On-Street Car Parking Improvements

Officers recognised that inefficient and inconsiderate use of roadside parking space around the town centre, could contribute to an overall car parking deficit in Donaghadee. Roadside car parking bays were not marked out along the Parade/Shore Street or in New Street/High Street. That meant that the value of the available car parking space at those key roadside locations was not being maximised, with a sub-optimal number of cars being able to avail of total space available at any one time. Furthermore, whilst a one hour waiting restriction was in place in New Street/High Street, there was no such waiting restriction along the Parade.

It was estimated that the provision of bay marking as indicated above would give around fifty designated car parking spaces, improving efficiency of the use of this stretch of roadside parking. Introduction of a waiting time restriction on the Parade would greatly enhance parking turnover, as it was evident that this prime location was routinely used for long stay parking.

From informal discussions with DfI officers it was possible that the Department may be amenable to introduction of bay marking and waiting restrictions at locations as outlined above. A DfI official attended a meeting of the Donaghadee Town Advisory Group (TAG) where the proposals set out in this report were discussed and confirmed that an expression of support from the local TAG and Council would be helpful in moving forward in partnership with the Department on those issues. The Donaghadee TAG had confirmed it was supportive of the direction of travel for car parking improvements in Donaghadee and had confirmed its intention to better utilisation of the existing town centre public car park estate in the meantime. Council officers had agreed to assist the TAG regarding the latter.

Funding

The total estimated cost of this car park improvement scheme was £390,000. Presently there was no identified budget for the project, however it was anticipated that there may be potential to avail of external funding later in the financial year, as often happened during year-to-date spending reviews. To put the Council in the best position to avail of any short notice funding opportunities, it was important that the Council had pre-planned schemes such as this which would be ready to commence without delay and be completed within set time constraints. Aside from

potential external funding opportunities, the existing car park maintenance and repairs budget could potentially be utilised to deliver at least part of the proposed improvement scheme for Donaghadee. Alternatively, when the issue around making of a new Car Park Order for the Borough was resolved and the Council was in a position to embark upon a programme of full implementation of its Car Park Strategy, with associated financial support arising from a new tariff structure, this scheme for Donaghadee could be incorporated into that programme.

The proposed car park improvement project could be undertaken in one or several phases as and when funding became available, subject to further agreement by Council of such details.

In the context of other pressures, at this stage it was not proposed that provision would be made for the required budget as part of the forthcoming 2023-24 estimates process.

RECOMMENDED that:

1. The above Donaghadee car park improvement scheme is approved.
2. Financing of the scheme is sought where possible from external funding sources, with details of any such funding opportunities brought back to Council for approval.
3. Any opportunity for funding/part funding of the scheme is considered within existing Council budgets/underspend in other areas of maintenance/regeneration work.
4. Failing any opportunity to fund the scheme as indicated under recommendations 2 and 3, it will be incorporated into the wider Car park Strategy implementation programme in due course.
5. Notwithstanding recommendations 1-4 relating to improvements in off-street parking facilities, the Council should write to DfI formally requesting that it agrees to work with the Council to progress the on-street car parking improvements referred to in section 2.3 of this report.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor MacArthur, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle welcomed the detailed report and associated costings for the work that was necessary. While he noted that there was no budget for that work at the time of writing, the report gave an indication of where Donaghadee would be headed and he agreed that arrangements should remain in place and be ready for development in the future when funds were available.

Councillor MacArthur welcomed the report as both a representative and resident of the town and was surprised to hear that the town had 337 off street public parking spaces. She believed that residents themselves may struggle to name those areas. The report indicated signage difficulties and she was encouraged that the Council was holding informal discussions with DfI. She agreed with Councillor Boyle that preparations should be put in place so that the project could progress in time.

She had a number of questions for the Head of Assets and Property Services including what was being done to rescind the old car parking legislation and she would welcome the marking out of parking spaces on The Parade. There were a number of elderly people living in that area and carers were finding that they needed to park some distance away from homes. She supported parking permits for carers and was aware that there was an issue with all day parking at that part of the town. Finishing, she referred to The Moat car park and asked for an update on that.

The Director spoke first indicating that there was a defect in the legislation which had been overlooked during the transition at the time of the Review of Public Administration. Council officers had been raising that problem with the Department for years and there had been a bit of traction over recent months, with a working group being established. The Council had been advised that there could be no further progress until a fully functioning Executive and Assembly was reinstated.

There had been a useful meeting with Donaghadee Advisory Group and a representative from the Department had also been in attendance. He also explained that the Department was not yet in a position to proceed with expansion of residents' parking permit schemes outside the original trial areas, but that the Council would continue to monitor that.

The Head of Assets and Property Services explained that Phase 2 of the regeneration at the Moat was in hand and a car park consultant had been appointed.

Councillor MacArthur asked a further question about parking for motor homes and if the large car park at the harbour had assigned spaces for those vehicles. The Director informed the Committee that that site had been identified as a potentially good location for short term motor home parking and that work would be undertaken with colleagues in Environmental Health and Planning to pursue the potential for such facilities in the future which complied with all relevant statutory requirements.

Councillor Cathcart was in agreement with Members and expressed his disappointment at the failings of the Department which in turn hampered the work of the Council. He called for a co-ordinated approach moving forward when it came to car parks and on street parking.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor MacArthur, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. BUILDING CONTROL Q2 ACTIVITY REPORT (1 JULY 2022 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2022)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Environment detailing that the information provided in this report covered, unless otherwise stated, the period 1 July 2022 to 30 September 2022 (Q2 1 July 2022 – 30 September 2022).

The aim of the report was to provide Members with details of some of the key activities of Building Control, the range of services it provided along with details of

level of performance. The report format had been introduced across Regulatory Services.

Applications

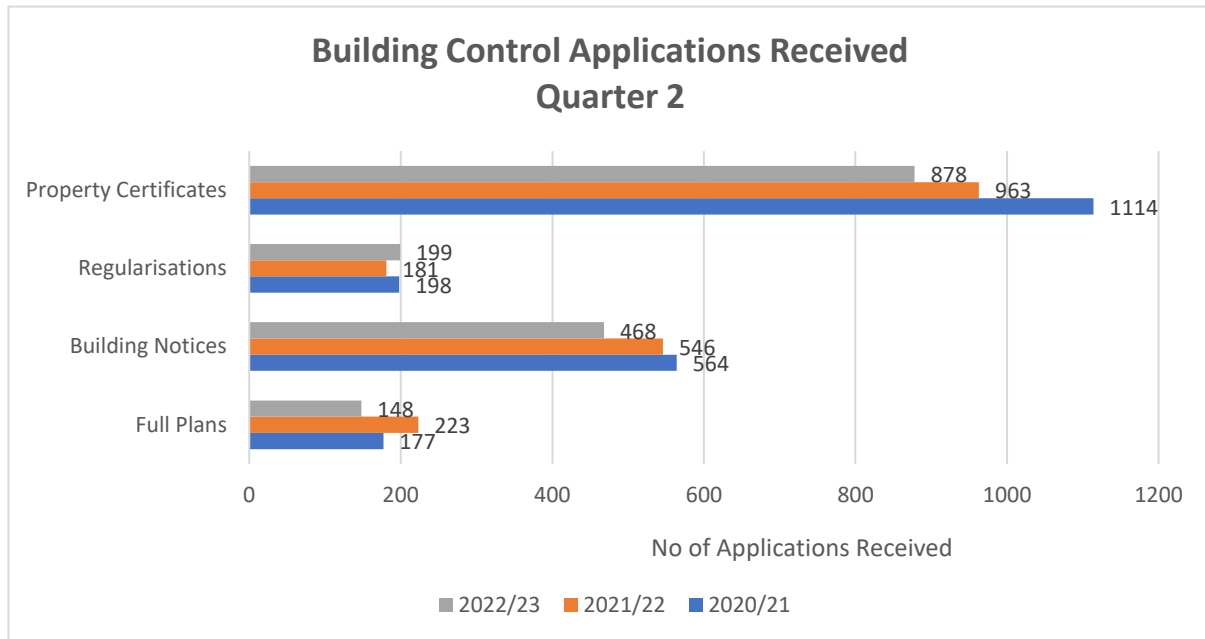
Full Plan applications were made to Building Control for building works to any commercial building, or for larger schemes in relation to residential dwellings.

Building Notice applications were submitted for minor alternations such as internal wall removal, installation of heating boilers or systems, installation of all types of insulation and must be made before work commenced. Those applications were for residential properties only.

Regularisation applications considered all works carried out illegally without a previous Building Control application in both commercial and residential properties. A regularisation application considered all types of work retrospectively and under the Building Regulations in force at the time the works were carried out.

Property Certificate applications were essential to the conveyancing process in the sale of any property, residential or commercial, and provided information on Building Control history and Council held data.

	Period of Report 01/07/2022 – 30/09/2022	01/07/2021- 30/09/2021	01/07/2020 – 30/09/2020
Full Plan Applications	148	223	177
Building Notice Applications	468	546	564
Regularisation Applications	199	181	198
Property Certificate Applications	878	963	1114



The number of Full Plan applications received were very much determined by the economic climate, any changes in bank lending or uncertainty in the marketplace may cause a reduction in Full Plan applications. There was no internal means to control the number of applications received.

Regulatory Approvals and Completions

Turnaround times for full plan applications were measured in calendar days from the day of receipt within the council, too day of posting (inclusive).

Inspections had to be carried out on the day requested due to commercial pressures on the developer/builder/householder, and as such any pressures on that end of the business reflected on the turnaround of plans timescale.

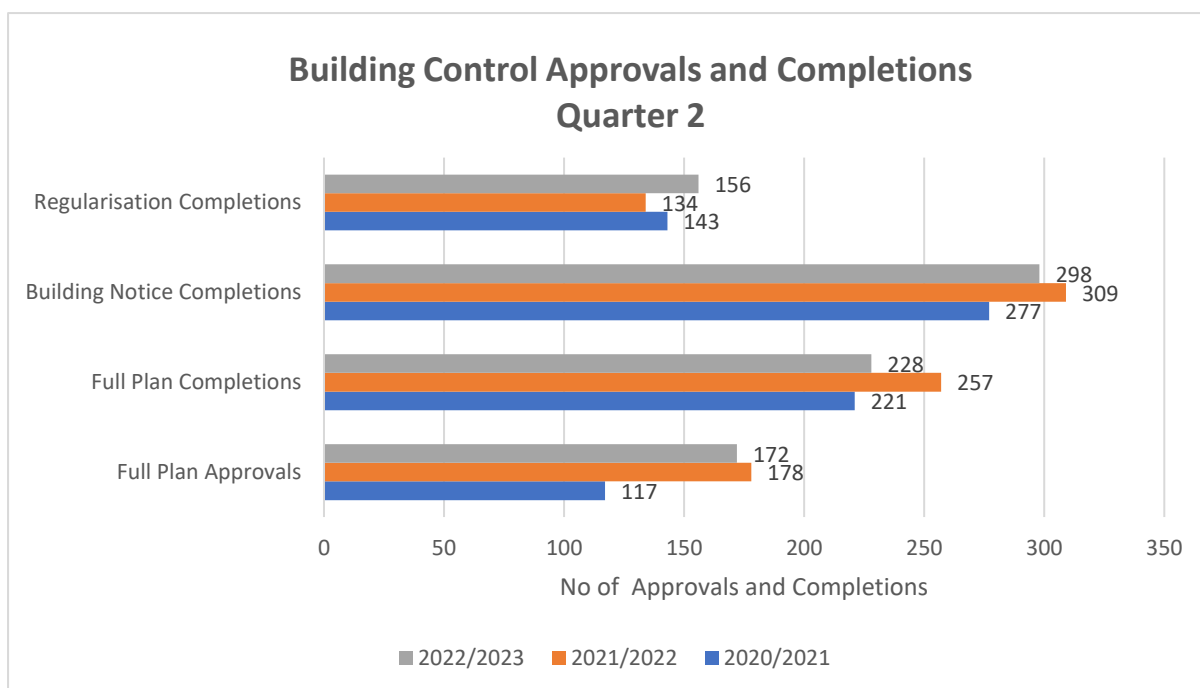
	Period of Report 01/07/2022 – 30/09/2022	Same quarter last year	Comparison	Average number of days to turnaround plan
Domestic Full Plan Turnarounds within target (21 calendar days)	55%	28%	↑	224
Non-Domestic Full Plan Turnarounds within target (35 calendar days)	75%	25%	↑	28

Regulatory Approvals and Completions

The issuing of Building Control Completion Certificates indicated that works were carried out to a satisfactory level and met the current Building Regulations.

Building Control Full Plan Approval indicated that the information and drawings submitted as part of an application meet current Building Regulations and works could commence on site.

	Period of Report 01/07/2022 – 30/09/2022	01/07/2021 – 30/09/2021	01/07/2020 – 30/09/2020
Full Plan Approvals	172	178	117
Full Plan Completions	228	257	221
Building Notice Completions	298	309	227
Regularisation Completions	156	134	143

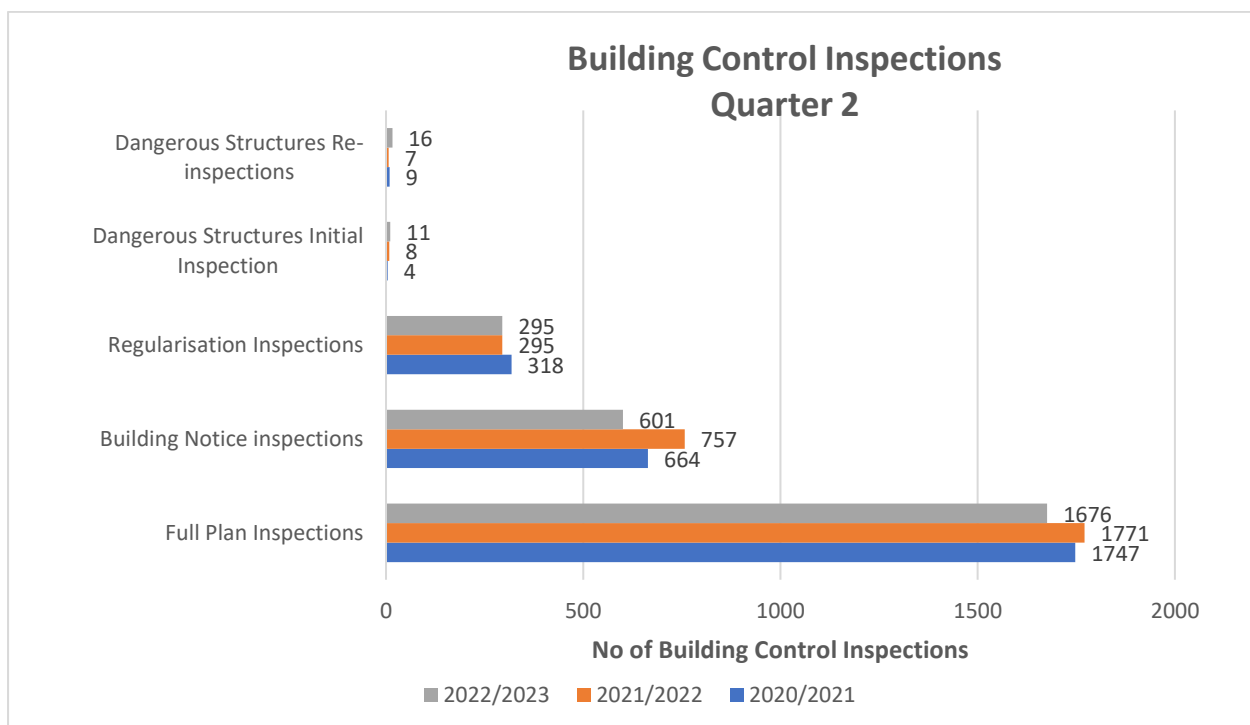


Inspections

Under the Building Regulations applicants were required to give notice at specific points in the building process to allow inspections. The inspections were used to determine compliance and to all for improvement or enforcement.

	Period of Report 01/07/2022 - 30/09/2022	01/07/2021 – 30/09/2021	01/07/2020 – 30/09/2020
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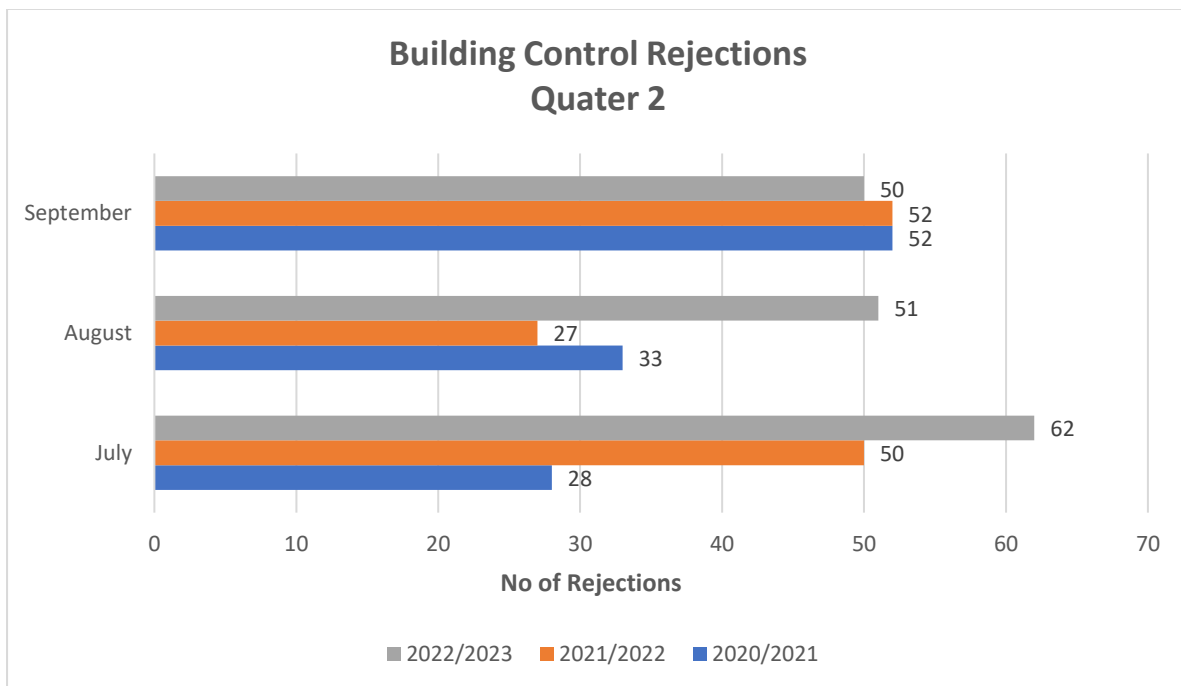
Full Plan Inspections	1676	1771	1747
Building Notice Inspections	601	757	664
Regularisation Inspections	295	295	318
Dangerous structures initial inspection	11	8	4
Dangerous structure re-inspections	16	7	9
Total inspections	2599	2838	2742



Non-Compliance

Where it was not possible to Approve full plan applications they were required to be rejected. Building Control Full Plan Rejection Notices indicated that after assessment there were aspects of the drawings provided that did not meet current Building Regulations. A Building Control Rejection Notice set out the changes or aspects of the drawings provided that needed to be amended. After those amendments were completed, the amended drawings should be submitted to Building Control for further assessment and approval.

	Period of Report 01/07/2022 – 30/09/2022	01/07/2021 – 30/09/2021	01/07/2020 – 30/09/2020
Full Plan Rejection Notice	163	129	113
Dangerous Structure Recommended for legal action	0	0	0
Court Cases	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0



RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report.

Proposed by Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Edmund thanked officers for the in-depth report and noted that the totals increased every year.

Councillor Cathcart indicated that he had a matter to raise which was likely to fall in to staffing matters and he would do so later in the meeting.

Councillor Woods referred to trends and noted the increase in the number of dangerous structures within the Borough and wondered how the Council was made aware of those. The Director explained that this type of regulatory activity was primarily reactionary, and he was unaware of any specific identified reason for the recent increase in incidents.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Edmund, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. NOTICE OF MOTION

9.1 Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Cathcart and Councillor MacArthur

That this Council expresses concern with the number of residential and commercial bins left on public footways in the Borough long after the bin collection date. Bins left on public footways are not only unsightly, they can lead to hygiene and contamination issues, as well as safety concerns, forcing pedestrians on to the road due to the blocking of a footway. This Council notes its own lack of enforcement powers to tackle this issue and expresses concern at the Department for Infrastructure's reluctance to use its own enforcement powers. Accordingly, this Council agrees to write to the Department for Infrastructure asking the Department to tackle this issue. Council officers, will in the meantime, bring back a report to the appropriate committee detailing action that the Council can take under current powers to try to address the issue of bins left on public footways.

Proposed by Councillor Cathcart and seconded by Councillor MacArthur that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Proposing the Notice of Motion Councillor Cathcart acknowledged that on specified collection days bins had to be left on footpaths, and that was acceptable. What he suggested was not acceptable was bins being left on the footways, long after the collection date.

He stated that bins left on footways:

- Obstructed the path for pedestrians, especially those with wheelchairs, mobility scooters and prams, forcing them onto the road.
- Presented danger for people with impaired vision or mobility problems
- Led to vandalism, litter, fly-tipping and arson
- Got blown in the wind and damaged vehicles or other property
- Made it difficult for the Council to keep the street clean.

That had been an ongoing problem for years but the number of complaints he had received had increased recently. Indeed, by pure coincidence, he had received an email that day regarding bins not being removed and blocking the footpath. As it was to be expected, the problem was worse in areas where there were fewer driveway spaces or none at all, so it was worse in the streets close to the City Centre which he represented. Obviously, there would be properties that did not have space

to place bins and that would have been accepted but the vast majority of households in the Borough did.

He highlighted a couple of examples:

In one example, he was contacted by a lady whose house was beside what was essentially a bin collection point in a side street off a main road. Every week that lady had more than thirty bins left outside her house, and she accepted that, however, the bins were not being returned at the end of the day. He had asked waste collection services to investigate that, and out of thirty bins, twenty of those remained at the collection point some twenty-four hours after the collection date. He was grateful to Council officers who issued letters to residents in respect of that and the situation did improve, but after a while, old habits began to come back and the situation flared up again. The Council could take no further action other than to ask the residents to be considerate.

In another example, a street in Bangor City Centre was having problems with both commercial and residential bins permanently on the footpath and indeed in some cases on the road causing obstruction and issues with fly-tipping. The Council could not take action against a non-Council commercial bin contractor and the Department for Infrastructure did not want to get involved when it was contacted about the matter.

He compared the situation in Northern Ireland to that of England where it was relatively straightforward to act in those situations. Councils had the power to issue fixed penalties under section 46A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Those could be issued when householders did not follow waste collection rules, and their failure to comply did one of the following:

- caused or was likely to cause a nuisance
- had a negative effect or was likely to have a detrimental effect on local amenities.

Examples

Fixed penalties could be issued if householders put waste out so it:

- caused an obstruction to neighbours, such as forcing people using wheelchairs or buggies to walk on the road
- restricted access to the pavement or street, for example leaving waste receptacles (bins or bags) out for several days
- was likely to attract vermin like foxes and rats, such as leaving bags or open receptacles out days before a waste collection
- was unsightly (torn bags or overturned receptacles were left out)

How to issue fixed penalties

There were three stages

1. Written warning

Write to the householder and explain the nuisance:

If the householder did not comply, and Notice of Intent could be issued.

2. Notice of Intent

A Notice of Intent must name the householder and tell them: they may get a fixed penalty and why

3. Final notice

A final notice twenty-eight days after the Notice of Intent. The householder's response must be considered before that was done.

The notice must name the householder and tell them:

- why they had been given a fixed penalty
- [how much they must pay, noting the maximum full penalty that can be applied was £80](#) and how it could be paid
- the deadline for the payment
- what happened if they paid the penalty early, for example if there was a discount
- what happened if they did not pay
- how they could appeal

In Northern Ireland, he stated that it was more complicated because the Council did not have powers to deal with the problem and it was the Department for Infrastructure that should be taking the lead role.

On the Department's Roads website obstructions could be reported and it stated that:

"If a person without lawful authority or excuse in any way wilfully obstructs the free passage of cars/pedestrians along a road or street, that person is guilty of an offence. In such cases the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has legal powers and may enforce removal."

He informed the Committee that nothing had ever happened when he had raised the issue of bins on footpaths. He had asked the former Minister of that Department, Nichola Mallon, the following questions:

Can I ask you to detail the number of fines/enforcement actions undertaken in Bangor in the last ten years regarding bins left on footways?

Can I ask whether your Department is actively enforcing this matter that is of concern to the people I represent?

Response from Minister Mallon in February 2021.

"My Department considers that only those bins that are 'stored' on the public road / footway on a permanent basis or are left for long periods after emptying are considered to represent an obstruction, particularly where footways / roads are narrow. Causing an obstruction of the public road, including a footway, is an offence under Article 88 of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, however, enforcement under this Article is a matter for the PSNI. As such, my Department does not actively carry out enforcement or hold any records of the number of fines or enforcement actions undertaken in relation to this issue."

So, Article 88 of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 stated:

Any person who, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, in any way intentionally or negligently obstructs the free passage along a road shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 2 on the standard scale.

Councillor Cathcart undertook a Freedom of Information request to the PSNI enquiring:

- Can I ask you to detail the number of fines/enforcement actions undertaken in Ards and North Down area in the last ten years regarding bins left on footways?
- Can I ask whether the police are actively enforcing this matter that is of concern to the people I represent?

“In respect of Section 1(1)(a) of the Act we can confirm that the Police Service of Northern Ireland does not hold information in relation to your requests. All enquiries made in relation to your request failed to locate any records or documents relevant to your request based on the information you have provided. PSNI may enforce “Obstruction” type offences, however ONLY when they involve a motor vehicle and/or trailer. We do not have any powers that would allow us to issue penalty notices in the circumstances described. In other parts of the United Kingdom, Councils had powers to deal with homeowners who place their bins out on the wrong day for collection, which if available in your area, would seem pertinent to the problem being highlighted. To further assist there were a total of 40 fixed penalty notices issued in C District over the past 10 years (although boundaries may have changed), however as articulated these would not be applicable for bins on a footway.

It was for this reason that he was proposing that the Council write to the Department to clarify its power and ask it to enforce it if it had relevant powers, or to devolve/create powers for local Councils like were in place in England. He believed that that power was best placed with the Council since it already dealt with bin issues and fly-tipping.

He was calling for a report on what could be done in the meantime. He was aware that the Council could issue letters, pay educational visits and remind the public on its communication channels. He did believe that Council staff also needed to play a part in respectfully leaving bins tidily after they had been emptied.

Councillor Cathcart recognised that a number of properties did not have space to place bins on their own property and obviously the Council would need to be reasonable in certain circumstances. He suggested that in those cases plastic sacks could be provided or other solutions found.

Concluding he said that bins left on footways beyond collection day was a difficult problem to solve but it was made harder by the lack of enforcement powers locally. Council officers had been helpful when he had raised the issue, but it was difficult to make progress when there were no consequences of non-compliance. He called for

Members to support his Motion to see what could be done to ultimately ensure safer and cleaner streets.

Seconding the Motion Councillor MacArthur thought the Motion had been summed up adequately and she looked at the problem also as the Age Friendly Champion for the Council. She had undertaken a walkability audit on the issues faced by the elderly, physically disabled and visually impaired and in some cases had found that these people were being forced on to the road to accommodate clutter on footpaths. She suggested that the threat of a penalty could improve the position greatly.

Councillor Boyle stated that he would support the Motion to see if the Council could do anything to improve the situation in the absence of the Department taking a lead or the police stepping in. He thought there must be hotspots for this issue around the Borough particularly in urban areas and those could be targeted since he had never received a complaint about it within his own constituency. He also praised the work of the Council in collecting the bins of the Borough faithfully.

Councillor Woods had witnessed similar problems within her own constituency in Holywood particularly within the terraced streets where bins were collected at a single point. She added that some commercial bins in the centre of Holywood were left out permanently blocking parking spaces on the road. She could not understand why the Department did not want to manage the situation and believed that the position was not helped by the lack of a functioning government at Stormont. She understood the lack of space for bins at some locations and businesses and hoped that through the planning and building control process, that could be built in as standard.

Councillor Smart and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter also gave their support to the Motion and were aware of the issues in some parts of the larger towns within the Borough. The matter was also being considered by the Disability Forum. It was of regret that the Council was still powerless to address these problems, but it was hoped that something could be done going forward.

Councillor Cathcart thanked Members for their comments and stressed that it was only to address the matter of bins being left out deliberately over a period of time. He would welcome a report to see what could be done to improve the situation.

AGREED.

10. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Cummings, seconded by Councillor Edmund, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

Arising from Item 8 - Building Control Q2 Activity Report (1 July 2022 to 30 September 2022)

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS
AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING
THAT INFORMATION)**

**11. PROPOSED ARC21 RESIDUAL WASTE TREATMENT
PROJECT – UPDATE REPORT**
(Appendix X)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS
AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING
THAT INFORMATION)**

**12. REVIEW OF COMMERCIAL WASTE SERVICE CHARGES –
2023/24**

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS
AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING
THAT INFORMATION)**

13. CCTV CONTROL ROOM OPERATOR CONTRACT

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION
SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS
AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING
THAT INFORMATION)**

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

**AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by
Councillor Edmund, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.**

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 9.14 pm.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Place & Prosperity Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Thursday 5 January 2023 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Walker

Aldermen: Armstrong-Cotter M Smith (Zoom)
McDowell (7.01pm) Wilson (Zoom 7.01pm)

Councillors: Adair Dunlop (Zoom)
Blaney (Zoom) Kennedy
Brooks McClean (7.07pm)
Cummings McKimm

In Attendance: Director of Place (S McCullough), Director of Prosperity (A McCullough), Head of Regeneration (B Dorrian), Head of Tourism (S Mahaffy), Head of Economic Development (C McGill) and Democratic Services Officer (P Foster)

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The Chairman proceeded to wish members a Happy New Year and welcomed Ann McCullough to the Committee in her new role as Director of Prosperity. At this stage the Chairman noted those members who were present via Zoom.

NOTED.

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman (Councillor Walker) sought apologies at this stage.

Apologies had been received from Councillors Gilmour and Irvine.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman sought Declarations of Interest at this stage, and none were declared.

NOTED.

3. GCSE SUPPORT REVISION PROGRAMME UPDATE (FILE ED90)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity stating that building upon the highly successful Easter School operating in West Belfast for over 20 years, Ards and North Down Borough Council was approached by Belfast City Council in 2019 as it was exploring extending this provision outside the city. The intention of the project was to engage young people (Year 12) who had the potential to achieve a grade C in GCSE English and Maths but who were at risk of not achieving that.

The Economic Development Section approached the schools in the Borough where GCSE levels of achievement from A* to C in Maths and English fell below 50% of the regional average, in order to assess their interest in the programme.

Two schools responded and participated in the programme: Strangford Integrated College and Nendrum College. Despite some delays due to the pandemic in implementing the scheme, this was done successfully in 2021 and this was an updated report on the programme.

Programme Delivery

West Belfast Partnership Board agreed the following delivery approach with both Colleges:

- Face to face Maths and English GCSE delivery would begin in the Autumn Term 2021 at both Strangford College and Nendrum College.
- Fifty students would participate (twenty-five at each College).
- The Colleges would identify those students most in need of GCSE revision support.
- All outcomes within contract would be achieved and partnership working efforts would seek to bring as much additionality as possible to ensure the outcomes.
- The majority of participants would be Year 12 students, with a small number of Year 11 students identified and support for Year 13 students who did not achieve in Year 12.
- Year 11 and Year 13 were additional to the original contract in order to provide support to make up for almost two academic years of lost learning. It was anticipated that the numbers of Years 11 and 13 would be no more than 20% of the overall participant numbers. This flexible approach would ensure that students most in need of support would have access to additional classes.
- Participating students would benefit from twenty hours of GCSE support in English or Maths.

Programme Objectives

The objectives of this programme were to:

- Contribute to improving GCSE attainment levels
- Engage with and develop relationships with schools, educators and parents/guardians that would result in securing their commitment and 'buy in'

- Address specific learning needs for GCSE Mathematics and English students by providing targeted and focused out of school hours learning support interventions.
- Ensure that each young person received the supports required within Maths and/or English.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased % in the number of students maintaining predicted Grade C
- Increased % in the number of students exceeding their predicted Grade
- Increased % in the number of students attaining Grade C or above
- 70% participation rate by students (i.e. attendance at GCSE Support classes)

Participant Criterion

The GCSE Maths and English Support Programme would be open to young people:

- Attending Strangford Integrated College or Nendrum College
- In Key Stage 4 (Year 11/12) studying towards GCSE English and Maths
- At high risk of not achieving GCSE Maths and/or English at Grade C but had the potential to achieve this.
- Referred into the programme from teachers/educators that could evidence/show projected grades ensuring suitability for the programme.

It was anticipated that the majority of young people participating would be students who were entitled to Free School Meals and / or lived in areas of disadvantage.

PROGRAMME QUANTITATIVE DATA

The tables below presented the GCSE grades achieved by the college students against their predicted grades, both in Maths and English for Nendrum College and in English only for Strangford College as the 25 pupils enrolled at Strangford college opted for English support only:

GCSE Results Nendrum College

Students attending the GCSE Maths Supports Programme

Predicted Maths GCSE Grade	Achieved Maths GCSE Grade
C	C
C/D	C+
C/D	C+
C	C+
E	C
E	C+
C	C
C/D	C+
C	C
C	C+
D	C
D	C
C	C

All thirteen students who attended the GCSE Maths Supports Programme achieved a C or C+ GCSE grade. Four pupils maintained their predicted grade C and nine achieved better than their predicted grade.

Students attending the GCSE English Supports Programme

Predicted English GCSE Grade	Achieved English GCSE Grade
D	C+
D	C
C/D	C
D	C
C	C+
D	C+
C	C+
C	C
D	C
C/D	C+
D	D
C	C

Eleven of the twelve students who attended the GCSE English Supports Programme achieved a C or C+ GCSE grade. Two pupils maintained their predicted grade and ten achieved better than their predicted grade.

GCSE Results Strangford College (GCSE English Support only)

Students attending the GCSE English Supports Programme.

Predicted English GCSE Grade	Achieved English GCSE Grade
C	C*
C	C
C	C
C/D	C*
C/D	G
C	C
C/D	B
C/C*	B
D	C*
C	C*
C/D	B
D	D
D	D
D	B
E/D	B
C	B
C	B
C	D
D	C
E/D	C
B	A
C	C*
C	C*
C/D	C

C	C*
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Twenty-one students gained a C grade or above, with one student being awarded an A grade, and seven students achieving a B grade.

Five students maintained their predicted grade (3 X Grade C and 2 X Grade D), two students achieved lower than their predicted grade (1 X C/D to G and 1 X C to D), eighteen students achieved higher than their predicted grade.

Participation and attendance

The tables below presented the quantitative data showing student participation in the GCSE English GCSE Support Programme (both Colleges) and the Maths GCSE Support Programme (Nendrum College).

Strangford College: English				
Subject	No. of Students	Year 12	Predicted Grade	Attendance %
English	25	25	B x 1 C x 12 C/D x 5 D x 5 E x 2	18 x 100% 4 x 90% 2 x 80% 1 x 70% Average: 95.6%

Nendrum College: English				
Subject	No. of Students	Year 12	Predicted Grade	Attendance %
English	12	12	C x 4 C/D x 2 D x 6	12 x 100% Average: 100%

Nendrum College: Maths					
Subject	Tier	No Students	Year 12	Predicted Grade	Attendance %
Maths	13 x Foundation	13	13	C x 6 C/D x 3 D x 2 E x 2	11 x 100% 1 x 90% 1 x 80% Average 97%

The table below provided an overall summary of the quantitative data.

Overall Totals for Strangford and Nendrum				
Subject	No Students	Year 12	Predicted Grade	Attendance %
English	37	37	B x 1 C x 16 C/D x 7 D x 11 E x 2	97.8%
Maths	13	13	C x 6 C/D x 3	90%

Foundation Tier			D x 2 E x 2	
Totals	50	50		Average: 95.2%

Super Output Areas and Free School Meal Entitlement

Using the postcodes supplied it was possible to identify students living in the 30% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas. The Application Forms also identified those students in receipt of Free School Meals. The table below showed the students living in the 30% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas, those who received Free School Meals or both.

College and Programme	Top 30% SOA and FSM	Top 30% SOA and FSM %	Top 30% SOA	SOA %	FSM	FSM %
Strangford English (n=25)	2	8%	3	12%	3	12%
Nendrum English (n = 12)	2	16.7%	3	25%	2	16.7%
Nendrum Maths (n = 13)	5	33.3%	2	15.4%	1	7.7%
Total	9	18%	8	16%	6	12%

Twenty-three students that participated in the GCSE Support Programmes either lived in one of the top 20% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas in NI, were in receipt of Free School Meals, or both. This represented 46% of the total number of participating students.

GCSE Support Programme outcomes

The table below considered the extent to which the Programme objectives were met:

Programme Objectives	Comment
Contribute to improving GCSE attainment levels	<p>Nendrum College:</p> <p><u>Maths:</u> All thirteen students who attended the GCSE Maths Supports Programme achieved a C or C+ GCSE grade. Four pupils maintained their predicted grade C and nine achieved better than their predicted grade.</p> <p><u>English:</u> Eleven of the twelve students who attended the GCSE English Supports Programme achieved a C or C+ GCSE grade. Two pupils maintained their predicted grade and ten achieved better than their predicted grade.</p> <p>Strangford College (English only)</p> <p>Five students maintained their predicted grade (3 X Grade C and 2 X Grade D), two students achieved lower than their predicted grade (1 X</p>

	C/D to G and 1X C to D), eighteen students achieved higher than their predicted grade.
Engage with and develop relationships with schools, educators and parents/guardians that will result in securing their commitment and 'buy in'	Fully met, as demonstrated by high level of attendance from all students. 47 (n=48) students said they were treated well by the tutors (1 student was unsure). The majority of students believed this was an environment in which they could learn effectively.
Address specific learning needs for GCSE Mathematics and English students by providing targeted and focused out of school hours learning support interventions.	Yes – evidenced by Teacher comments who were 'able to target areas of weakness'. All students identified benefits, with 47 (n=48) students said they improved in English or Maths. The majority of students said they benefitted from: * learning new things, skills and methods * going over things they didn't understand before * things being explained in different ways so they understood more * studying and learning about topics they were unsure about
Ensure that each young person receives the support required within Maths and/or English.	Yes – evidenced by Tutors assessing that every student progressed in English or Maths; which was also the assessment of the students about their own progress.

Furthermore, the majority of students reported that they felt more confident about studying English or Maths, that they received the support they needed, and that the GCSE Programme was useful.

Student Participation Criterion

As agreed with West Belfast Partnership Board at the outset, fifty Year 12 students participated in the Programme (twenty-five at each College), which was delivered face-to-face with groups of students and was delivered over twenty hours.

All the participant criteria were met. Each participating student was assessed by their English or Maths Teacher, with every Programme application form stating that each student was 'at significant risk of not obtaining a Grade C in English without additional support'. Those students on a predicted Grade C were 'within 5% points of Grade D'. In addition, 46% of students lived in the top 30% most deprived areas, were in receipt of Free School Meals, or both:

- 18% of students lived in the top 30% most deprived areas and were in receipt of Free School Meals
- 16% of students lived in the top 30% most deprived areas
- 12% of students were in receipt of Free School Meals

Conclusion:

The West Belfast Partnership Board had now produced a final evaluation report in order to inform the Council of the following objectives:

- Increased % in the number of students maintaining predicted Grade C
- Increased % in the number of students exceeding their predicted Grade
- Increased % in the number of students attaining Grade C or above

Outcome	%	Comment
% of the number of participating students maintaining predicted Grade C	16%	8 participating students (n=50) achieved their predicted grade NB: 3 students maintained predicted Grade D and 2 students achieved below predicted grade and did not pass their GCSE. In total 5 students did not pass.
% of the number of participating students exceeding their predicted Grade	74%	37 participating students (n=50) achieved a higher GCSE grade than the predicted grade prior to their engagement in the GCSE Supports Programme.
70% of the number of participating students attaining Grade C or above	92%	Of the 50 students who participated in the GCSE Programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 students achieved Grade C or C+ in their Maths GCSE • 33 students achieved Grade C or above in their English GCSE.

In terms of participation:

70% participation rate by students (ie attendance at GCSE Supports classes)	82%	Significantly exceeded, 41 students (n = 50) attended every session. The lowest participant rate was attained by one student who attended 70% of the sessions; showing that this outcome was achieved by every student.
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Belfast City Council had confirmed that it had secured a one-year extension to the programme for the 2022-23 academic year with the programme re-starting in the Autumn and a Service Level Agreement had now been signed between both parties following the approval of the Council to participate in this one-year programme at a cost of £9,000.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the updated report highlighting the outcomes of the programme in terms of actual grades achieved against predicted grades.

Councillor McKimm proposed, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor McKimm, welcomed the report and noted the wonderful achievements documented within it for those struggling to find a way into education.

However, he did express some disappointment that more schools had not become involved with the programme and continuing he expressed his thanks to all of those involved with it.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter shared Councillor McKimm's disappointment and suggested that consideration was given to involving local Community Networks which had successfully run several programmes of this nature during the Covid19 Pandemic. Continuing she acknowledged the importance of English and Maths qualifications and offered her congratulations to all of those who had enjoyed success through the programme.

Concurring with the previous two speakers, Councillor Adair stated that he had issues attaining an English qualification so could appreciate the difficulties associated with that. He added that the Council was an enabler and programmes such as this put people at the heart of its ethos. He too offered his congratulations to all of those who had successfully completed the course adding that he hoped it would continue to grow.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor McKimm, seconded by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, that the recommendation be adopted.

4. FLAGSHIP, HIGH STREET ENTRANCE

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place stating that the Flagship was about to open in a new format which included an indoor market and food offerings. The Council had been approached by the owner to seek permission to remove two benches and three trees from outside the High Street entrance. This would then be used as a new gateway to the Flagship Centre. The removal would require reinstatement of the pavement to the same standard as the existing public realm using the same materials.

Planning permission for the works had been approved and DfI Roads had no objections to the removal of the items.

The picture below showed the area in question:



RECOMMENDED that Council agrees to the removal of the trees and benches with the proviso that the pavement is reinstated to the required standard and all costs are met by the applicant.

Councillor Dunlop proposed, seconded by Alderman Wilson, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Councillor McClean entered the meeting at this stage – 7.07pm)

In response to a query from the proposer, Councillor Dunlop, the Head of Regeneration confirmed that it was proposed to relocate the three trees and reuse the benches elsewhere.

Alderman Wilson commented on the very exciting plans for the Flagship Centre, adding that his question in relation to the trees had already been answered by the officer.

At this stage Councillor McKimm commented on the future plans for the Flagship Centre which would see it reinstated to its original purpose and the reopening of the front doors onto Main Street, Bangor. He encouraged members to support the recommendation which was before them.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Dunlop, seconded by Alderman Wilson, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. REVIEW OF VILLAGE ACTION PLANS (FILE RDP189)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Place stating that as members would be aware, the Council had developed a suite of 16 Integrated Village Plans, some of which dated back to 2016. Eight of the Plans were reviewed in 2018 via funding support from the Rural Development Programme's Village Renewal Scheme.

Most of the Plans now required updating. Given the current constraints on budgets and lack of available external revenue funding, officers would undertake a review of each of the Village Action Plans in-house.

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the review would be to establish the current priorities for each of the local communities in the Borough's rural villages. This provided village communities with an opportunity to reflect on the actions within their plans, to consider their status and to feedback how relevant they still were.

The Action Plan Review process would also assist the Council with the development of projects, should any future funding opportunities become available, for example, through PEACE PLUS or the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Village Action Plan Review – Process

In the first instance the Village's Community Action Groups would undertake a review of their Action Plan. Following this, public meetings/drop-in sessions would be held in each village so all groups, residents and businesses could feed into the Action Plan Review. A questionnaire had also been developed which would be available in hard copy and online.

To promote and encourage maximum participation in this process, flyers would be produced and delivered locally, and the drop-in sessions would be advertised on the Council's social media platforms.

Village Action Plan Review – Timeline

It was anticipated that six reviews would be completed by March 2023, with the remaining 10 being finished by March 2024.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the above.

Councillor Adair proposed, seconded by Councillor Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

The proposer, Councillor Adair, welcomed the report which he said would ensure all villages were best placed to secure funding once it became available. He recalled that back in 2018 £100,000 had been received by all the villages with a further £1.8M being made available through the Small Settlements Scheme. He added that recently in the village of Portavogie works had been completed on the Promenade enabled by funding received from the Seaflag Fisheries Fund. Continuing Councillor Adair asked that Ballyhalbert was prioritised for any funding which may become available and that those statutory agencies be encouraged to support this. He sought clarification on which of the six proposed reviews would be completed by March 2023.

In response the Head of Regeneration confirmed that Ballyhalbert along with those other villages which had missed out on previous funding would be prioritised on this occasion. He also confirmed that officers were ready to work with those Groups once they were ready to do so adding that other methods of consultation were also being considered in order to get as broad a view as possible.

Councillor Adair welcomed the officer's comments.

Welcoming the report, the seconder, Councillor Cummings, noted the short timelines involved up to March 2023 and sought reassurance from officers that those could be met.

The Head of Regeneration confirmed that meetings had already been set up and officers were content the deadlines could be met.

Councillor Cummings took the opportunity to commend officers on the progress which had been made to date and agreed that statutory agencies needed to be more aware of the deadlines Councils were required to adhere to.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Adair, seconded by Councillor Cummings, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. UPDATE ON PIPE BAND CHAMPIONSHIPS (FILE TO:EV/64)

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED:- Report from the Director of Prosperity stating that In October 2022, the Regeneration and Development Committee was presented with the Economic Appraisal report on the Ards and North Down Borough Council Pipe Band Championships that took place in Bangor in 2022 and Newtownards in 2019. Further to the presentation of this report it was:

‘Agreed that Council invites a deputation from RSPBANI to speak to this Committee at the earliest opportunity to provide feedback to Members on their preferences and requirements for a venue and how the event can be enhanced for Borough residents as well as the success of the RSPBANI’.

The Head of Tourism contacted the Project Officer of the Royal Society of Pipe Bands Association NI (RSPBANI) at the start of November and further to that received correspondence from the Association following discussion at their Executive meeting. The correspondence was attached.

Following receipt of the letter, officers met with the Chair, the Treasurer and the Project Officer from RSPBANI to clarify the Council’s Pipe Band Championship 2023 date and bid amount. At this meeting the representatives confirmed that both Bangor and Newtownards were suitable locations for the event and were keen to work with the Council to deliver an event should a bid be forthcoming and confirmed.

The RSPBANI representatives confirmed that an event was deliverable for a bid of £14,000 (as per 2021), however it was acknowledged that some additional infrastructure such as toilets should be included in an increased bid. The Council would have the option to increase the bid to include this element or source and support the event via its own remaining budget.

At the meeting, RSPBANI representatives confirmed that the Ards Airfield and Castle Park were suitable venues, and both received good feedback from participating bands. When the Bangor venue was discussed, the representatives enquired about the use of Ward Park to potentially alleviate some traffic management issues. It was felt that a traffic management plan, at additional cost, may be required for Castle Park and/or Ward Park considering recent event planning requirements for other Bangor events. It was acknowledged that parking arrangements for the Bangor event, at either venue, may be problematic unless other parking arrangements at locations close by could be secured.

Officers undertook to establish availability of the three venues in the first instance and review traffic management requirements at each location. This was currently a work in progress at the time of writing the report.

Budget

The Council’s Pipe Band Championship Event had been allocated £21,500 in the Business Case put forward in the Rates Setting Process. The current escalating costs relating to all event infrastructure and programming continued to be very challenging for officers in the event planning process. Research would indicate that a budget of £26,500 would be required to deliver the event in Newtownards and an indicative budget of £21,500 would cover either Bangor venue (final costings on traffic management to be developed/confirmed). This would cover the key event infrastructure requirements, with a reduced/minimal programming elements. The provisional budget does not include any Council marketing beyond the normal digital ‘push’ given to grant or supported partner events.

Future Potential Opportunities

During the meeting, RSPBANI representatives advised officers that should Council be interested in exploring larger scale Pipe Band events the following were available for consideration. The information provided was a high-level outline only and further information on each event, the bid process, the event infrastructure requirements and available Council resource, both financial and physical, to deliver any such opportunity alongside other Council committed Tourism Events in the chosen year, would need careful assessment.

Event Title	Indicative Bid Amount (current)	Normal calendar month	Note	Organising Body	Approx. attendee figure 2022**
All Ireland Pipe Band Championships	£25,000	1 st weekend July	Attract ROI bands. Rotates NI/ROI will be in NI this year and ROI in 2024	RSPBANI	5000 New Ross (includes 30 Bands & 24 Drum Majors). Lower numbers in 2022 due to the location in County Wexford.
Ulster Pipe Band Championships	£25,000	1 st weekend August	Event available 2024* onwards	RSPBANI	4500 Ballymena includes 39 Bands & 31 Drum Majors
UK Championships	£75,000	2 nd Saturday in June	Available 2024 Potential clash with Council Tourism event	RSPBA	8000 Lurgan (includes 39 Bands & 30 Drum Majors)
European Pipe Band Championships	£75,000 plus	Last Saturday in July		RSPBA	17,000 Inverness (includes 90 Bands & 25 Drum Majors)

*Ward Park Council booking in place for major event first weekend in August until at least 2024.

** Numbers approximate. RSPABNI advise likely lower with two full years of no competitions post Covid-19. (Sourced via RSPBANI Glasgow and internet.)

All the above events would require Council to submit an Expression of Interest to host any of those, further to a successfully EOI the Council would then be invited to make a formal 'Bid', the outcome of which would be determined by the organising body.

At this juncture a decision was required regarding the Council bid and location for the Council's Pipe Band Championship event to allow officers and RSPBANI sufficient provisional planning time for the 2023 event, subject to the Rates Setting process. The decision required confirmation on bid amount, Council budget and location.

RECOMMENDED that Council approves that:

1. Officers submit a bid for the Council's Pipe Band Championship 2023 to the RSPBANI at £14,000 with a total Council allocated budget to a maximum of £26,500, subject to the Rates Setting process and confirmation of bid by RSPBANI, and further recommends that:
 2. Council decides on the host location for the annual Council's Pipe Band Championship from one of the following three options:
 - Option 1
Bangor - Castle Park or Ward Park. Ward Park will be dependent on officer confirmation of available suitable additional parking or
 - Option 2
Newtownards - Newtownards Airfield, Newtownards.
 - Option 3
Rotate the hosting of the event in Bangor and Newtownards Airfield, the event being at the Newtownards Airfield in 2023 and Bangor in 2024, subject to annual negotiations with the Ulster Flying Club and the bidding process.

The Chairman reminded Members that previously there had been much discussion about this matter and as such he encouraged Members to refer to the evidence before them detailing the views of the Pipe Band Association NI and the Economic Appraisal. He stated that he would be asking Members to consider the matter in two separate parts as detailed within the report recommendation. At this stage he sought a proposer for Part 1 of the recommendation.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Alderman McDowell, that officers submit a bid for the Council's Pipe Band Championship 2023 to the RSPBANI at £14,000 with a total Council allocated budget to a maximum of £26,500, subject to the Rates Setting process and confirmation of bid by RSPBANI.

The proposer, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, agreed that there had already been plenty of discussion on where to hold the Pipe Band Championships, adding that it was an absolute dream to be able to host it within the Ards and North Down Borough. Continuing she also acknowledged the hard work which had been undertaken to make this happen and as such she was delighted to put forward the proposal.

Commenting as seconder, Alderman McDowell, said that the amount of support there was for the Pipe Band Championships was very evident. He also acknowledged the number of local bands which originated from the Borough who participated in this and as such he felt it was important to continue to support the event.

At this stage Councillor McClean sought clarification on what was meant by 'subject to the Rates Setting process'.

The Head of Tourism advised that, as with all events, the team awaited confirmation of all budgets from the Council's Rate Setting process.

The Director of Place confirmed that a detailed Business Case had been submitted for the Tourism Events in 2023, which included the Pipe Bangor Championships and as such had been included within the appendix circulated to Members as part of the Rates Setting process. She further advised Members that this event was one of seven to be considered as part of that process.

In response to a further query from Councillor McClean, the Head of Tourism acknowledged that the Rate Setting process had already commenced and she warned Members of the challenging costs set to impact Council events surrounding traffic management. Continuing she suggested that those costs could equate to up to £4,000 for both the Newtownards and Bangor proposed sites.

AGREED.

At this stage the Chairman sought a proposal for the second part of the report's recommendation.

Alderman Armstrong-Cotter proposed, seconded by Councillor Adair, that the Council proceeds with Option 3 to rotate the hosting of the event between Bangor and Newtownards Airfield, the event being at the Newtownards Airfield in 2023 and Bangor in 2024, subject to annual negotiations with the Ulster Flying Club and the bidding process.

The proposer, Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, expressed the view that this option was the most fair and equitable one and in the spirit of a new year she encouraged all Members to support this. She stated that if Members so wished they could get down to the nitty gritty matters in respect of costings, but she felt there was no need to for that and instead the Council needed to do the right thing and work better together. Referring to the response received from the Pipe Band Association NI she felt that was particularly embarrassing for the Council as it effectively stated that it did not wish to be part of Council's squabble. Considering that, she felt this option offered the best way forward for all to host it alternatively in Newtownards and Bangor.

The seconder, Councillor Adair, concurred with the comments made by his colleague adding that the Council needed to move forward as one Borough. He referred to Bangor's recent award of City status and Newtownards winning awards for 'Best

High Street' stating that the Council should endeavour to work together in order to promote the entire Borough.

Councillor McClean acknowledged the comments made by both the proposer and the seconder as well as those included in the response letter from the Pipe Band Association NI. While the event was originally held in Bangor which was where he felt it should remain, he appreciated the comments made by Alderman Armstrong-Cotter and Councillor Adair and therefore appreciated the sentiment behind the proposal before them.

Alderman McDowell stated that the Pipe Bands were equally loved and enjoyed in both Newtownards and Bangor. He stated that it would be difficult to pitch one against the other, therefore the proposal before Members represented the best way forward. In respect of the traffic management costs referred to by the officer, he suggested that those may not be as much as had originally been anticipated with potential for those now to be reduced.

At this stage Councillor McKimm expressed the view that to have a difference of opinion in matters such as this was in no way an attempt to try to tear people down or disrespect them. He referred to the many difficult decisions to be taken by Members during the coming weeks as part of the Council's Rate Setting process. Continuing he stated that he was a Newtownards man and as such he was content to support the proposal as put forward, adding that it was important to do this graciously and move into the new year on this vein of goodwill.

Alderman Wilson commented that everyone was well aware of his views on this matter, however given the depth of compassion which Members had displayed in their comments this evening he was content to support the proposal.

Councillor Blaney also welcomed the good spirit which had been demonstrated by Members this evening and agreed that Option 3 provided the best way forward for the entire Borough.

In summing up Alderman Armstrong-Cotter thanked her colleagues for their support, adding that it was appreciated. She referred to the difficulties currently being faced by many constituents, stating that it was time for the Council to work together for the sake of its ratepayers. Alderman Armstrong-Cotter also took the opportunity to express her thanks to officers for the additional work which had been undertaken in respect of this matter.

AGREED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Alderman McDowell, that officers submit a bid for the Council's Pipe Band Championship 2023 to the RSPBANI at £14,000 with a total Council allocated budget to a maximum of £26,500, subject to the Rates Setting process and confirmation of bid by RSPBANI.

FURTHER AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Councillor Adair, that the Council proceeds

with Option 3 to rotate the hosting of the event in Bangor and Newtownards Airfield, the event being at the Newtownards Airfield in 2023 and Bangor in 2024, subject to annual negotiations with the Ulster Flying Club and the bidding process.

7. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that there were no items of Any Other Notified Business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Cummings, seconded by Councillor McClean, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business.

8. FUTURE BUSINESS START UPDATE (FILE ED43)

*****IN CONFIDENCE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman Armstrong-Cotter, seconded by Alderman McDowell, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.46pm.

ITEM 8.3.1**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Prosperity
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Tourism
Date of Report	19 January 2023
File Reference	TO:EV/64
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
Subject	ANDBC Pipe Band Championships Events Further Update Report
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Revised outline budget

This update report is referred to Council, further to a report presented to the Place and Prosperity Committee held on 5 January 2023, when the Committee agreed the following two recommendations:

1. Officers submit a bid for the ANDBC Pipe Band Championship 2023 to the RSPBANI at £14,000 with a total Council allocated budget to a maximum of £26,500, subject to the Rates Setting process and confirmation of bid by RSPBANI; and further recommends that
2. Council decides on the host location for the annual ANDBC Pipe Band Championship from one of the following three options:
 - Option 3
Rotate the hosting of the event in Bangor and Newtownards Airfield, the event being at the Newtownards Airfield in 2023 and Bangor in 2024, subject to annual negotiations with the Ulster Flying Club and the bidding process.

Officers are bringing to the attention of Members, an update on revised costs to the deliver the event at the Newtownards Airfield.

Since the location was determined by Committee, Officers felt it prudent to progress planning, subject to Council ratification and the Rates setting process. The outcome of this work has established that costs such as venue hire and traffic management are likely to be significantly beyond what was previously anticipated.

It is necessary to highlight that while Members had been advised that the maximum spend for the event to be held at Newtownards Airfield in 2023 would be £26,500, further to receipt of a full quotation from the Airfield, it has transpired that the cost of hiring the venue for the event will be £8,500 (previously charged £2,500 in 2019), which includes a non-refundable £5,000 in event of cancellation. Further monies in respect of traffic management (estimated now at £4,000) will likely be required. It should be noted the additional traffic management budget would now also be required if the event was in Bangor. It should be noted that the traffic management estimation cannot be concluded until a traffic management company is appointed. This procurement exercise is currently a work in progress.

This report has been presented to Council to advise of the uplift in the event budget by £7,350.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers the additional information as presented in the report and the revised budget of £33,850 to deliver the event in Newtownards in May 2023, subject to a successful bid to RSPBANI and the Rates setting process.

Appendix 1

Pipe Bands – Outline Costs for 2023, Ards Airfield

ITEM	COST
Hired Premises – Airfield	£8500
Contributions – RSPBANI	£14000
Traffic Management	£4000 (Estimate as 2023 appointment of Traffic Management Company not complete)
Security	£4000
Bus Hire	£250
Wages	£2000
Bins/Waste Collection	£300
Toilets & Mobiloo	£800
TOTAL	£33,850

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A hybrid meeting (in person and via Zoom) of the Corporate Services Committee was held at the Council Chamber, Church Street, Newtownards and via Zoom, on Tuesday 10th January 2023 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor P Smith

Aldermen: Gibson
Irvine
McIlveen
McDowell

Councillors: Blaney (via Zoom)19.15) Gilmour (via Zoom)
Cooper (via Zoom) S Irvine (via Zoom)
Chambers (via Zoom) Irwin (via Zoom)
Dunlop (via Zoom) McKimm
Douglas (via Zoom) T Smith (via Zoom, 19:05)
Greer (20:10)

Officers: Head of Administration (A Curtis), and Democratic Services Officer (S.McCrea)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from the Director of Finance & Performance.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest submitted.

NOTED.

3. DEPUTATION – DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION ALONGSIDE THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF GPS RE PRIORY SURGERY TBC

(Appendix I)

Representatives from each of the organisations were unable to attend the meeting with the Head of Administration advising that a letter had been sent from the Department of Health. Councillors McKimm and Irwin expressed their disappointment as they had both heard concerns and worries from constituents. Alderman McIlveen asked if the letter could be tabled for January's Council meeting as an in-confidence item.

NOTED

AGREED, on the proposal of Councillor Greer, seconded by Alderman McIlveen, that the discussion be noted.

4. REQUESTS TO LIGHT UP COUNCIL BUILDINGS IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE

On the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Irvine, this item was moved to in-confidence given the reliance on decision in relation to Item 11.

AGREED.

5. NOTICES OF MOTION

a. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors Douglas and Walker

That this Council adopts the White Ribbon Pledge to ‘Never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls’, agrees to sign the Pledge, and tasks Officers to bring back a report outlining how we can amalgamate existing relevant policies, undertake the Listen, Learn, Lead programme within the Council, and identify effective routes to encourage other agencies and organisations in our Borough to engage with the White Ribbon Project.

(Councillor Walker was admitted to the meeting at 19:11.)

Councillor Douglas proposed, seconded by Councillor Walker, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillors Douglas explained that the White Ribbon campaign’s genesis was Canada and had expanded internationally. It was managed by men with the objective of ending violence against women by men. She expressed surprise that Ards & North Down Borough Council had not signed the White Ribbon pledge as other Councils and political parties had and hoped agreement would be reached which would also build solidarity with other stakeholders.

(Councillor Blaney joined the meeting at 19:15).

Councillor Walker had signed the pledge and believed it was an important subject for the Council to consider. The White Ribbon campaign had developed over the course of 32 years and the combined experience of those who ran it. He explained that the only part of it he found difficult was that part of the pledge stated to never remain silent about violence; something he believed was difficult for men to do successfully as it was easy to step in to stop a physical altercation but the difficult existed when it came to friends, colleagues or social situations where inappropriate comments or approaches may be made. Councillor Walker believed it could be difficult to ensure a situation was not made more difficult for the woman involved or for those intervening. He suggested that the person who may be acting inappropriately might not know that their actions are wrong, but that this program was one that people not only pledged to but were also educated by. Councillor Walker cited news at the time of writing whereby one Andrew Tate, a social media influencer had been arrested for alleged

rape and human trafficking. This individual had a following that numbered in the millions who could be led astray in terms of the differences between right and wrong.

Councillor Irwin thanked Members for submitting the motion and was unaware the Council had not signed the pledge; a move she believed would be timely given the murder of Natalie McNally whose vigil Councillor Irwin had attended at Stormont. She believed men would be much more likely to accept advice and guidance from other men.

Councillor Gilmour recalled the murder of Sarah Everhard in recent years and had heard a story by the British Broadcasting Corporation regarding Jean Quigley who had been beaten to death by her partner and that his long history of violence against women had only become apparent after the trial. Jean's mother had called for an implementation of a strategy to protect women. Councillor Gilmour cited how violence often occurred in the homes of victims where they should feel safe but aren't and recalled her involvement in safe-place training that allowed the identification of flags of domestic violence and abuse and how victims required exit strategies to avoid returning to the same unsafe environment.

Councillor McKimm thanked Councillors' Douglas and Walker for their contributions and was able to speak of his daughter who worked as a trauma therapist with women who suffered through violence and the trials experienced by women in attempting to seek help through services due to feeling shame or long waiting lists. Councillor McKimm had also worked with individuals who had suffered violence and believed one of the common factors had been a feeling of loneliness. He hoped this evening's decision could act as a catalyst for victims and organisations alike.

Councillor Douglas summarised the motion, thanking Members for their input and explained her belief that it was important to have males assisting and leading the movement .

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Douglas, seconded by Councillor Walker, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

(Councillor Walker returned to the virtual lobby at 19:36.)

b. Notice of Motion submitted by Councillors S Irvine and Cooper

That this council supports all NHS staff who provide unstinting and unwavering service and will write to all trusts in Northern Ireland assuring them of our support for their industrial action and their objectives of safe staffing levels and adequate remuneration in the current cost of living crisis, in line with other government and council employees.

Councillor S Irvine proposed, seconded by Councillor Cooper, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor S Irvine explained that when he had been investigating this particular motion, he had discovered a letter written by an Accident & Emergency doctor, the

contents of which described dire situations and difficulties experienced by staff at varying levels throughout the Trust, as well as the abhorrent conditions that service users had endured. The letter had also outlined that the general public had a tendency to blame hospital staff when the truth was that wards built and staffed for fifty patients had circa one hundred and eighty patients and that the NHS was not breaking as it was already destroyed. The doctor had described how it was not a hospital problem but a national one brought about by politics; something that required immediate attention and additional staff.

Councillor S Irvine cited one million hours of unpaid overtime that had been worked by Trust staff over the pandemic whilst the government's solution had been to have the general public clap for the effort, an action which had long since stopped by the time of this evening's meeting. He referenced the Government's response of being unable to afford the necessary funding for the NHS despite an apparent ability to spend millions of failing contracts. With a decade of cuts and freezes of pay, Councillor S Irvine believed it was well past the time of such funding especially when it was taken into consideration how many healthcare workers had been forced out of jobs they loved due to being overstretched and undervalued. He regarded the recent Council staff pay rise and hoped that the Council would equally support such action for NHS and care workers.

Councillor Cooper spoke of how he had, in recent years, been in intensive care and would not be alive today had it not been for the care he had received. He believed the NHS was top heavy with money not filtering to where it should. Councillor Cooper recalled a pilot scheme in Scotland where individuals studying in the appropriate fields would have their study fees renege if the individuals worked in the same area for five years. He believed there was a need for structural change in order for improvement.

Alderman McIlveen suggested that Councillors' S Irvine & Cooper may wish to consider amending their motion slightly to have communications go to trade unions as opposed to the Trust as the latter would mean managers receiving the communication. Alderman McIlveen had shown his support by attending some of the recent strikes by health workers and was able to recapitulate the concerns of workers regarding quality of service and safety of patients and though they had been acutely aware of the pressures there had been under, they were more concerned of the service and care provided. Alderman McIlveen believed retraining and attracting of quality staff was paramount and recalled how, several years ago he had been left on a trolley for several hours in Accident & Emergency where he had seen the difficulties suffered by those who worked there including the queues of ambulances.

Councillor Chambers thought that most individuals present this evening would be able to recall stories of professionalism by healthcare workers and could also probably recall horror stories that had occurred due to the system as opposed to staff. He believed Members needed to acknowledge that NHS staff did not want to take industrial action but had been left with no other option given the cost of living versus a lack of remuneration.

Alderman Irvine thanked Councillors' S Irvine & Cooper for their notice of motion and agreed that the NHS was in its greatest crisis since its inception. He had taken a call

from a Junior doctor over the Christmas period who wished not to be named but had explained the situation to Alderman Irvine in the hospitals in manner akin to the letter Councillor S Irvine had alluded to earlier. He recalled the statistics of a report that he had caught sight whereby a target had been set for patients to not wait any longer than three hours before being transferred from ambulance to hospital; a target that one in three patients had not reached. Alderman McIlveen believed many of those working in the care sector did so because it was their calling and that it would be a heavy burden to see unsafe working practices that they were unable to challenge due to practices such as understaffing.

Councillor Douglas appreciated the sentiment behind the notice of motion and supported all HSC staff and those from other sectors that provide compassion, care and treatment who were beyond breaking point. She explained that part of the issue had been that review after review had taken place without action and that those in Stormont had to act. Councillor Douglas mirrored the sentiments of Councillor S Irvine in that the government's solution had been for the general public to clap for the NHS without any changes to terms & conditions.

Councillor T Smith agreed that most individuals would have experience in some form of the care provided by the NHS and that anyone who deals with life and death deserved the best that could be given. He recalled the recent pay rises throughout the Council and believed even those kinds of rewards should be a bare minimum for the NHS and that now was the time to deliver. He also agreed that the national government was able to find monies in their coffers for various projects when they wanted to and that reforms were required.

Councillor P Smith believed the situation would likely become worse before any improvement would occur and noted Members' mention of staffing which he explained would require a three year budget which had not occurred due to an inability to govern. A percentage would be received of whatever figure had been quoted by the Minister of Health with 49% of the overall budget being spent on health. Though Robin Swann had levelled pay in Northern Ireland with England, the health spend per capita in 2022-23 would fall below England, an issue that had been compounded by poor health productivity according to politicians. The cost of inpatient/outpatients was 36% higher than England with 1.5 days more being spent in hospital by comparison and pharma drugs being 43% more expensive per capita. Councillor P Smith believed that unless Christopher Eaton-Harris stepped in, it would be unlikely that any corrective measures would occur despite the need for reform.

Councillor S Irvine and Councillor Cooper both agreed to sending a letter to unions as opposed to Trusts. Councillor S Irvine reiterated that it was time for action and if the Council could in any way assist, it should.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor S Irvine , seconded by Councillor Cooper, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

6. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

There was no other notified business.

NOTED.

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Gibson, that the public/press be excluded during the discussion of the undernoted items of confidential business at 20:05.

7. OUR PLACE IN SPACE – SCULPTURES

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

8. REQUEST FOR EASEMENT OVER REAR OF 84 CRAWFORDSBURN ROAD

(Appendix IX)

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. COMBER BYPASS VESTING

(Appendix X)

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

10. DFI VESTING AT HARBOUR ROAD, PORTAVOGIE

(Appendix XI)

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Gibson, that the recommendation be adopted.

11. COST OF REPAIRS TO LIGHT UP COUNCIL BUILDINGS

(Appendix XII)

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

NOTED.

4. REQUESTS TO LIGHT UP COUNCIL BUILDINGS IN SUPPORT OF UKRAINE

*****IN COMMITTEE*****

NOT FOR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE 6 – INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FINANCIAL OR BUSINESS AFFAIRS OF ANY PARTICULAR PERSON (INCLUDING THE COUNCIL HOLDING THAT INFORMATION)

RE-ADMITTANCE OF PUBLIC/PRESS

AGREED, on the proposal of Alderman McIlveen, seconded by Alderman Gibson, that the public/press be re-admitted to the meeting.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 20:30.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

A virtual meeting of the Community and Wellbeing Committee was held via Zoom on Wednesday 11th January 2023 at 7:00 pm.

PRESENT:

In the Chair: Councillor Edmund

Alderman: Carson (Zoom)
W Irvine
Wilson (Zoom)

Councillors: Adair (Zoom) McRandal (Zoom)
Boyle Moore (Zoom)
Chambers T Smith (Zoom)
Douglas (Zoom) Smart (Zoom)
S Irvine Woods (Zoom)
Johnson (Zoom)

Officers: Director of Community and Wellbeing (G Bannister), Head of Community & Culture (J Nixey), Head of Leisure Services (I O'Neill), Head of Parks & Cemeteries (S Daye), Head of Environmental Health, Protection & Development (A Faulkner) and Democratic Services Officer (H Loebnau)

1. APOLOGIES

The Chairman sought apologies and those were noted from Councillors MacArthur and Councillor Thompson.

NOTED.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman asked for any Declarations of Interest and the following declarations were made:

Councillor Woods – Item 3 – Holywood Football Club
Councillor Chambers – Item 3 – Holywood Football Club
Councillor Boyle – Item 10 – Private Tenancies Act (NI) 2022 Update

NOTED.

(Having declared an Interest in Item 3 – Councillor Woods and Councillor Chambers left the meeting at 7.03 pm)

3. DEPUTATION – HOLYWOOD FOOTBALL CLUB

The Chair welcomed the Deputation from Holywood Football, Alan Harris (Chairman of Holywood Football Club Youth and Ladies Section) and Gordon Donaldson (Holywood Football Club Youth Coach, Seniors and Youth Committee). It was explained that the presentation which had been circulated to Members had been made previously to the Council at its meeting in June 2022.

The main points were highlighted within that report; Holywood was a one football club town and the entire community was represented within it. The Club included 400 playing members, 60 volunteer coaches and 25 teams which played each week. The Club was large and was outgrowing itself. The growth had been curtailed due to facilities and funding and the growth of girls football was having a particular impact. The demand currently could not be met. The Club was successful on and off the field, and through the playing of football other life skills could be learnt such as teamwork, resilience and good mental health habits as well as purely physical fitness.

It was explained that the Club paid a premium relative to other local clubs to use the Council facilities at Spafield and Seapark. Compared to Blanchflower, Holywood Road, Belfast, Holywood Football Club charged 30% more and that was only going to rise. For the premium paid, the product on offer did not match. The pitch was nearing the end of its life and toilet and other facilities were unavailable to Members on training nights. The team had also to pay for its own nets unlike other clubs. The situation was so poor that the Club was beginning to feel that it might need to look outside Holywood and the Borough for facilities and value for money such as Blanchflower and Ashfield in East Belfast.

When applying for grants it was explained that those could only be given where a club had a long-term lease or was the owner of a facility. The Club had requested that and had been told that it was not an option. It was explained that the Club was a loyal paying tenant but did not get opportunities for investment that other clubs had. The Club collected £1k per month but needed £1,700 to break even and that had to be done through sourcing sponsorship which itself was becoming increasingly challenging.

The Club had also enquired about extended opening hours at Spafield which were currently 6-9 pm. If that could be pushed to 10 pm the extra hour would permit more people to play and make better use of the facilities. Since the SERCO agreement was coming to an end it was hoped that the Council would be open to discussion to allow both changes and for a lease agreement which would allow the Club to apply for grant funding.

The Chair thanked the visitors from the Football Club for the informative presentation and invited questions from Members.

Councillor McRandal explained that local Councillors in Hollywood had some appreciation of the issues which the Club was facing and thanked the representatives for attending. There were no easy answers but he hoped that the Club and local elected representatives could meet outside the Community and Wellbeing Committee to work together on the matters to see if something could be done collaboratively to deal with the varied issues. The Club replied that it would welcome such a meeting.

(Councillor Johnson entered the meeting at 7.15 pm)

Alderman W Irvine also welcomed the Deputation which had outlined the issues the Club was facing. He explained that he was a member of the Trust in relation to SERCO and he hoped that the Trust would be able to facilitate the Club as best it could. He wished the Club all the best for the rest of the season. In response the Club explained that it appreciated that finances were tight now but that it was not looking for a quick fix and was prepared to collaborate with others.

Councillor Boyle praised the presentation which in many respects had been positive and encouraging but had been very disappointed to hear about the difficulties the Club had faced communicating with SERCO. He went on to stress that the Council was serious about promoting sport within the Borough and punched above its weight in terms of sporting prowess of many of its residents. He felt that Hollywood Football Club could be isolated and probably felt it was regularly hitting a brick wall. He wanted all residents of the Borough to benefit from sport and would be happy to support the Club in any way he could.

Councillor Douglas thanked the Club for making the presentation and was also disheartened to hear about the lack of communication the Club had faced and hoped the issues could be resolved. She supported Bangor Football Club in her own area, and it sounded like Hollywood Football Club was a great community resource in promoting fitness and good mental health. She supported the idea put forward by Councillor McRandal to have a meeting so that elected representatives could support the Club in a more robust way. She was personally very keen to support grassroot clubs and would hate for Hollywood to relocate outside the Borough. She wished the Club success.

Councillor S Irvine commended the presentation by the Club and offered assistance, if necessary, on a crowd funding programme which had been useful in raising funds for a similar club in Newtownards. He also had a contact within Sport NI who could give advice on the deficits clubs faced.

The Club thanked Members for the interest they had shown and left the meeting.

(Councillor Woods and Councillor Chambers returned to the meeting at 7.25 pm)

NOTED.

4. PEACE IV SHARED SPACES PROJECT – POST PROJECT EVALUATION

(Appendix I)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that in line with the Council's Capital Management Handbook a Post Project Evaluation (PPE) should be carried out on all capital projects, typically within 12 months of construction. The PEACE IV Shared Spaces and Services project, funded through the Peace Programme administered and funded by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) was completed by the project deadline of 31 September 2022.

The Post Project Evaluation (PPE) was service led and was an assessment of the projects results, activities, and processes. It was an essential tool to show that the project objectives had been met and, in terms of public accountability, to demonstrate what had been achieved with the investment of public funds.

It also facilitated recognition of project achievements and acknowledged people's work. This phase was also used to capture any learnings gained from the project while the memory of any issues encountered were still recent.

The PPE primarily evaluated:

- If the benefits, scope and deliverables of the project, as stated in the Project Brief, had been met
- The performance of the building/facility
- Lessons to be learned from the experience which may help future projects

The PPE for the PEACE IV Shared Spaces and Services Project was attached. Members should note that SEUPB still needed to verify the final claim and until they did that, the figures contained within the report were subject to change.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes this report.

Proposed by Alderman W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman Irvine commended the Peace IV programme and the evaluation that went with it had shown it was a major success. It had not been easy to meet the targets especially when people were not meeting face to face. He congratulated the officers and team for making the work happen.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the recommendation be adopted.

5. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SEEDING GRANT, BALLYWALTER MEN'S SHED

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that as Members may be aware, the Council provided a Community Development Seeding Grant for newly formed community/residents groups. The seeding grant provided financial assistance with the costs involved in formally constituting a community/residents group.

On 21 March 2022, the Council received a seeding grant application from the Chairperson of Ballywalter Men's Shed. The application was reviewed by a Community Development Officer and the Community Development Manager. The application was complete and met the criteria for receipt of a Community Development seeding grant.

Ballywalter Men's Shed was awarded a seeding grant of £200.00. Under delegated authority, the seeding grant was approved and signed off by the Director of Community and Wellbeing.

RECOMMENDED that the Council note this report.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Alderman W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle welcomed the grant for the Men's Shed in Ballywalter and the initiative generally for the work that was done in local communities.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Alderman W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

6. UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND, COMMUNITIES AND PLACE GREEN SPACES APPLICATION

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that on Thursday 5 January 2023, officers attended a briefing session held by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) along with other NI Councils concerning an allocation to each Council for Green Space initiatives under the UKSPF.

Councils were advised that each had been allocated on the basis of their population a share of circa £1.3M. For Ards and North Down that amounted to £113,925. The deadline for applications was 16 January 2023 with a decision target date of 6

February 2023. Any project applied for must be practical, visible and a capital expenditure and delivered by 31 March 2023.

As a result of the briefing which detailed the criteria, including community consultation, proof of need, and an analysis of intended outcomes, it became clear that options for delivery in such a tight timescale were limited.

However, plans for delivery of enhancements of open spaces included playgrounds. The Council would be aware that an extensive consultation process was undertaken in relation to the development of its play strategy, which included analysis of need and the other measures required to support an application under that measure. The Council had already pre-tendered for a designer and installer of its playgrounds for a period of years and also had a schedule of priorities for the current year for delivery of fixed play facilities.

The next play facility due for installation was a replacement facility at De Wind Drive Comber. The estimated cost of that facility would use all of the grant application offered. Although the annual refresh of the prioritisation of playground work was still to be completed (due before end of March), it was next on the current prioritisation list for action.

Therefore, officers, having considered the opportunity and other possible schemes, had determined that an application for the funding for the De Wind Drive Playpark would present the best opportunity to the Council to allow the funding to be secured and deliver a project in the timescales required in accordance with the UKSPF criteria. Officers had completed the application on that basis because of the tight application deadline and intended to submit that by 16th January 2023 and wished to request retrospective approval for doing so from the Council. Funding that was required for the scheme from Councils' own budgets could then be invested elsewhere in the future.

Although that was not ideal because of the timescales, there were two more years of UKSPF funding available under that measure (and other elements going forward). The DLUHC representatives advised that going forward more time in the year would be available to consider future applications for projects and schemes.

RECOMMENDED that the Council retrospectively approves that an application to be made under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Communities and Place Green Spaces measure for funding for a new playpark to replace its facility at De Wind Drive Comber.

Proposed by Alderman W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman W Irvine was encouraged that the Council had been able to make use of the programme and asked if there had been scope to include other parks in the

application or if it was one per Council area. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries explained that this was a playpark which had been ready for work and fitted with the need to have work completed before the end of March 2023.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Chambers, that the recommendation be adopted.

7. ARDS AND NORTH DOWN SPORTS FORUM GRANTS

(Appendices II – IV)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that on the 26 August 2015 the Council delegated authority to the Ards and North Down Sports Forum, in order to allow it to administer sports grants funding on behalf of the Council. £40,000 had been allocated within the 2022/2023 revenue budget for that purpose.

The Council further authorised the Forum under delegated powers to award grants of up to £250. Grants above £250 still required Council approval. In addition, the Council requested that regular updates were reported to Members.

During November 2022, the Forum received a total of 11 grant applications: 1 Coaching, 2 Goldcard and 8 Individual Travel/Accommodation. A summary of the 11 successful applications was detailed in the attached Successful Coaching, Goldcard and Individual Travel & Accommodation Appendices.

For information, the annual budget and spend to date on grant categories was as followed:

	Annual Budget	Funding Awarded November 2022	Remaining Budget
Anniversary	£1,000	£0	£250
Coaching	£3,000	*£300	£592.50
Equipment	£11,000	£0	£3,535.14
Events	£6,000	£0	£1,700
Seeding	£500	£0	£250
Travel and Accommodation	£14,500	*£1,090.00	*£96.03
Discretionary	£1,000	£0	£1,000
New category under development	£3,000	£0	£3,000
*Goldcards proposed during the period November 2022 is 2 (16 Goldcards in total during 2022/23).			

* The proposed remaining budget for Coaching of **£592.50** was based on a proposed award of **£300.00** for Approval. The proposed remaining budget for Travel and Accommodation of **£96.03** was based on a proposed award of **£1,090.00** – for Noting, and withdrawn costs of £5.72.

RECOMMENDED that the Council approves the attached applications for financial assistance for sporting purposes valued at above £250, and that the applications approved by the Forum (valued at below £250) are noted.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle welcomed the grants and knew how well they were appreciated by all involved from those coaching to successful individuals. It was the Council's task to promote all sport within the Borough and so he thanked the officers for their ongoing work in that area.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Boyle, seconded by Councillor S Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

8. REWILDING UPDATE AND EXTENSION OF SCHEME (Appendix V)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members would be aware that the Parks and Cemeteries Service initiated a Rewilding initiative in 2018. That was part of a wider Grassland Management Strategy to ensure best sustainable use of resources and promote biodiversity.

Rewilding required converting closely mown amenity grasslands to managed grassland habitats capable of supporting a much more diverse range of floral species, pollinators and insects and thus improving Biodiversity. At present 49,195m² of grassland was being managed for rewilding. The purpose of this report was to update Members on the initiative and provide detail on expanding the scheme across further locations. In addition to Biodiversity Net Gain, the Council's Rewilding initiative had climate change advantages by reducing carbon / using less fuel by cutting less grass and improved workload planning by enabling staff to have more capacity to work in other areas within parks and open spaces.

Rewilding was about the restoration of natural ecosystems and encouraged a balance between people and the rest of nature where each could thrive. It was not something that was solely focused on rural landscapes. The creation and maintenance of meadow grasslands was taking place in public open spaces across the UK and making real improvement to biodiversity.

The promotion of biodiversity was a statutory requirement under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Biodiversity was defined as the variety of life on earth. Moreover, it was the variety of flora and fauna and the functions that existed between them. One such function was the interaction between the natural environment and recreational value of open spaces.

By improving the biodiversity and creating a place for wildlife to thrive opportunities had been opened for education by creating outdoor classrooms where schools and local members of the community could discover the natural world and develop understanding of environmental issues through first-hand experience. Educational activities had been carried out in meadow grassland including bug hunts, flower species identification, sketching flowers etc. Regular positive feedback on the benefits of those sites to constituents and visitors' experiences within the Borough highlighted the positive impact the scheme had made to people's lives in addition to the obvious biodiversity benefit.

Current Sites

It was the intention that the current sites would continue to be subject to the alternative management techniques outlined above with a view to encouraging increased variety of species. The rewilding scheme included areas at the following Council owned sites:

- Ballystockard Open Space, Comber
- Cloughey Road, Portaferry
- Tullymalley, Portaferry
- Linear Park, Bangor
- Ballymenoch Park, Holywood
- Stricklands Glen/Connor Park, Bangor
- Seapark, Holywood
- Brompton Coastal Path, Bangor
- North Street, Greyabbey

In addition to the ongoing maintenance, the schedules would be altered to take account of infrequent event use on certain sites. It was critical that the rewilding project worked in harmony with the overall use of parks and a balanced offering was available across the parks portfolio. Events and community use would be catered for in the integrated grassland management of each chosen site.

Following community engagement, one of the current sites at Stricklands Glen/Connor Park was recommended for an adjustment to the current mowing regime. In order to provide a balance between recreation and sustainable management, the following was proposed and shown in the plan in the appendix:

- Retain areas of amended mowing across the site to fit with the All-Ireland Pollinator objectives.
- Provide an open area for passive recreation.
- Carry out tree planting to integrate the mature woodland with the open site of Connor Park.

Inclusion of Additional Sites

In 2020 the updated Rewilding Parks reported to the Council committed to the continued monitoring of sites to evaluate the success of the management changes and if successful, consideration would be given to further sites being included at a future date.

A further audit of grassland maintenance across the Borough had been undertaken by the Council Parks Officers and found significant potential to extend the Council's existing rewilding portfolio. Officers' secured funding through Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership for a bespoke piece of mowing equipment designed to provide a cut and lift across smaller areas of land. On that basis, it was possible to roll out the initiative across a range of new sites.

It was recommended to include further sites under the Rewilding Scheme as detailed in the list below:

- Bowtown Road, Newtownards
- Lands Adjacent (Parsonage Road) to Kircubbin Cemetery
- Demesne View, Portaferry
- Whitespots Country Park
- Glenlyon, Holywood
- Windmill Stump, Portaferry
- Whiterock Car Park

That would take the total area within the Rewilding Initiative to just over 90,000m². It should be noted that land at Bowtown Road and Parsonage Road were under a conacre agreement until January 2023, bringing both locations under the rewilding/tree planting initiative would return them to public amenity use. It was anticipated, if approved that those schemes could commence immediately, and the benefits noted above could begin to be achieved in 2023. However, the intention was to manage that roll out with consideration for resources across the section.

RECOMMENDED that Council continues to approve the above initiative and supports the ongoing development of the rewilding project as outlined within this report to enhance and promote biodiversity across the Borough.

Proposed by Councillor Woods, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Woods welcomed the report and was pleased to see that more areas were being added to the rewilding initiative and knew there was great support for that environmental activity within local communities. She asked about Seapark and Glenlyon and the extent of the rewilding there. The Head of Parks and Cemeteries said that he would send her maps of the plan for those areas of Holywood. It was also the intention to progress with a full management plan for the Glenlyon area.

Councillor Boyle also welcomed the report observing that when rewilding was introduced many residents thought areas looked a little unfinished but now people

could see the benefit environmentally and saw the reasoning to it. He asked officers to consider the Windmill Stump, Portaferry, which was a tourist attraction and asked that it not be completely rewilded since it may look forgotten to the many visitors coming to the area.

Alderman Wilson referred to Stricklands Glen, Bangor, and feared that there was no room now for a kick about in that area due to the rewilding and welcomed the amended proposal. He asked officers what sort of discussions took place with residents when rewilding was considered and why the goal posts there had been taken down and if the plan was to reinstate them.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries stated that consultation did take place with communities and there had been some learning experiences over the years. The amendment at Stricklands meant there would be a good mix of rewilding, trees and recreation areas and while there would always be a difference of opinion it was hoped that the recommendation would suit most people.

Referring to the goal post the officer confirmed that all of those posts were checked annually under health and safety commitments and a number had been removed to protect the public. It was hoped that they would be replaced soon.

Councillor Douglas had brought the initiative of rewilding to the Council initially and was frustrated that the work was not further developed but she appreciated the task involved in winning support from the public.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor Woods, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

9. KINEGAR TO DONAGHADEE ADDITIONAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

(Appendix VI)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that following a Council decision in December 2021 to carry out additional public engagement in relation to the Greenways project, clarification was sought in February 2022 from Members on the nature of the engagement and that the intention was to apply it only to the Kinnegar to Donaghadee section of the project underway.

In March 2022, Ards and North Down Borough Council commissioned Social Market Research (SMR) to undertake a programme of research to further inform the proposal to develop a coastal path Greenway from Kinnegar/Holywood to Donaghadee. In accordance with the Council's decision, the research was based on two elements: a survey of a representative sample of Council residents; and a survey of users of the existing North Down Coastal Path. The research was

conducted in October and November 2022 and in accordance with the ISO202252 giving a result which was a statistically significant, 95% confidence level. To achieve that, 404 residents were surveyed, and 108 users were interviewed.

The aim of the surveys was to explore the following:

- Use of the existing path
- Perceived benefits of the existing path
- Satisfaction with the existing path
- Suggestions on how the existing path could be improved
- Awareness of the Council's proposal to develop and extend the existing path to Donaghadee
- Likelihood of using the path if developed by the Council
- Views on the proposal to develop and extend the existing path
- Suggestions for further improvements to the proposed new coastal path
- Support for the proposal to develop and extend the path from Kinnegar/Hollywood to Donaghadee.
- Any further comments on the proposed coastal path from Kinnegar/Hollywood to Donaghadee.

Copies of the survey questionnaires were included in the appendix of the attached report.

Survey Methodology

Residents' Survey

The survey was based on a representative sample of 404 residents aged 16+, with quotas applied for age, gender, social class and District Electoral Area. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing or CATI (a profile of the sample was included within the attached report). Fieldwork on the survey was conducted between 21 October and 5 November 2022. All interviews were conducted by telephone (landline and mobile) with interviewers briefed before the commencement of fieldwork.

Coastal Path User Survey

The survey was based on a sample of 108 users of the existing coastal path. The survey was conducted on a face-to-face basis using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Fieldwork was undertaken between the 15 and 19 October 2022 (a profile of the sample was included in appendix of the attached report).

Actual survey days:

- 15th October 2022 (weather conditions, 12 degrees, scattered clouds).
- 16th October 2022 (11 degrees, passing clouds, light showers).
- 18th October 2022 (14 degrees, sunny, passing clouds).
- 19th October 2022 (11 degrees, overcast, scattered light showers).

It should be noted that the original survey dates were changed to those stated above due to weather warnings in place at the time of the original proposed dates.

The surveys were conducted between three pairs of points along the pathway namely:

- Seapark to Seahill (near the bridge).
- Helens Bay to Crawfordsburn (near the beach); and
- Brompton to Pickie (near Brompton Bay).

The surveys were taken over six hours with the market researchers rotated between those sets of locations.

The research was conducted in line with ISO20252 of which Social Market Research (SMR) was fully accredited.

Key Findings

Council's Proposal to Develop the Coastal Path from Kinnegar/Hollywood to Donaghadee

- 40% of residents were aware of the Council's proposal [54% of users of the existing path].
- 76% of residents were supportive of the proposal [78% of users of the existing path].
- 79% of residents saw the development of the path as being positive for the area [existing users, 65%].

Current Use of the Existing Coastal Path

- 76% of residents used the existing North Down Coastal Path
- 73% used it for walking (dog walking, 21%) [existing users: walking, 57%: dog walking, 42%].
- 76% were satisfied with the existing path [existing users: 90%].
- 23% of residents said they used the path on a weekly basis [existing users: 57%].

Future Use of the Coastal Path

- 85% of residents said they would use the path if developed [existing users: 98%].
- 79% of those who said they would use it would use it for walking [existing users: 67%].
- 33% of those who said they would use it would use it on a weekly basis [existing users: 44%].

Conclusions

The research showed that a majority of residents, and existing users of the North Down Coastal Path, were supportive of the Council's proposal to develop a coastal path/Greenway from Kinnegar/Hollywood to Donaghadee. Moreover, most residents and current path users, saw the Council's proposal as being a positive development for the area.

The findings also showed that a substantial number of those consulted used the existing path on a weekly basis, with most users satisfied with the existing path. Walking was the most common reason for using the existing path, followed by dog walking.

If the coastal path were to be developed in line with the Council's proposal, the research suggests that there would be increased use among residents, with almost all current users saying they too would use the path. As with current use, walking was cited as the most common reason for using the redeveloped path.

Both residents and current users of the path highlighted a range of benefits associated with the existing path and the proposed redeveloped path including health benefits, the provision of open space and the scenery, views and beaches.

The research also provided residents and current path users with opportunities to say how the existing path could be improved with those suggestions including: the provision of more bins/dog bins; wider paths; improved surfaces; and additional lighting.

Finally, a relatively small number of residents and existing path users, (11%) were unsupportive of the Council's proposal with their concerns focusing on the environmental impacts for the redevelopment and a need to prioritise spending on other areas.

Notes on Reporting

Please note that due to rounding, row and column totals in tables and figures may not sum to 100. Also, please note that any differences between respondent subgroups alluded to in the report commentary were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. The use of [-] within tables denoted less than 1%.

More than three out of four (76%) residents said they were supportive of Ards and North Down Borough Council's proposal to develop a coastal path/Greenway from Kinnegar/Hollywood to Donaghadee (very supportive, 52%: supportive, 24%).

Five percent (5%) were unsupportive (not very supportive, 2%: not at all supportive, 3%). Approximately one in five (19%) were undecided.

Public Information Meetings

Public Information meetings to discuss the proposed Greenway had been confirmed for:

- Monday 23rd January: Donaghadee Community Centre from 6.30-8.30pm.
- Tuesday 24th January: Council Chamber Bangor Town Hall from 6.30-8.30pm.
- Wednesday 1st February: Queens Leisure Complex Holywood from 6.30-8.30pm.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the results of the public survey and continue to support the ongoing development of the North Down Community Greenway Network including that from Kinnegar to Donaghadee which in part follows the North Down Coastal Path. Members are also asked to note this is still progressing through the planning process with an accompanying Environmental Statement.

The Chair explained that the Committee would be joined by Donal McDade, Director of Social Market Research that carried out the consultation.

Proposed by Councillor T Smith, seconded by Alderman S Wilson, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor T Smith welcomed the public information sessions which had been proposed a year ago and believed that it was important to hear the views of local people as part of a consultation. Many concerns had been expressed and the Council wanted to make sure that it was undertaken correctly and the public was largely on board. Figures had shown that only 40% of residents were even aware of the Council's proposal and of the users of the path itself only 54% were aware of plans. He asked officers how the message was being put across to the community about the Greenway scheme.

The Director explained that all the usual channels were being used such as newspapers, flyers, posters and there was extensive coverage by social media. The awareness level itself was not as bad as it might appear to some since for any scheme there were always people who were not reached. The Council would continue to push the channels that were available to it.

Councillor T Smith pointed to the fact that 76% of residents were supportive of the scheme and that 76% were also happy with the existing path. There were concerns that it would be dramatically improved to the point where it would damage the environment particularly along the coast of North Down. He thought that it was important that the public were listened to at the public information sessions and comments were reviewed.

The Director explained that the information presented was the public feedback from the main consultation which had just been completed and the public could discuss that information.

Alderman S Wilson thanked all involved for the research and the time that had been spent gathering the information. The feedback needed to be taken from all demographics and he personally looked forward to being able to cycle the route in time. Often when there was opposition initially feelings could change when the benefits could be seen. The new route should also improve accessibility for all people and had the potential in his view to be transformational for the Borough and aid regeneration.

Councillor Chambers thought that there seemed to be a reluctance to use the words Greenway in relation to this scheme and North Down Coastal Path seemed to be preferred. Mr McDade observed that that had come from terminology used by the Council.

The Director explained that the detailed plan could be tweaked so long as it did not jeopardise the application and that major changes would probably not be possible at this point. Many had concerns over cycling on the path but the Director believed that currently the path was being used by walkers and cyclists and it was hoped that this initiative would make the path safer for all.

Councillor Woods asked about how telephone numbers had been sourced and about promotion near the path and the next steps in the process. Mr McDade confirmed that the numbers had been provided by an independent research organisation and those who had responded had been assured of confidentiality and it was intended to promote the meetings through the normal channels such as libraries, shops and Bloomfield Shopping Centre. The collated results would be brought to a future meeting of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, probably after the spring election.

Councillor McRandal asked a technical question in relation to the statistics and probability and Mr McDade explained that the margin of error was explained in terms of the sample size and the accuracy of 95% which was sufficient for a survey such as this.

Councillor Boyle had received an email from For Another Path expressing a desire for the coastal path between Pickie and Holywood to be excluded. The Director explained that surveys had been consistent, the consultation had been carried out twice with similar results and represented 95% confidence in the views of all residents. The work was carried out independently to remove potential bias to the outcome. That area outlined was approximately four fifths of the entire scheme and could not be changed without scrapping the current scheme first.

Alderman W Irvine recognised that there was no doubt tremendous public interest in the scheme particularly in the stretch between Pickie to Holywood and asked when the telephone surveys had taken place. It was explained that residents were telephoned between 21 October – 15 November 2022 and the user survey had been

carried out 15 – 19 October 2022. He knew that in terms of what was proposed the majority of respondents would like to see a sympathetic upgrade to the North Down coastal path but that what was proposed was going a bit too far. There were concerns for wildlife, the environment, future proofing the area and even the associated costs and he hoped to see a resolution of those.

Councillor Douglas said that many of her questions had been answered already but hoped that those who could not attend the meetings in person could be connected by some other means and she was advised that it was intended to put the Bangor Castle meeting on a live stream via YouTube.

At this stage the Chair of the Committee thanked Donal McDade and he left the meeting at 8.10 pm.

Councillor T Smith stated that when he had proposed the recommendation he was under the impression that the information evenings would not represent consultation which was expected and therefore withdrew his proposal.

At this point the officers' recommendation was proposed by Alderman S Wilson, seconded by Councillor Douglas.

Councillor Woods explained that she had not been a Member of Council when this was originally proposed and amended and asked for the exact wording of what had been agreed then.

Councillor T Smith advised that at that point there had been a commitment to holding public information sessions to allow for further discussion and clarification.

A number of Members said they therefore could not support the recommendation. while other Members said they were unsure and asked for further clarity from the Director.

The Director explained that at that time in 2021, the recommendation was to note the update and furthermore that a commitment was given to undertake a full consultation on the proposed routes including public information sessions. Officers would bring back a comprehensive report, detailing the outcome of the consultation with the full range of options outlined on the way forward.

At this point a vote was taken on the report which had been presented to the meeting this evening and 7 voted FOR, 5 AGAINST and 2 ABSTAINED so it was declared CARRIED.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman S Wilson, seconded by Councillor Douglas, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Having declared an interest in Item 10 Councillor Boyle left the meeting at 8.19 pm).

10. **PRIVATE TENANCIES ACT (NI) 2022 UPDATE** (Appendices VII & VIII)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members may recall previous updates in relation to the Draft Private Tenancies Bill. The subsequent Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 received Royal Assent in April 2022, and a phased approach to its commencement was proposed by the Department for Communities (DfC) in September 2022.

The planned first phase related to the implementation of Sections 1-6 of the Act on 1 January 2023. In preparation for that, DfC were to issue guidance documentation to Councils and provide training if necessary. However, that had not been provided to date and DfC had notified the Council that the implementation date had been pushed back until 1 April 2023.

- Sections 1 and 2 of the Act related to information that the landlord must provide to the tenant; DfC would provide a prescribed form in relation to those provisions.
- Section 3 would make it a requirement for landlords to provide receipts of payments for any transaction not carried out electronically.
- Section 4 restricted the deposit amount requested by a landlord to the equivalent of one month's rent.
- Section 5 increased the time available to landlords to secure a deposit in an approved tenancy deposit scheme from 14 to 28 days.
- Section 6 removed the statutory time bar in relation to prosecuting tenancy deposit offences.

While it was disappointing that the new legal provisions were delayed, the three-month postponement would enable the Council to be fully prepared for the new requirements contained in the Act. A further report would follow prior to the implementation of Sections 1-6, as the Council must agree on the level of fixed penalty notices that could be issued on those guilty of committing an offence.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the report and the delayed implementation of Sections 1-6 of the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Proposed by Alderman W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted.

Alderman W Irvine expressed his disappointment at the delay in this legislation and asked if there would be a further report brought back on the Council's obligations under the Bill.

The Head of Environmental Health, Protection and Development said that there would be and explained the delay from 1 January to 1 April 2023.

Councillor Smart was happy to support the recommendation and it was important that there were protections in place for many of the tenants of the Borough. He felt the legislation should be introduced sooner rather than later.

Councillor T Smith asked how much additional staff time would be needed when the legislation came in to practice since he assumed there would be no additional funding from Stormont. The officer explained that the first six sections did not involve a significant amount of resource and that that could be absorbed, but, moving into the future, and the later sections required, such as energy efficiency, additional resource would be needed for what would be a significant amount of work.

Councillor Woods asked about Commencement Orders and if those could be made in the absence of a functioning Assembly at Stormont. The officer explained that it could be progressed and that had been the reason for the delay in allowing Departmental officials to pull the necessary information together.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Alderman W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Smart, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Councillor Boyle re-entered the meeting at 8.23 pm)

11. UPDATE ON PORTAVOGIE 3G PITCH PROJECT

(Appendices IX & X)

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: - Report from the Director of Community and Wellbeing detailing that Members will recall the update brought on the Portavogie 3G Pitch project in October 2022. As a result, the following recommendations were adopted by the Council:

1. Members to acknowledge that unforeseen circumstances have resulted in a significant uplift in estimated costs and therefore a review of the value for money and need against outcomes should be carried out, in the form of an addendum to the original OBC completed in 2017. The finding of which will be reported to members on completion.
2. Officers continue to liaise with NI Water on their exact requirement and establishment of Council financial commitment.

3. Officers request that Planning NI reconsider NI Water's recommendation for refusal and manage the resolution of the identified matter, as a condition to the planning approval instead.
4. Members write to NI Water Minister with the recommendation that these works are general area improvement works and therefore NI Water should cover the cost and carry out the works directly.

In relation to recommendation 4, in the absence of a Minister, a letter was sent instead to the DFI permanent Secretary on 21 November 2022. A response had now been received and was attached.

In response, the Chief Executive had now written to the Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Water.

RECOMMENDED that the Council notes the attached reply from the DfI Permanent Secretary and the further letter sent to the Chief Executive of NI Water and her response will be reported back when received.

Proposed by Councillor Boyle, seconded by Alderman W Irvine, that the recommendation be adopted.

Councillor Boyle thanked officers for the report and shared the frustration of officers, and more so, the people of Portavogie, who had been waiting a long time for this pitch. It was disappointing that after 13 months NI Water had a problem and was seeking a large contribution of £200k from the Council. He wondered why that was necessary and queried how could costs be attributed at this stage with accuracy.

The Director urged caution in using any figure with any significant confidence at this stage since it was still being calculated. There was no doubt that if a 3G was introduced it would have an effect on the water infrastructure of the area and would need drainage for the water whereas in a grass pitch water could soak away naturally. The question the Council would have would be if there was a deficiency already and should it be a shared responsibility.

Alderman W Irvine echoed the frustrations regarding the delay and the cost of the project which had gone up and hoped that a resolution could be found so that the Council was not paying more than it should be.

AGREED TO RECOMMEND, on the proposal of Councillor MacArthur, seconded by Councillor Boyle, that the recommendation be adopted.

(Councillor Adair entered the meeting at 8.32 pm).

12. NOTICE OF MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLORS THOMPSON AND ADAIR

That Council task of officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Abbey Road, Millisle, to ensure that they can be used and enjoyed by the local sporting clubs and the community of Millisle.

Proposed by Councillor Adair, seconded by Alderman W Irvine, that the Notice of Motion be adopted.

Councillor Adair said that he had attended a meeting with Mr S Dunne MLA regarding football clubs in Millisle and it was noted that the pitches at Abbey Road were frequently flooding and were uneven in places. He welcomed that the Council had carried out some additional drainage in recent times but problems persisted.

He explained that 250 young people were associated with Abbey Villa Football Club and demand for those facilities was high and he was therefore saddened that the football pitch could not be used all the time. It was unsuitable for young people and he was asking for a Council report outlining the options that could be taken to ensure the facility could be used by everyone. He thanked the Director for meeting with him that day and hoped to source some funding opportunities. He asked Members to support his call for a report so that the facilities could be improved and that young people did not need to travel to use other pitches.

Alderman W Irvine was happy to support the Notice of Motion and thought it was incumbent on the Council to have pitches in a good condition so young people did not need to travel far to participate in their sport. Millisle was a growing village with youth teams so hopefully everyone could look forward to using good facilities in the future.

Councillor Boyle thanked his Council colleagues for bringing the Motion and he hoped that outside funding could be sourced and agreed that improvements were needed at that pitch.

Councillor Adair thanked Members for their support and restated that the pitch at Millisle fell short of being at an acceptable standard.

AGREED.

13. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

- a) Update Requested Consultation Concerning Reports of ASB at Playparks

Alderman W Irvine explained that a report had come forward a couple of months ago in respect of the locking of some playparks and he asked for an update on that.

The Head of Parks and Cemeteries stated that officers had been engaging with residents in many neighbourhoods including Clandeboye, Bloomfield and Breezemount and with the North Down Community Network. They had also met the Ward Park Residents Group in November, the PSNI in December and had held stakeholder meetings. Some had still to take place with Moira Drive residents and the Clandeboye Village Association. Following those meetings officers would be better placed and informed to consider if further consultation was necessary and to hear concerns to make recommendations to Members at a later date.

Alderman W Irvine looked forward to the report on its completion.

Councillor Chambers asked about the historical problem of anti-social behaviour that had taken place at Linear Park where it met with Marlo Link beside Ballycrochan Presbyterian Church. The officer explained that meetings continued in that area with residents and that currently there was a relatively low level of anti-social behaviour in that place. Local residents were encouraged to ring the PSNI to get a crime number if there was something worth recording. Only last month a Friends of Policy was agreed which might help to solve any remaining issues in that area.

NOTED.

b) Recent success of Bangor Football Club on Steel and Sons Cup

Alderman W Irvine explained that Bangor Football Club had had a recent success winning the Steel and Sons Cup. He stated that the Club was now in prime position for promotion. He asked that a letter of congratulation be sent to the Club along with a Mayoral reception to recognise that success and show that the Council was fully behind them and the other Clubs within the Borough.

AGREED, on the proposed of Alderman W Irvine, seconded by Councillor Chambers that a letter of congratulation be sent to Bangor Football Club and that a Mayoral reception take place.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.46 pm.

ITEM 8.5.1**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Parks & Cemeteries
Date of Report	18 January 2023
File Reference	CW30
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Matter Arising from Community and Wellbeing Committee Item 9 Kinnegar to Donaghadee Additional Public Engagement
Attachments	None

Background

The purpose of this report is to clarify Elected Member concerns raised at the Community & Wellbeing Committee on 11 January 2023 regarding previous decisions made and the purpose of the public Information meetings to discuss the proposed Kinnegar to Donaghadee Greenway on the following dates:

- Monday 23rd January: Donaghadee Community Centre from 6.30-8.30pm.
- Tuesday 24th January: Council Chamber Bangor Town Hall from 6.30-8.30pm.
- Wednesday 1st February: Queens Leisure Complex Holywood from 6.30-8.30pm.

Following an update report to Community and Wellbeing in December 2021 relating to the Council's Greenway Network projects, Council agreed to the following amendments (in bold) to the Officer's recommendation.

“That the recommendation (*to note the update*) be adopted and furthermore that a commitment is given to undertake full public consultation on the proposed routes including public information sessions. Officers will bring back a comprehensive report detailing the outcome of the consultation with the full range of options outlined on the way forward.”

Please note that the decision included to hold public ‘Information Sessions’.

In February 2022, the outworking of this decision was agreed as:

1. applying only to the Kinnegar to Donaghadee section of the proposals,
2. that this additional element was to supplement consultation that was already carried out prior to the planning application being submitted – this consultation report was attached for members information - and general consultation was ongoing at that time (*through the planning process*),
3. That it was to include public meetings in order that residents have an opportunity to further engage once more with the project team

To that end it was agreed in February 2022 to organise

1. Public meetings on a DEA basis
2. User surveys on the path
3. A residents survey based on a sample that gives a high level of confidence that the results are meaningful and representative.

Points 2 and 3 have been completed and reported to the Community and Wellbeing Committee.

Point 1 will be completed by holding the three Public Information meetings. Council Officers will start the meeting by presenting information on the plans, the results of the surveys and then invite questions and comments from those attending. Half of each meeting will be reserved for the question-and-answer sessions. Information, comments, questions, and queries will be recorded, compiled and brought back to Elected Members at a future meeting of the Community & Wellbeing Committee as soon as possible.

Although not advertised as public consultation (as this was not the Councils definition of the meetings requested), there is very much an element of consultation on the information that is being presented at the meetings, what is already in the public domain, and will provide opportunities for comments on the environmental statement, the plans on the portal and the hard board plans that will be at the meetings.

Those attending will also have an opportunity to view the plans, complete a feedback form and will be encouraged to contribute towards the Planning Consultation also being undertaken. Elected Members can be assured that Officers will be listening and reporting back to provide any feasible options for action resulting from the full consultation process, including issues raised at the public information meetings. A full outcome report will be brought to committee in due course with options for members information and consideration on next steps as required by the earlier Council decision.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council notes the above and that a further report will be brought back after the public information sessions to a future meeting of the Community & Wellbeing Committee.

Received by email 22.12.2022

To: DfE Energy Consumers <EnergyConsumers@economy-ni.gov.uk>

Subject: Consultation on the Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Stakeholder,

The Consultation on the Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan is now live - [Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

This represents a crucial step for the Department to deliver on the Energy Strategy for NI and the ambition of 1GW of offshore wind from 2030.

The draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) sets out the direction for planning, licensing, consenting and development of offshore renewable energy in Northern Ireland. The purpose of this consultation on the draft OREAP is to enable stakeholders to contribute and provide input into offshore renewable energy policy development.

We encourage you or your organisation to share your views and evidence about the Draft Action Plan to help inform the development of an offshore wind framework in Northern Ireland.

The consultation closes on 16th March 2023.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Renewable Electricity Team

Email: RenewableElectricity@economy-ni.gov.uk

Marie Ward
Chief Executive



Comhairle Ceantair
**an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin**
**Newry, Mourne
and Down**
District Council

Our ref: C/207/2022

12 December 2022

Dear Chief Executive

Re: Notice of Motion – Workers Legal Rights to Tips

At a Meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council held on 5 December 2022 the following motion was agreed:

"It was agreed that Newry Mourne and Down District Council calls upon the extension of laws that are being proposed at Westminster giving workers a legal right to their tips be extended here to Northern Ireland. If this Motion is adopted, we write to the other ten local authorities seeking their support and also to the Permanent Secretary at the Department of the Economy and the relevant Minister at Westminster strongly urging that the legislation in Northern Ireland be brought into line with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland as a matter of urgency".

Members fully supported the Motion and agreed it would be a positive step towards improving the rights and entitlements of lower paid workers.

I would ask that you give this matter serious consideration and I look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully

Marie Ward
Chief Executive



ITEM 11**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	17 January 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
Subject	Request for Deputation from Greenspaces Bangor and North Down
Attachments	

A request to make a deputation to the Community and Wellbeing Committee has been received from Ms Louise MaCartney of Greenspaces Bangor and North Down.

The deputation request stated the following:

“Our group comprises people from a range of professional or skills-based backgrounds relevant to the environment and ecology, who are passionate about seeing our borough become the best it can be for nature and for people's access to nature. We were outlining for the Mayor our aspirations for the coming year in terms of promoting and enhancing the green spaces in the locality and looking for ways to support Council in its recent initiatives for example the tree planting policy, and launch of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. In relation to this, we write to you, to request that we might bring a deputation to the Community & Wellbeing Committee to make contact and build connections.

I am confident we can offer some support or add value to the efforts of Council to creating a well-managed, sustainable environment, that we can all take pride in, as per the aspirations of the Big Plan.”

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council considers the request for a Deputation from Greenspaces Bangor and North Down.

ITEM 12

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	05 January 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Nominations to Working Groups
Attachments	

Places on working groups are filled through nomination at the Council's Annual Meeting and are thus held by individual Members rather than Parties. When a position becomes vacant, it reverts back to Council to nominate a Member to fill the place rather than Party Nominating Officers.

Following the resignation of Deborah Girvan from Council, a place has become available on each of the following groups:

1. Car Parking Strategy Working Group
2. East Border Region Members Forum

The below tables reflect current membership of the above working groups:

Body: Car Parking Strategy Working Group – 11 Places

	2022/23
1	Alderman Carson
2	Councillor Smart

3	Alderman Gibson
4	Councillor Thompson
5	Councillor Edmund
6	Alderman McIlveen
7	Councillor Dunlop
8	Councillor Douglas
9	Alderman Wilson
10	Councillor Irvine
11	

Body: East Border Region Members Forum – 6 Places

	2019 - 23
1	Councillor Thompson
2	Alderman Keery
3	Alderman McDowell
4	Councillor Boyle
5	Alderman Carson
6	

Nominations are sought from Council to fill each of the above places for the remainder of the year or four-year term as necessary.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council nominate a Member to the following groups:

1. Car Parking Strategy Working Group
2. East Border Region Members Forum

ITEM 13**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Community and Culture
Date of Report	19 January 2023
File Reference	CW 157
Legislation	The Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Coronation Community Grants Response to NoM
Attachments	

In November 2022 the Council agreed the following Notice of Motion:

In light of the fact that the Coronation of King Charles III will take place on 6 May 2023, this Council tasks officers to make provision for community celebrations across the Ards and North Down Borough Council area, and tasks them to allow for this in the forthcoming rate setting process.

Whilst a celebration of the Coronation of King Charles III undoubtedly fits with the Councils Big Plan and Corporate Plan and will enable pride within our communities, we are aware that the Coronation is happening during a period of austerity, where many people within our communities are struggling to cope with rising food, fuel and utility costs.

The current process towards setting the Rate for 2023/24 is nearing its conclusion and an indicative allocation of £50,000 has been made. It is hoped that grant funding may be available from the Northern Ireland Office or other sources, which could supplement this budget.

Based on Members debate around the Notice of Motion, officers are developing a number of programmes and activities to enable communities to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III. These include an arts competition for schools, tree planting, civic events and beacons, traditional crafts at North Down Museum and the Newtownards Town Hall, a tea dance, coronation party packs, coronation grants and commemorative coins. Officers are currently waiting on guidance from Royal Pageant Master to finalise the civic element of the programme and a fully costed programme will be brought to committee in February for Members consideration.

Officers had also investigated the option to include the screening of the Coronation. However, the cost of screening the event in one outdoor venue is approximately £27,265 to include the cost of screen hire, infrastructure and marketing costs. Therefore, with a budget of £50,000 the cost of screening the event within budget is likely to be prohibitive and is not being considered as a recommendation.

Big Screens have also been used in other Council areas, such as Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Mid and East Antrim, Antrim and Newtownabbey, for events such as the Queens Funeral. The feedback from those Councils confirmed that numbers in attendance were very low. Whilst Big Screens may be appropriate for certain types of events such as large-scale sporting events, they do not appear to draw a crowd for some other types of events.

It is recommended that £30,000 is ringfenced within the total budget for Coronation Community Grants. The grants would be limited to £500 per constituted community and voluntary groups, allowing up to 60 constituted community and voluntary groups to be supported to celebrate the Coronation. Any unallocated funding from the total budget of £30,000 can be reinvested into the overall programme of activities.

Members will be aware that there are multiple constituted groups within each of our towns and villages all of whom are likely to what the celebrate the event in their own way. Alternatively, the individual groups can apply and pool their funds to organise a single large event for their area.

This grants scheme is based on the previously successful scheme run by Council for HM the Queen's 90th Birthday and it is proposed that the maximum award for each application is increased from £300 to £500. By using a first come first served simplified grants scheme, the eligibility of applications can be considered upon receipt, without the need of a formal assessment panel, which will fast track the process.

In order to administer and award the grants in time for the Coronation on 6 May 2023 the simplified grant scheme will have to open in early February 2023, with Council approval sought in March 2023. Following the call-in period £500 can be released to up to 60 successful groups during April, upon receipt of a signed and accepted Letter of Offer.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council agrees that a budget of £30,000 is ringfenced for the Coronation Grants Scheme, which is opened for applications in early February 2023

Unclassified

and administered as detailed in this report, and that a further report on other activities and costs will be brought to committee for consideration in February.

ITEM 14**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	05 January 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Schedule of Meetings 2023 - further update
Attachments	Appendix 1 - ANDBC Meeting Schedule 2023

At the Council meeting in November 2022, Members approved the schedule of meetings for 2023.

Since then, the date of the Local Government elections has been rescheduled and will now take place on 18 May 2023. Accordingly, the 2023 meeting schedule has been reviewed and updated, and can be found in appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council approves the updated schedule as found in appendix 1.

ARDS AND NORTH DOWN BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS FROM 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2023

Please note that all Meetings will commence at 7.00pm unless otherwise stated.

JANUARY 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Wednesday 4 January	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 5 January	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 10 January	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 11 January	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 19 January	Special Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 26 January	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor (Date changed to accommodate Holocaust event in the Chamber)
FEBRUARY 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Thursday 2 February	Special Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 7 February	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 8 February	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 9 February	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 14 February	Special Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
Tuesday 14 February	Corporate Services Committee	City Hall, Bangor
Wednesday 15 February	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 22 February	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
MARCH 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 7 March	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 8 March	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards

Thursday 9 March	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 14 March	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 15 March	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Monday 20 March	Audit Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 29 March	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
APRIL 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 4 April	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 26 April	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
MAY 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
NO MEETINGS		
JUNE 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Wednesday 7 June	Annual Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
Monday 12 June	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
Tuesday 13 June	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 14 June	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 15 June	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 20 June	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 21 June	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
JULY 2023		
Tuesday 4 July	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 5 July	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
Wednesday 26 July	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
AUGUST 2023		
Tuesday 1 August	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 30 August	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
SEPTEMBER 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 5 September	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 6 September	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards

Thursday 7 September	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 12 September	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 13 September	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 27 September	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
OCTOBER 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 3 October	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 4 October	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 5 October	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 10 October	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 11 October	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 25 October	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
NOVEMBER 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 7 November	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 8 November	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 9 November	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 14 November	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 15 November	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 29 November	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
DECEMBER 2023		
Date	Meeting	Venue
Tuesday 5 December	Planning Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 6 December	Environment Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Thursday 7 December	Place and Prosperity Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Tuesday 12 December	Corporate Services Committee	Church Street, N'Ards
Wednesday 13 December	Community and Wellbeing Committee	Church Street, N'Ards

Wednesday 20 December	Council Meeting	City Hall, Bangor
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ITEM 15**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	17 January 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Independent Reporting Commission Fifth Report - Letter of response
Attachments	Appendix 1 - Letter from the Independent Reporting Commission

At the Council meeting in December 2022, Members considered the Independent Reporting Commission's Fifth Report. At the meeting it was agreed:

“That Council writes to the IRC to ask if the IRA Council still direct Sinn Fein Policy and Strategy.”

On 9 January, the Chief Executive wrote to the Independent Reporting Commission and received a response on 17 January. A copy of the response can be found in Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council note the response.

IRC Independent Reporting Commission

Po Box 2352, Belfast, BT4 9EL

E: enquiries@ircommission.org T: 02890 527015

Stephen Reid
Chief Executive
Ards and North Down Borough Council
Town Hall
The Castle
Bangor, BT20 4BT

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for circulating and discussing the IRC's Fifth Report with your council representatives, and for your letter dated 9 January which we have discussed with our Commissioners.

In answer to your question, the IRC is not an assessment body, the Commissioners have no operational role and they do not make detailed security, threat or status assessments of the various paramilitary groups. The IRC's mandate is to report on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland; and implementation of the relevant measures of the Government of Ireland, the Government of the United Kingdom, and the Northern Ireland Executive, including the Executive's Strategy, to inform the implementation of that Strategy. For more background on the mandate of the IRC, please see paragraphs 1.4 to 1.10 of its Fifth Report.

It would be much appreciated if you could inform your elected members of the above response.

Yours sincerely,

IRC Secretariat

ITEM 16**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Environmental Health Protection and Development.
Date of Report	17 January 2023
File Reference	EHPD5
Legislation	N/A
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	Whole System Approach to Obesity early adopter expression of interest Progress Update
Attachments	None

A report "Whole System Approach to Obesity – early adopter expression of interest" ref EHPD5, was taken Community and Wellbeing Committee on 12th October 2022 advising that we had been approached by Public Health Agency (PHA) to apply to be an early adopter of this new approach to tackling the significant and worrying trend of increased overweight and obese adults and children. The report was approved by the Committee and subsequently ratified by Council at the October Council meeting.

Following the application process, Officers were informed in late December 2022 that Ards and North Down had been chosen as the first council in Northern Ireland to begin the process of developing a Whole system approach to obesity. Belfast and Derry and Strabane Councils will join in this first phase towards the end of 2023. Another three NI councils will then follow suit in phases 2 and 3.

Members will receive an update report at the February Community and Wellbeing Committee. However, before that, in January, PHA will be releasing a press release outlining the successful Councils and that they have chosen Ards and North Down as the first adopter. This will be done alongside the publication of their research work commissioned from the Institute of Public Health which has provided the

evidence for their new strategy. It is envisaged that shortly after this PHA launch and following the report to Community and Wellbeing Committee and Council in February, Ards and North Down will do a local press release.

As the PHA press release will take place before the date of the February Committee, it is important to notify members of the successful application at the earliest opportunity and before the information is in the public domain.

The lead officers on this project are the Community Planning Manager and Environmental Health Manager (Health and Wellbeing) and further information or queries should be addressed with them.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council note that the application to be an early adopter of this new approach to tackling obesity has been successful.

ITEM 17**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Community and Wellbeing
Responsible Head of Service	Community Planning Manager
Date of Report	20 January 2023
File Reference	
Legislation	
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below: Not a policy or strategy
Subject	Response to NoM in relation to Cost-of-living crisis
Attachments	Cost-of-ILiving Statistical Assessment of Need

Background

Members will be aware that at a special meeting of Council on 12 January 2023 the following was agreed:

“That this Council recognises the significant Cost of Living hardship facing the many residents in Ards and North Down and directs officers to urgently complete a report outlining options for how we can best support our residents.

This should include consideration of a potential hardship fund following liaison with counterparts in other District Councils in Northern Ireland around the nature and delivery of similar schemes, and liaison with local organisations and charities who specialise in delivering financial support around how Council can best support their services.

This Council will also write to the Department of Communities and the Northern Ireland Office to request that funding is provided to Councils (and that it is ring-fenced in the 2023/24 budget) to assist with the implementation of any such support schemes. Given the urgency of the matter, this report should be ready for the meeting of Full Council on 26 January 2023”

It has been a challenge given the short time available to produce a comprehensive report, on this complex matter. However, officers have collated information on help that is currently available to residents, feedback on the impact of cost-of-living on our residents, and support programmes (including hardship funds) that have been established in other council areas. The report also outlines options, for additional support, for Members to consider.

It should be noted that no funding has been identified and the potential options outlined at the end of this report have not been budgeted for.

The report seeks to address each aspect of the Notice of Motion and provide information as requested.

1. Outline options of how we can best support our residents

To consider additional support it is important to reflect on the existing services that are available to residents. The examples set out below include initiatives already being led by council, initiatives where council is a partner and initiatives that are being led by others. While not referencing everything that is being done, these provide a flavour of the support that is already available.

A. Communication and signposting

Council has repeatedly promoted the cost-of-living support information that is available on NI Direct (www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/cost-living). Council's own website also includes information, lifted from the **Big Guide to Age Friendly**, on its website about money, poverty and legal matters (www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/resident/community/money-tackling-poverty-and-legal-matters). This is a useful way of providing support to people as Council is a trusted source of official information.

The recently launched **Here2Help** app, that is being supported with an extensive promotional campaign, also contains signposting to organisations (both local and regionally based) who can offer support to people who are struggling and adversely affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Within the app there is a dedicated theme for 'Benefits and Finances'. This includes organisations who can help with debt advice.

In addition to Facebook, Council promotes the Here2Help app on the community support section of its website, accessed via the following link: www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/resident/community/community-support. The app is also promoted by statutory and community partners. Work is ongoing to roll out signs across the borough. This includes attaching signs to approximately 100 benches. Future marketing activities include window stickers for shops, schools and taxis as well as business cards for GP surgeries.

Alongside other Community Planning Partners, Ards and North Down Borough Council is a member of the AND Poverty Forum. A Cost-of-Living Event is being considered for March 2023. This is like previous events (pre covid) where residents were invited to attend a 'funday' and could also avail of other support information. Funding for this event may be available

via the South Eastern Protect Life Implementation Group (of which the Community Planning Manager is a member), funding is likely to be provided by several partners organisations. Exhibitors at this event are likely to include Make the Call (benefits advice), mental health support services and other community support organisations.

Following input from AND's Community Support Steering Group a Find a Warm Welcome Here Campaign has been implemented. This campaign has involved creating a shared graphic that can be used by organisations to promote their warm spaces. Information on these spaces is collated via an online form and a document produced that gives information on the location of each space, what happens in the space and whether hot drinks, food, activities, or device charging is also available. The document is updated as required and a new version circulated.

Lots of partners (statutory as well as community and voluntary) are also undertaking signposting exercises. The Children and Young Person's Strategic Partnership has a resources publication available on their website with signposting to organisations who offer support. <https://cypsp.hscni.net/download/390/lpg/39049/cost-of-living-crisis-resource.pdf>. The Family Support Hubs will also be providing support to families in crisis. The Networks and AGEnda also undertake considerable amounts of signposting.

B. Affordable Warmth Scheme

(existing help for low-income families to reduce energy costs)

The Council, in partnership with Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and Department for Communities (DfC) delivers an Affordable Warmth scheme to upgrade home insulation and heating systems to alleviate fuel poverty. Low-income households (less than £23,000 total gross income per year) and a homeowner or private tenant, can apply for a range of measures including cavity wall and loft insulation, double glazing, draught exclusion, new boiler and radiators, etc

This is a targeted scheme. Council officials make contact with households likely to be affected by fuel poverty to check eligibility and advise on energy efficiency measures (strict criteria applies).

Currently the Council can refer 20 households per month to NIHE for the technical assessment and grant but there are challenges with households signing up. There is sometimes a reluctance to provide the amount of documents that need submitted (proof of ownership, income, etc) and be transparent about finances (bank statements must be provided). Occasionally the occupant is unwilling to allow the full range of works required to proceed because of the disruption.

Discussions are in progress with DfC to widen the targeted areas and make it more accessible. The referral rate is expected to increase to 30 per month from 1 April 2023.

In the previous financial year 341 referrals were made by the council and during that timeframe 241 homes were improved with 302 measures undertaken to a value of £861,913.35.

C. Existing Council funding mechanisms to support people

Currently, Community Advice Ards and North Down (CAAND) and the three Networks are funded to supply, help, assistance and signpost residents of the Borough that are struggling with the ever-increasing cost-of-living crisis.

CAAND receives £294,000 annually via a 3-year contract (2021-2024) which is co-funded by DfC. This funding is allocated to Advice support. In addition, CAAND receives £86,835 towards Welfare Reform Mitigations, Tribunal Representations, and uplifts.

The three Networks Ards Community Network (ACN), County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN), and North Down Community Network (NDCN), each receive £10,000 from Council as a contribution to the services they provide.

Council agreed that to assist groups during the cost-of-living crisis, that project costs were removed from the Community Development Fund so that 100% of the fund, totalling £93,000 was allocated to grants for grass roots community and voluntary groups to assist with "Running Costs". The budget for individual applications was also increased from £2000 to £2500, to enable Council to provide up to 37 local groups with support towards their energy bills.

Members will be aware the boroughs first social supermarket, Well Fed, was launched in September 2022. This services all of Ards and North Down and includes a mobile outreach service to ensure those living on the Peninsula and Comber/Ballygowan and Killinchy have equal access to services. Statistics for the first month of operation are available. These are not statistically reliable as the Social Supermarket was launched slowly as people becoming members needed high levels of support. However, initial data indicates that personal debt was a factor in 69% of individuals who joined in the first month. To date, £68,267.22 has been provided for this initiative.

£10,000 was also provided to Kilcooley Women's Centre for a heating system for their Social Supermarket. Northern Ireland Housing Executive paid the costs for the remedial works needed for their Social Supermarket building.

Council also provides support to older and younger residents via leisure member concessions.

D. Central government support for cost-of-living

Starting from January 2023, every household in Northern Ireland will receive £600. Prior to this, central government put in place a cost-of-living

support package that includes one-off payments to those on income related benefits, disabled claimants and pensioners. These payments are intended to provide support with the current rise in the cost of living. Two low-income cost-of-living payments of £326 and £324 have already been made to eligible households. A lump sum of £150 has been paid to individuals in receipt of disability benefits. Pensioner households have received an extra £300 Pensioner Cost-of Living Payment in addition to their normal Winter Fuel payment.

The payment schedule for 2023/24 has been announced. Payments will be made to those in receipt of eligible low income (means tested) and disability benefits.

An additional Winter Fuel Payment will also be made. This information is available on NI Direct. Additional payments will be:

- The first £301 low income (means tested) Cost of Living Payment is due during Spring 2023
- A £150 Disability Payment is due during Summer 2023
- The second £300 low income means-tested) Cost of Living Payment is due during Autumn 2023
- A £300 additional Winter Fuel Payment is due during Winter 2023/24
- The third £299 low income (means tested) Cost of Living Payment is due during Spring 2024

The UK government has announced further Cost of Living Payments (www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2022-cost-of-living-support-factsheet/cost-of-living-support-factsheet) of up to £900 for people on an eligible low income benefit, £300 for pensioner households and £150 for people on an eligible disability benefit.

2. Review of support provided by other Councils

In December 2022, as part of their knowledge sharing remit, the Community Planning Officers Network (all 11 councils) collated information to share with each other on the activities being undertaken within each council area to address the cost-of-living crisis. The key activities are summarised in the table below.

Council	Hardship/ Fuel Poverty Fund (inc amount)	Other Support
Antrim and Newtownabbey	No	To tackle the specific Energy crisis issues ANBC have also been involved with the following interventions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable Warmth • NISEP grants • Oil Stamp Saving Scheme • Heater Lending Scheme • Keep Warm Packs <p>Other initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concession leisure membership

Unclassified

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support of existing community activities
Armagh Banbridge Craigavon	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication on cost-of-living via website and Seniors Newsletter. • Formed an independent Poverty Forum • Established a Poverty Truth Commission
Belfast	Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund £1m Council funding committed (see below for more info)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed Belfast Cost of Living newsletter guide (communication) • Warm Spaces/ Warm Welcome Campaign • Establish a Poverty Truth Commission
Causeway Coast and Glens	2 nd Fuel Support Scheme completed with support to 90 households (signposted to St Vincent de Paul or Salvation Army via Community Advice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established Anti-poverty Stakeholder Steering Group and develop and action plan • Developed a 'Where to Turn' Campaign • Held Cost-of-Living crisis information sharing event • Emergency fuel signposting • Setting up of warm spaces • Energy advisors • Fuel Stamp Saving Scheme
Derry City and Strabane	Emergency Fuel Support Programme - £100 to eligible households (see below for more info)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm Banks as welcoming places in council owned community centres, civic buildings and leisure centres
Fermanagh and Omagh	£80,000 allocated to help households with home heating via St Vincent de Paul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support provided to food banks • Established as Poverty Truth Commission • Money for school breakfast clubs • Anti-poverty Officer
Lisburn and Castlereagh	<p>Missing from collated table but information on their hardship fund (for organisations rather than individuals) is available on their website. In October 2022, local community and voluntary groups or organisations could apply for a grant of up to £2,000 from the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Hardship Funding Programme.</p> <p>This £80,000 scheme opened on Friday 28th October. It closed at 12 noon on 21st November 2022.</p>	
Mid and East Antrim	Only covid monies and Social Supermarket funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty Action Group • Food and fuel vouchers • Slow cooker scheme • Warm spaces grants (£500) to constituted groups • Info on Council website • Oil heater and electric blanket scheme
Mid Ulster	Crisis Support Programme (£90,000) – Foodbanks and St Vincent De Paul (food, fuel vouchers, white goods)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Support Programme – referrals in partnership with Save the Children, Northern Health Trust and Southern Health Trust. • £500 uplift to community (and sports) venues and facilities • DfC Funding for Social Supermarket
Newry Mourne and Down	<p>Missing from collated table. But information shared by Co Down Rural Community Network of a small oil grant (£6,000) provided to the Network to distribute to households via a social worker referral.</p>	

The table shows that many councils have implemented/participated in similar initiatives to Ards and North Down Borough Council. This includes pro-active communication and signposting, establishing social supermarkets and promoting warm spaces. Councils appear to have used a mixture of remaining Covid-19 monies previously provided by DfC (ANDBC's allocation was quickly distributed to groups) and small amounts of their own budget. Only Belfast City Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council appear to have used their own funding for direct hardship support payments. Other Council's appeared to have either Covid or Social Supermarket funding available. Due to the short time available to prepare this report we have not been able to verify this assumption.

3. Specific review of Hardship Funds by other Councils

The agreed recommendation from 12 January 2023 Special Council asked officers to consider a potential hardship fund and liaise with counterparts in other District Council who have delivered similar schemes to consider how these have worked.

A review of publicly available information was undertaken. Officers within Councils with 'hardship funds' were approached to find out about the processes that were used to establish the funds and how they have been administered. While the debate at the Special Council meetings suggests that Elected Members were unsure about Council using its own funds, it was considered appropriate that distributing funding provided by central government was potentially a palatable option.

Belfast City Council

Information on Belfast City Council's Fuel Poverty and Hardship Fund is available on their website(www.belfastcity.gov.uk/Community/Cost-of-living-and-winter-support/Fuel-poverty-hardship-fund).

Several critical news reports have been written about Belfast's Scheme. In December 2022 negative reports appeared around the £60k gross household income criteria. In January 2023, Belfast Telegraph reported that the NI Audit office was looking into the scheme due to concerns with the use of nine 'statutory' partners who had been contracted to distribute the fund vouchers. Some partners had allegedly started distributing their allocation of vouchers prior to the scheme officially being launched, meaning that by the time the scheme launched some had already closed to applications.

A MS Teams meeting was held with officers (19 January 2023) from Belfast City Council to gather information about the scheme. At this meeting it was stated that media reporting was not accurate.

The allocation of the £100 vouchers to individuals was undertaken via nine 'Strategic' partners. These partners had previously worked with Council during the covid pandemic. Not all the previous covid partners had the capacity to deliver the scheme. The partners who did, confirmed they had the resources

to undertake all the necessarily procedural steps (as set by Council) within the timescale available.

The distribution of £1million (provided entirely by Council) put into the scheme was based on statistical evidence of need and poverty. Each partner was then allocated a value of vouchers. Funding agreements were signed between Council and the nine partners, and the agreed funding transferred. Retail partners who could accept vouchers to process fuel (gas – only one partner found a retailer for oil) and electricity had already been established during the Covid pandemic. It would have been challenging to deliver the scheme if these retailer arrangements were not already in place.

Based on voucher allocation to households, partners then paid retailers directly. No cash was distributed to individuals

The £1 million pounds within the scheme went directly to 10,000 households. Partners were not paid to deliver the scheme but were allowed to recover their costs (premises, travel etc) which could be no more than 10% of their total cost allocation. This potentially increased the cost of the scheme to £1.1m.

In the four weeks between Council approving the scheme and its roll out, a team of officers from Belfast City Council arranged for Funding Agreements to be signed. This process included checking the financial capability of partners organisations. Officers applied the funding model (calculation based on statistical evidence) to determine how the £1m fund should be equitably split between the nine partners. They developed (in consultation with the nine partners) a Client Capture Sheet to record the evidence used to assess applicants' suitability and prepared detailed guidance notes so each partner was consistent with their application of the criteria.

To apply for the Belfast scheme, households had to demonstrate they met one of the following criteria:

- **A member of the household is entitled to free school meals**
Evidence of entitlement for example a copy of written or email correspondence from the Education Authority
- **A member of the household has recently become unemployed**
Evidence that employment has ended, for example a copy of P45
- **A member of the household is in receipt of means tested benefits**
Evidence of entitlement, for example copy of written or email correspondence from the relevant department or organisation
- **The household is in debt to an energy provider**
Evidence of current status, for example letter or recent bill from their energy provider
- **The gross annual household income is less than £60,000**
Evidence of annual income, for example copy of recent payslip(s) or copy of P60 for all adults in the household

Households meeting more than one criterion were only eligible for one £100 voucher.

While £1m was available for 10,000 households, a quick look at deprivation and poverty data from Belfast suggests that over 30,000 households could have been eligible. A first come first served approach was applied to how the vouchers were distributed. Many partners ran out of their allocation within the first few hours the scheme was open.

When the Client Capture Sheets are returned, Belfast City Council Officers will undertake random spot checks to clarify how well processes were followed and that the appropriate evidence was collected.

While the scheme was delivered by nine strategic partners, there was still a significant administrative requirement from council officers. The exact number of Officers working on the scheme is unknown, a request for this information has been submitted. It is likely to be senior officers, neighbourhood officers, finance officers and administrative officers.

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Information on DCSDC's Emergency Fuel Support Payment Scheme is available via a report written for their Council Committee ([Emergency Fuel Support Payment Appendix 1.pdf \(derrycityandstrabanedistrict.com\)](#)).

Derry City and Strabane District Council established a Hardship Fund and allocated £258,000 towards a Discretionary Emergency Fuel Support Programme (DEFSP). The purpose of this programme was to provide a one-off emergency fuel payment of £100 to a household in a financial emergency and requiring support to make a fuel payment of electricity, gas or oil.

The DEFSP was designed to provide an accessible and discretionary approach and operated via a referral system. Referrals to the scheme could be made via 'Trusted Partners'. These were local support organisations aware of households who were in difficulties and submitted a referral form directly to Council. The 'Trusted Partner' making the referral had to sign a declaration on the referral form that the household was in an emergency financial situation.

The eligibility criteria that the 'Trusted Partners' applied was:

- A member of the household is entitled to free school meals
- The household is in debt with an energy provider
- There is a person with a disability in the household
- A member of the household has recently become unemployed (last 3 months)
- A member of the household is on a zero hours contract
- The gross annual income of the household is less than £40,000

Each DEA was allocated an amount based on the Council's grant-aid allocation template. Once the funding was exhausted for that DEA no further referrals for that area could be assessed. A total of 2,405 households were supported with the fund.

Once the referral forms were received by the Council, a small, dedicated administration team collated each of the forms according to DEA and rank,

and according to the time received. At the end of each day a tally was drawn up on the number of forms received so that communication could be issued on the level of demand for each area and when the programme might close.

All eligible referrals were then sent to the Fuel Payment Partner via an excel document for processing their fuel payment according to their requested fuel type. The Fuel Payment Partner made the payment of up to £100 to the nominated energy supplier on behalf of the household or provided a credit voucher for top up for the fuel type to the household.

An approach has been made to Derry City and Strabane District Council for more information on their scheme and the internal council staff resources used to administer it.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is offering a Fuel Support Programme via St Vincent de Paul to support those most in need during the cost-of-living crisis. The fuel support is one of the initiatives of the Council's £250,000 cost-of-living crisis programme which was launched in December 2022. A total of £80,000 has been allocated to support local households with home heating.

The monies for this initiative have come from Covid Reserves. It is not clear whether covid funds were provided by Council or central government. As the Council has indicated they sought support from Department for Communities it can be assumed that this money has come from funding provided by DfC to address the community impacts of covid.

It is anticipated that £80,000 will help 400 families with home heating costs. A direct referral protocol will be put in place to enable community partners such as the six established foodbanks, South West Age Partnerships, Enniskillen and Omagh Family Support Hubs, and other organisations, to make requests to St Vincent de Paul to draw against the direct emergency fuel support scheme. Individuals can also self-refer to St Vincent de Paul.

As part of their Cost-of-Living Scheme, £12,000 has also been allocated to the Food Banks.

A study carried out by council identified that families with children, the 'working poor', those living with disability and older people will be most adversely affected by the crisis. Council is considering support for schools in the setting up of breakfast clubs. It is proposed that £28,000 is allocated to support those schools that wish to offer additional food provisions.

4. Liaison with local organisations and charities who specialise in delivering financial support around how Council can best support their services.

A meeting of the Community Support Steering Group was convened on 20 January 2023 to gather feedback on how Council can best support the services of local organisations.

Community Support Steering Group Engagement

Feedback was gathered on local need. Partners reported that an increased number of individuals have asked for help with food, fuel, and general hardship issues. Lots of people who are asking for help work full time and fall outside the criteria for free-school meals and don't get help with childcare costs. Working families are falling through the cracks. This experience was also supported by information from a survey exercise undertaken by schools where 30% of the parents who signed up for a food support scheme have children who were not eligible for free school meals. Action Mental Health indicated that a third of their clients needed help to access food.

Bangor Foodbank explained that while food donations have increased by 26%, demand has increased by 88%. This is a concern as it is a challenge to maintain the level of food supply needed. Ideas around breakfast clubs and exploring food links between partners were discussed.

Concern about cost-of-living carrying over into neighbourhood disputes was highlighted. Concern was also expressed about the increase in illegal money lending from organised crime gangs. Many people have indicated that the £600 payment from central government was spent in anticipation in the run up to Christmas and the actual money is now being used to pay off a debt.

Lots of the good examples of support being provided, such as warm spaces, were discussed. Organisations have reported an increase in the number of people accessing warm spaces. Where food is provided it is apparently evident that people are reducing their food intake at home to save money. The spaces have also highlighted high levels of loneliness. The Warehouse in Newtownards had over 500 individuals through the door every week and many spend a considerable time in the venue benefiting from the warm space and the food that is available.

Cost-of-living increases has resulted in increasing levels of loneliness experienced by both older and younger age groups. Money is not available for extracurricular activities, or for the transport to get to them. This is also an issue with students struggling with transport costs to attend SERC.

Partners within the Community Support Steering Group indicated that a hardship fund may not be the best method of getting support to those most in need. Agreeing the household income threshold, creating a scheme that is equitable (and not a postcode lottery) and getting support to those most in need were just some of the challenges mentioned.

Partners suggested support for the organisations providing advice and signposting is probably of greater value to a household than the £100 voucher. This is due to the time spent supporting an individual in crisis plus the referral pathways to support available from other organisations.

Feedback on delivering financial support

This was discussed at the 20 January 2023 meeting of the Community Support Steering Group. None of the partners organisations have much experience making direct payments or vouchers to individuals. The most common method of supporting individuals with fuel costs is via referrals to St Vincent De Paul. This is the route that most partners use when they get a request for help with fuel. There has been a huge increase in demand from SVP.

The County Down Rural Community Network is the only partner who mentioned they had some experience of delivering hardship payments. This is due to a grant of £6,000 given to them by Newry Mourne and Down District Council. This grant helped people (in financial hardship) within that council area purchase oil. Referrals for this scheme were accepted from social workers via HomeStart and SureStart. The Network then paid an oil supplier £200 per household referred. The fund was spent within a morning.

5. Statistical evidence about people in hardship in AND

To know how best to help people living in Ards and North Down, it is useful to consider some of the evidence. A short paper providing information on claimants, food bank demand, salary data and children living in low-income families is provided in appendix 1. This information shows the scale of the problem as well as challenges to ensure that support gets to where it is most needed.

The benefits system in Northern Ireland is extremely complex. The move from multiple benefits to universal credit means the definitions for any statistics quotes needs to be carefully considered. In 2020, 9.5% of the working age population claimed Universal Credit compared to a Northern Ireland average of 14.2%. In Belfast 14% of the working age population are on universal credit, while in Derry City and Strabane this figure is 14.9%. This comparison is potentially relevant due to the information provided earlier in the report about their 'hardship/fuel poverty' funds. Not everyone in Ards and North Down will have transferred to Universal Credit. Universal Credit was scheduled for roll out in AND in 2018. We assume that the jump in UC claimants from 4220 in 2020 to 9710 in 2021 is due to how Universal Credit is rolled out. This follows a similar trend and NI. This jump is not due to Covid.

Heat maps within the document in appendix 1 show where claimants are located. It also shows which parts of the borough an increased number of claimants are located in.

Trussell Trust information on food bank parcels has also been included in the report. There are two Trussell Trust Food Banks in Ards and North Down, in Bangor and Newtownards. Covid did have an impact on the demand for food parcels and this demand has now dropped. However, demand is still above pre covid levels which indicate there has been an increase in need. Economic inequality is a priority within the Community Plan. A project has been initiated between Community Planning, the Trussell Trust, the Social Supermarket and Community Advice AND to collate data that will be used to provide more

comprehensive information about poverty within this area. This will help understand people's circumstance for accessing support. As this project has just commenced, we do not yet have access to this level of local intelligence. We believe this project may help us understand why people are living in poverty.

The report includes information on salaries. In 2021, the median gross annual salary for people living in Ards and North Down was £24,123 which is similar to the NI average of £24,000. The median gross annual salary of people living in Ards and North Down working full time was £29,332 compared to £10,670 for people working part-time. This information is important if we were to establish a hardship fund and to identify appropriate criteria based on household income.

Included within the report is information on children in low-income families as well as information on pension credits. While below the Northern Ireland average of 20.9%, 17.3% of children (under 16) in AND live in relative low income families. Only Lisburn and Castlereagh has a lower percentage of children living in relative low income families. 17.3% equates to 5187 children. While this is lower compared to other areas and increasing trend is observed in the data.

Pension credit data shows a similar pattern. Lisburn and Castlereagh is the only council area with a lower % of claimants that Ards and North Down. AND has 12.9% of its population claiming pension credits compared to 20.8% as the NI average. This equates to 4,500 people. But not everyone who is eligible is claiming their pension credit. The trend for people claiming pension credits in AND is decreasing.

The information provided shows that poverty exists in AND, that this info could be used (with caveats) to agree a support programme that tries to address need. It also shows how complicated this would be.

6. Options for Members to consider

As requested, officers have identified options outlining how Council can best support our residents.

These options are additional to the support already available. The options proposed are currently hypothetical as no budget has been identified to implement them. A review of potential underspend within Community and/or Social Supermarket budgets is the most likely source of money to fund cost-of-living support. However, if this is the source then the original purpose of DfC providing this funding to Council cannot be deviated from i.e. food and wrap around services.

a. Hardship fund (as specially mentioned in NoM)

To establish a hardship fund in Ards and North Down, money would need to be secured from Council reserves as any underspend from DfC funded programmes cannot be given out as vouchers to individuals.

The information and research undertaken for this report highlights the challenges of designing and delivering a hardship fund. There is no mechanism in Ards and North Down to implement a voucher scheme. No organisations have come forward to say they would have the capacity to roll out a voucher scheme.

Data has been provided for Members that may help identify appropriate criteria for a scheme. This data indicates that eligibility will be significantly more than the value of a hardship fund meaning those who are most in need may miss out. Examples of other hardship funds and their criteria have been provided. If Members agree to establish a Hardship Fund, criteria will either need to be agreed at Council. Criteria from the Belfast and Derry City and Strabane scheme has been included. It should be noted that members of the Community Support Steering Group, highlighted the large number of 'working poor' accessing their services who would be unlikely to meet the criteria used in the other schemes.

b. Large signposting and support event (via AND Poverty Forum)

The Cost-of-Living event to be held before March will be particularly useful to residents to show them help that is available. Along with other partners, Council may be asked to contribute a small amount of money to help maximise the reach of the event across the whole borough. This small contribution can be met from within existing budgets.

c. Financial help for support organisations

An option to increase financial support to the 3 networks named above budget depending. Each network to receive additional financial support to enable them to advise, inform, and signpost the residents of the Borough who are experiencing financial hardship. Explore if funding is available to provide funding for Kilcooley Women's Centre My Pantry Social Supermarket.

Donations to the food banks are insufficient for demand, as more residents are encountering hardship, due to the cost of living is increasing. An option would be to provide financial aid to the 3 foodbanks within the Borough, so they can restock their shelves, budget and funding identified dependant.

Provide financial assistance, through Community Advice AND, to St Vincent De Paul. Utilising this method would ensure those that are struggling the most with the cost-of-living crisis receive vouchers for food and fuel and is recorded/accounted for appropriately.

d. Consideration of schemes to reduce cost-of-living impact

Potential projects with partners, such as South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to run courses on low-cost nutritional cooking. Funding could be used to purchase slow cookers.

Exploration of the number of breakfast clubs and identify links between Schools, Social Supermarket and Foodbanks who have a large (over) supply of breakfast cereals. This could link to the option outlined above.

e. Additional support from central government

A letter has been sent to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities to ask if there is a funding stream available from the Department to assist with the Cost of Living crisis. From discussions with DfC Officials, it is unlikely that additional Departmental funding will be made available, other than what has already been introduced by the Department, including:

- Additional funding from DfC (£1500) for Community and Voluntary Sector organisations already funded to deliver services.
- Fair Share, will also be assisted by the Department to secure additional food for member organisations to access.

A letter has also been sent to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland asking for additional financial support from the Northern Ireland Office towards the Council setting up a Cost of Living Hardship Fund. No replies to the letters have been received at the time of writing this report, but an update on this will be given at the Council meeting.

Members should note that care needs to be taken with how funds are distributed to non-profit organisations to comply with audit requirements and fraud regulations. This would be a risk to be assessed closely and advice taken. When some potential projects have been outlined above, it is also important to recognise that if funding is secured, the requirements of that funding will need to be applied to assess any potential projects.

Finally, no existing or proposed funding allocation is currently allocated for 2022/23 or 2023/24 years. Sources of funding would have to be found such as from Reserves, to fund a scheme.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that that Council:

1. Notes the contents of this report and research on the subject undertaken by officers with other Councils and partners to date
2. That no resources currently exist to fund such additional schemes including a potential hardship fund within current budgets, underspends, or other outside sources, but that funding has been requested from DfC and the Northern Ireland Office.
3. If funding was to be made available in the meantime, this would have to be drawn from current reserves
4. It is therefore further recommended that Council considers this report and any action to be taken.

Claimants, food parcels and median salary data for AND

Name: Irene Chong (Data and evidence analyst)

Date: 13/01/2023

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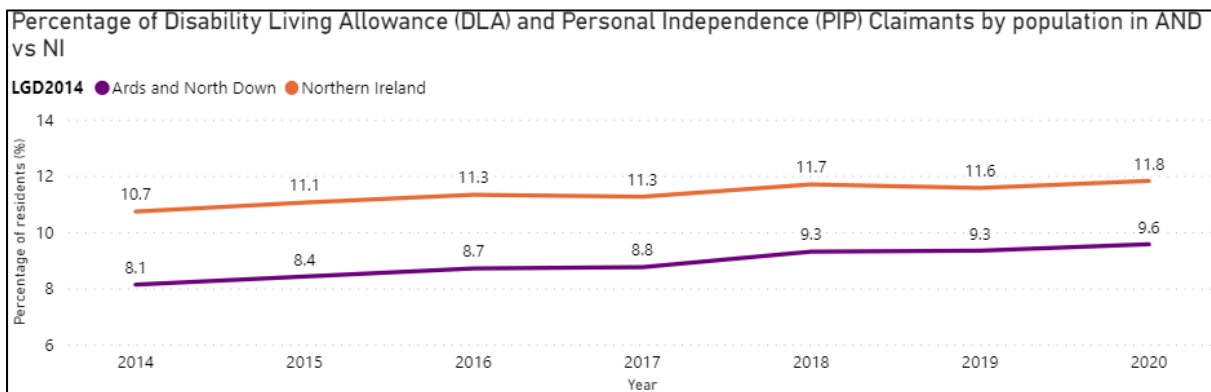
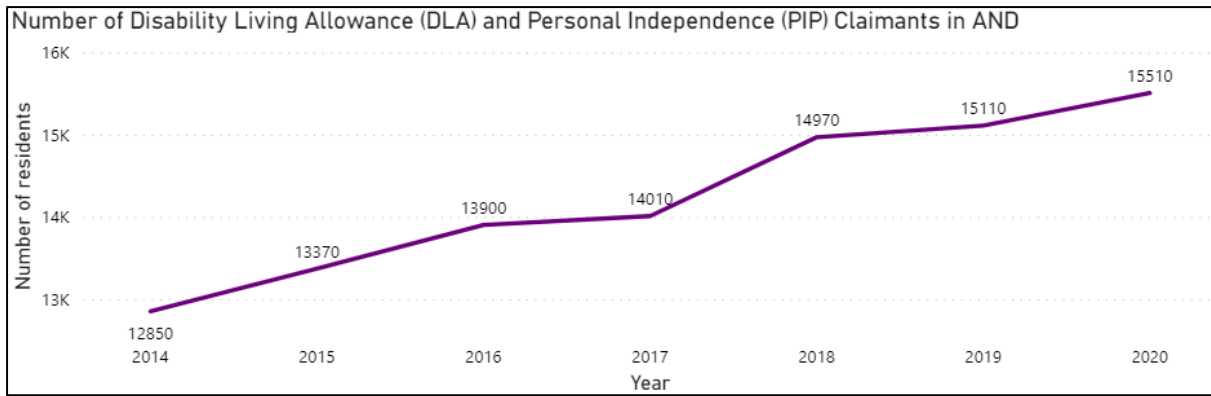
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1.0 Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment

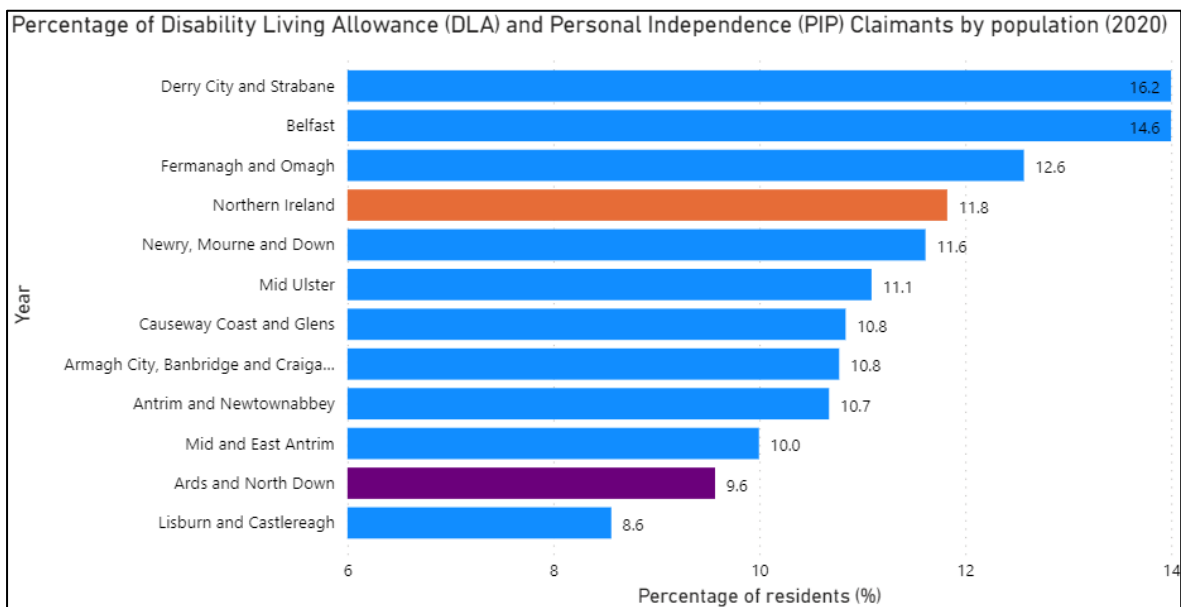
Personal Independence Payment (PIP) replaced Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for claimants of working age on 20th June 2016. With the introduction of PIP there have been no new working age claimants to DLA from this date. The main reassessment of existing working age DLA claimants to PIP took place from December 2016 to November 2019. DLA can currently only be claimed by children under 16 and claimants turning 16 will continue to be reassessed for PIP. Thus, the graphs below combined the number of DLA and PIP claimants to assess the total number of claimants on these two benefits.

Key points

- Number of claimants on DLA and PIP in AND increased by 20.7% from 2014 to 2020 in AND.
- In 2020, 9.6% of AND population were DLA or PIP claimants, lower compared to NI average of 11.8%.
- The top 5 SOAs with highest proportion of DLA and PIP claimants in AND in 2020 were: Portaferry_2 (22.5%), Scrabo_2 (19.0%), Conlig_3 (18.3%), Central Ards (16.7%), Millisle_1(16.1%).

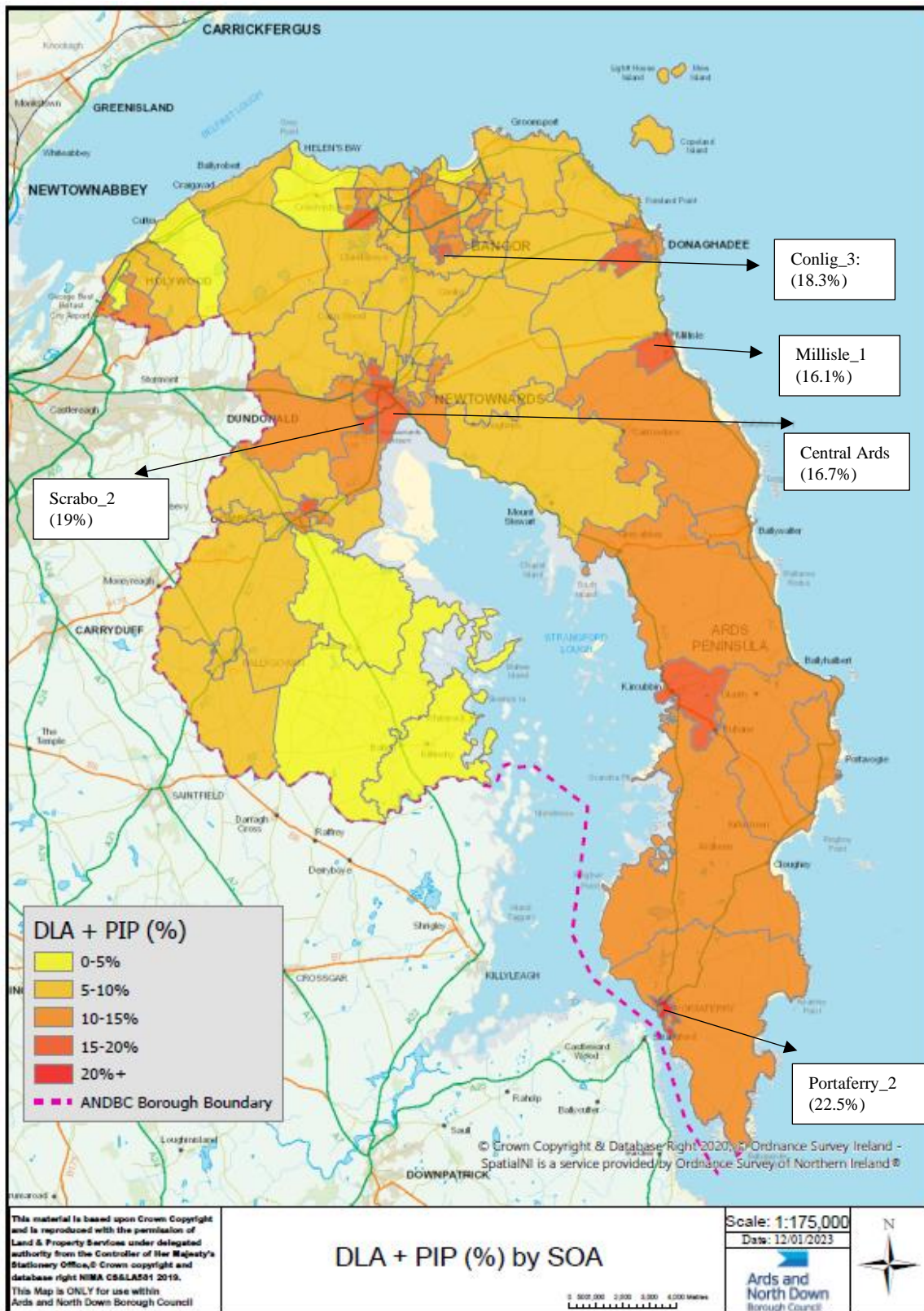


* Data is presented by the number of claimants (DLA + PIP) in 2020 by the mid-year population estimates in 2020 in selected SOA.



* Data is presented by the number of claimants (DLA + PIP) in 2020 by the mid-year population estimates in 2020 in selected SOA.

Figure GIS Map showing the proportion of DLA and PIP claimants of overall population by SOAs in AND.

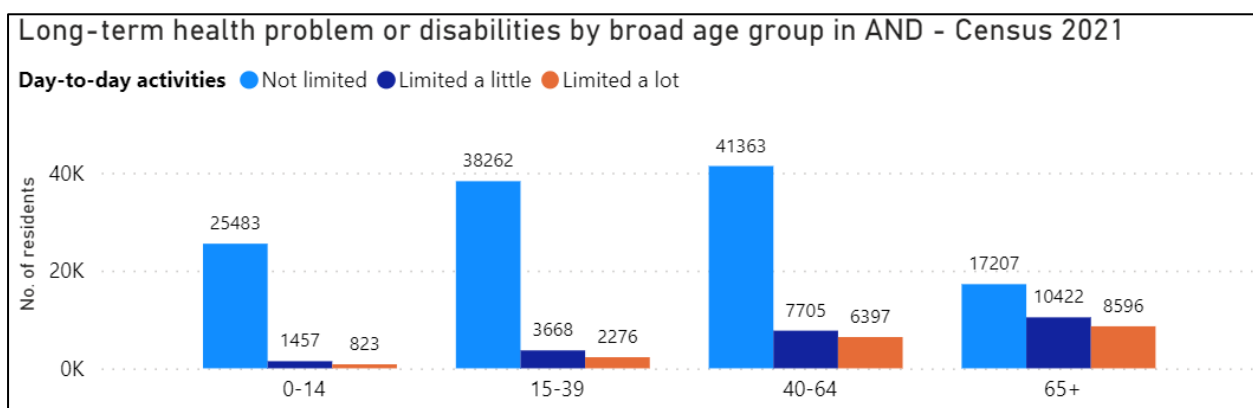
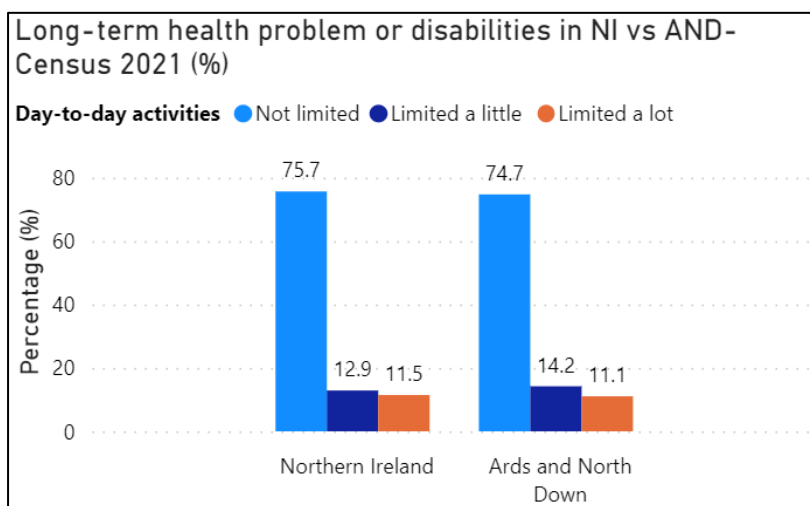


* Data is presented by the number of claimants (DLA + PIP) in 2020 by the mid-year population estimates in 2020 in selected SOA.

1.1 Long-term health problem or disabilities

Key points:

- On Census Day 2021, around 1 person in 4 (25.3%) in AND had a limited long-term health problem or disability (41,344 people). Looking in more detail, nearly one person in every nine (11.1%) in AND had a long-term health problem or disability which limited their day-to-day activities a lot (18,092 people).
- Over half of the population aged 65 or more (52.5% or 19,018 people) had a limiting long-term health problem or disability. In contrast, this falls to just 8.3% of those aged 0 to 14. The data also shows clear age gradient for the types of limitation. The percentage of people whose day-to-day activities were limited a lot rose from 3.0% of those aged 0 to 14 years to 23.7% of those aged 65 years or more, while the percentage of people whose day-to-day activities were limited a little rose from 5.3% to 28.8%.

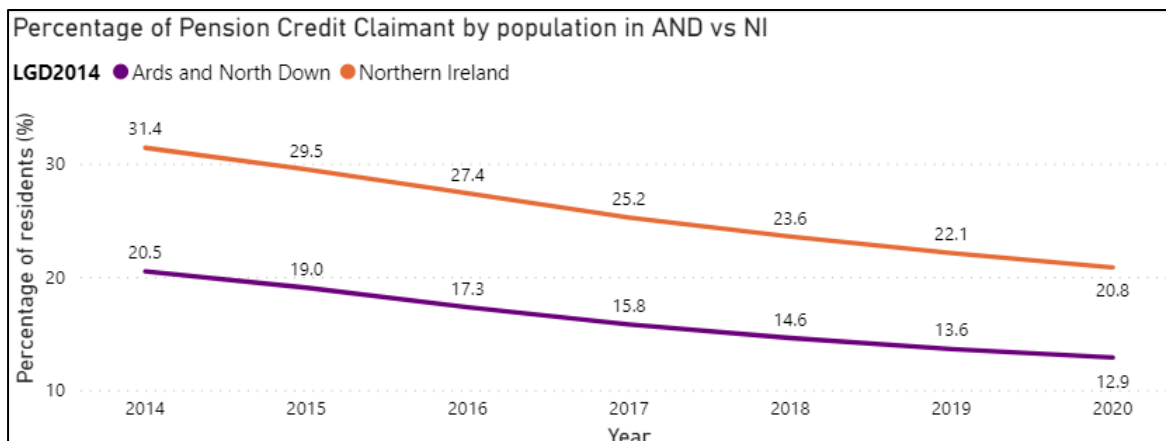
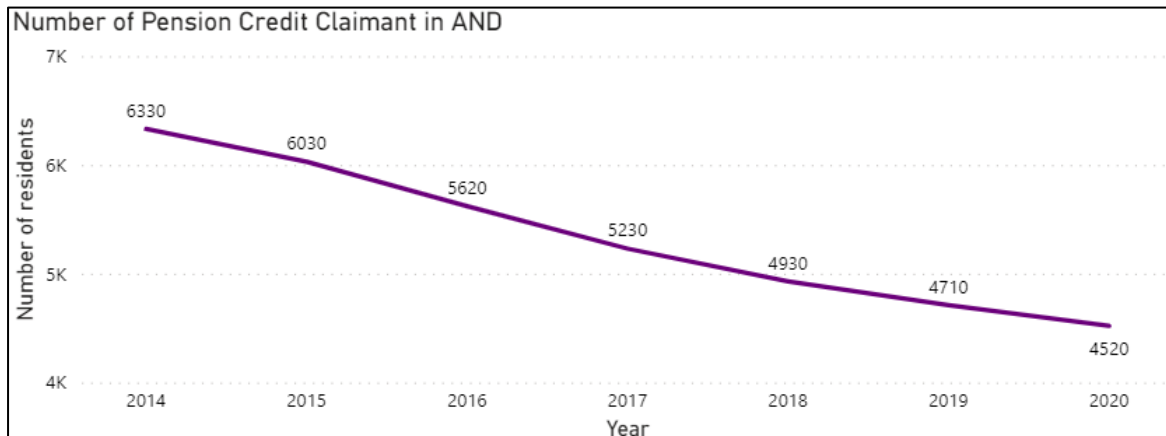


2.0 Pension Credit

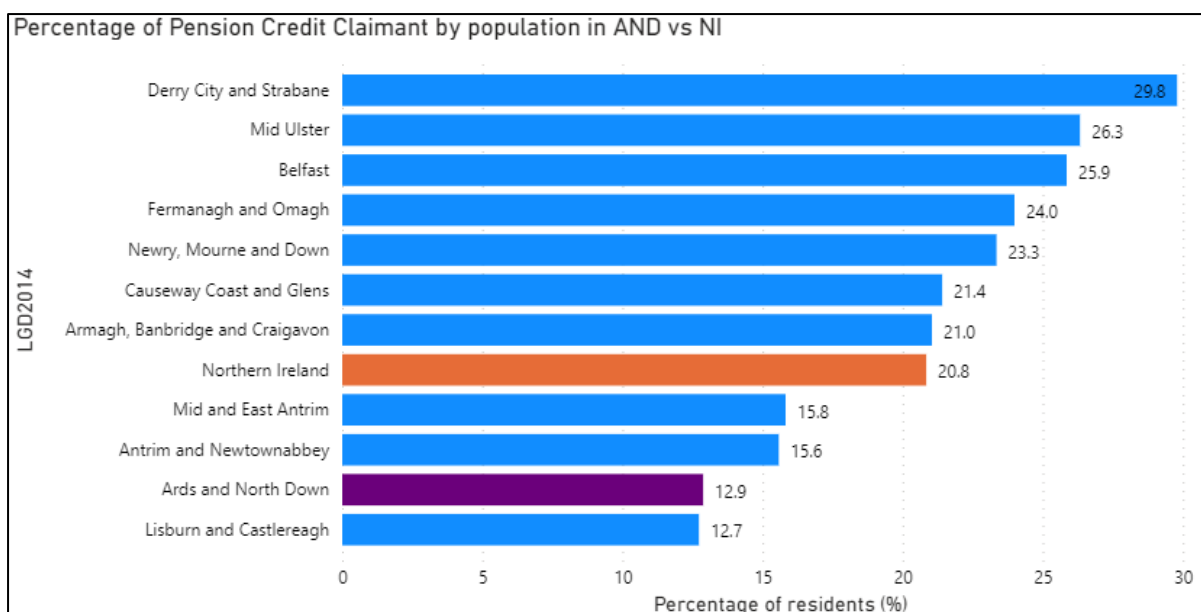
Pension Credit is an income-related benefit which you can be eligible for even if you have a pension, savings or own your own home. Pension Credit can also provide access to a wide range of other benefits.

Key Points

- The number of pension credit claimant in AND decreased from 6,330 in 2014 to 4,520 in 2020.
- In AND, the proportion of over 65 population claiming pension credit decreased from 20.5% in 2014 to 12.9% in 2020.
- Ards and North Down sees an estimated 62% taking up the benefit – the lowest % amongst LGDs.
- The top 5 SOAs with highest proportion (over 65 population) of pension credit claimants in AND in 2020 were: Conlig 3 (35.4%), Portaferry 2 (34.1%), Scrabo 2 (33.7%), Kircubbin 2 (33.6%), Central Ards (32.9%).



* Data is presented by the number of pension credit claimants in 2020 by the mid-year population estimates for people over 65 years old in 2020 in selected LGD.

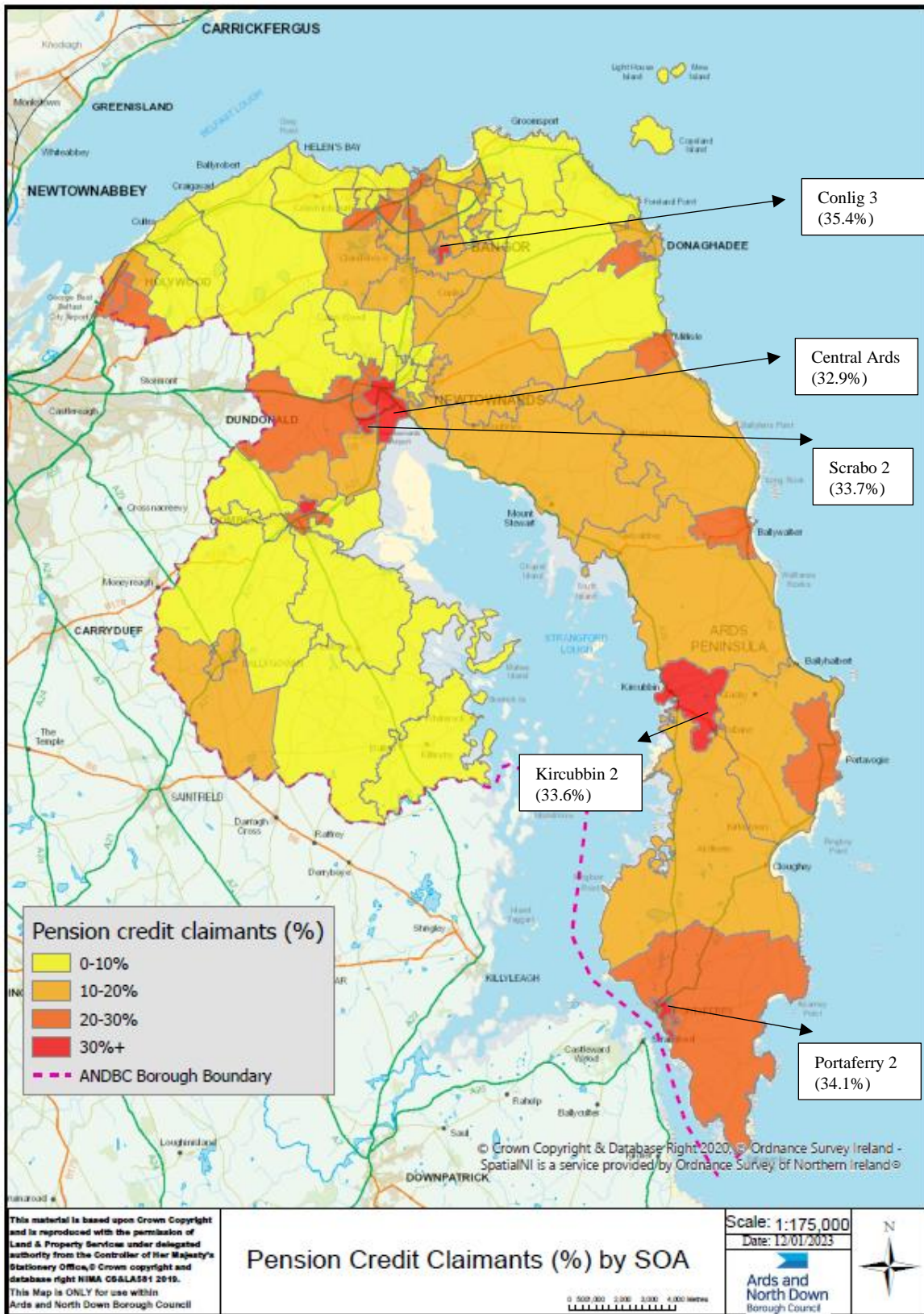


* Data is presented by the number of pension credit claimants in 2020 by the mid-year population estimates for people over 65 years old in 2020 in selected LGD.

Table Pension Credit Take-Up by Geographical Area (Local Government District), 2019/20

Local Government District	Number of claimants	Caseload take-up rate	Total weekly amount claimed	Estimated total weekly amount unclaimed	Expenditure take-up rate
Antrim And Newtownabbey	3,800	68%	£230,000	£60,000	79%
Ards And North Down	4,500	62%	£280,000	£100,000	74%
Armagh City, Banbridge And Craigavon	7,200	71%	£480,000	£120,000	80%
Belfast	13,200	78%	£890,000	£150,000	85%
Causeway Coast And Glens	5,800	72%	£370,000	£90,000	81%
Derry City And Strabane	7,000	80%	£510,000	£80,000	86%
Fermanagh And Omagh	4,900	69%	£370,000	£100,000	79%
Lisburn And Castlereagh	3,300	64%	£190,000	£70,000	73%
Mid And East Antrim	4,300	66%	£250,000	£80,000	75%
Mid Ulster	5,800	74%	£430,000	£90,000	83%
Newry, Mourne And Down	6,800	70%	£490,000	£130,000	79%

Figure GIS map showing proportion of pension credit claimants of over 65 population by SOA in AND.



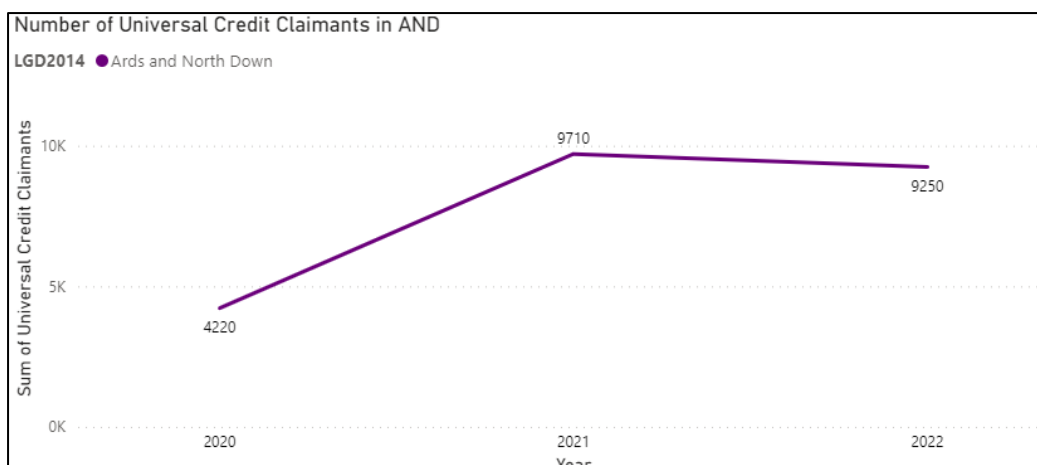
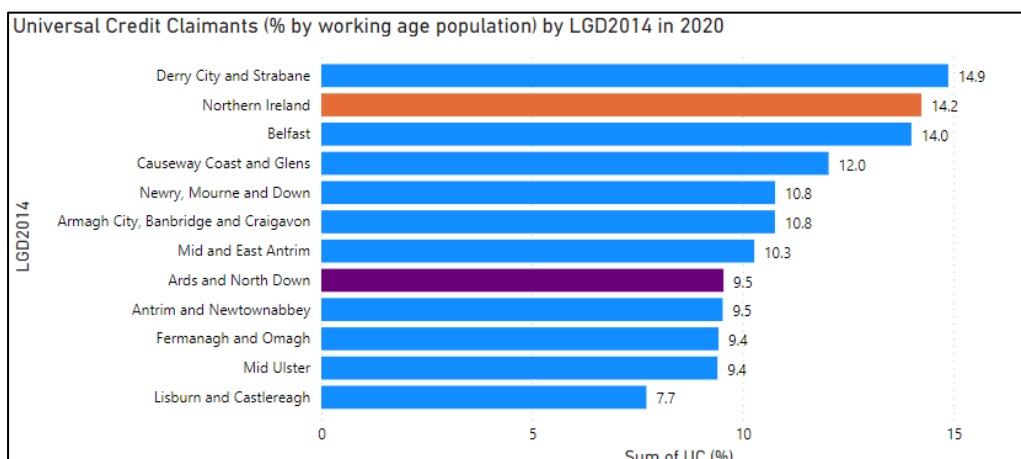
* Data is presented by the number of pension credit claimants in 2020 by the mid-year population estimates for people over 65 years old in 2020 in selected SOA.

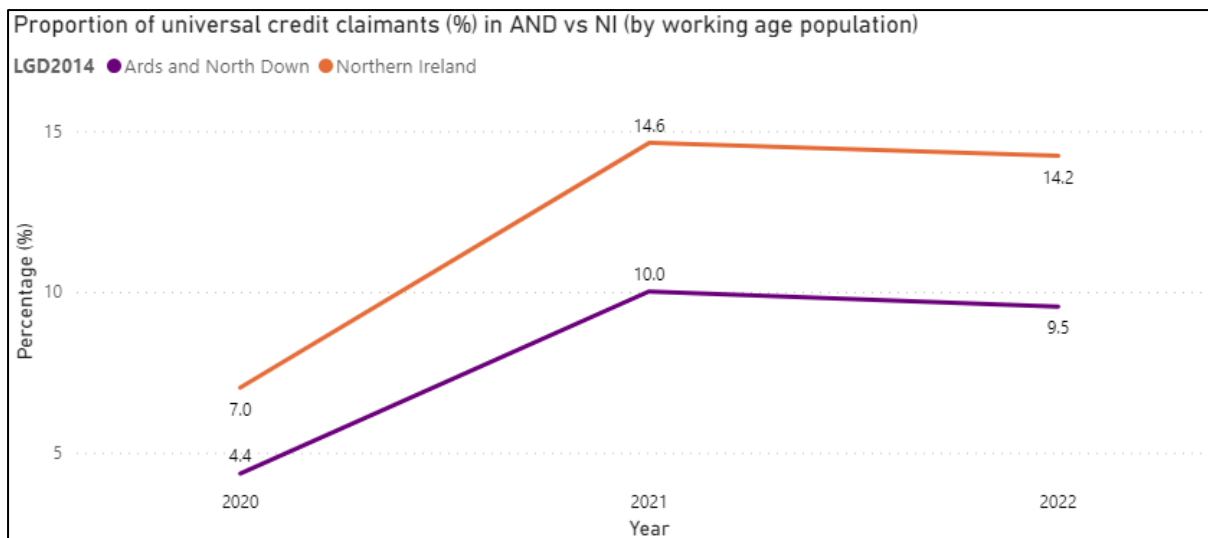
3.0 Universal Credit

Universal Credit is a new payment to help support households that are out of work or are on a low income. Universal Credit was introduced in Northern Ireland on a phased geographical basis from 27 September 2017. The proportion of universal credit claimant was calculated using the working age population (aged 16-64) in the selected SOA.

Key Points

- In 2022 in AND, there were 9,250 universal credit claimants compared to 4,220 claimants in 2020.
- The top 5 SOAs with highest proportion (working age population) of universal credit claimants in AND in 2022 were: Glen 1 (25.1%), Central Ards (23.3%), Scrabo 2 (23.1%), Harbour 1 (20.8%), Ballyrainey (19.3%).
- The top 3 SOAs with highest increase in universal credit count (%) from 2021 to 2022 were Central Ards (2.2% increased from 2021 to 2022), Glen 1 (2% increased from 2021 to 2022) and Ballyrainey (1.9% increased from 2021 to 2022).



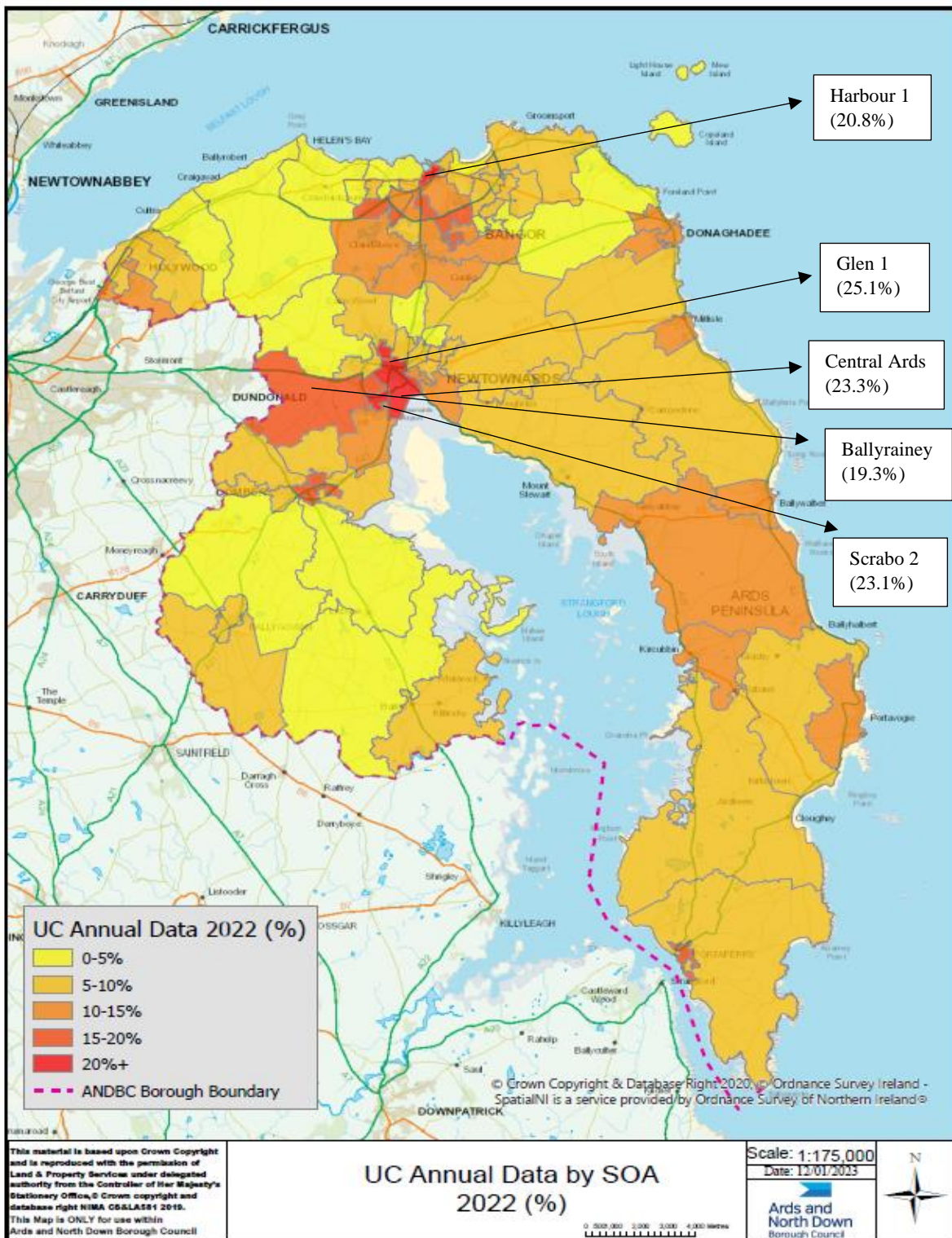


Note: The number of households on Universal Credit had been rising steadily since it was rolled out in Northern Ireland. However, the number of households on Universal Credit almost doubled between February and July 2020 when the government introduced restrictions due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The increase in the number of people on Universal Credit since March 2020 should be considered in the context of:

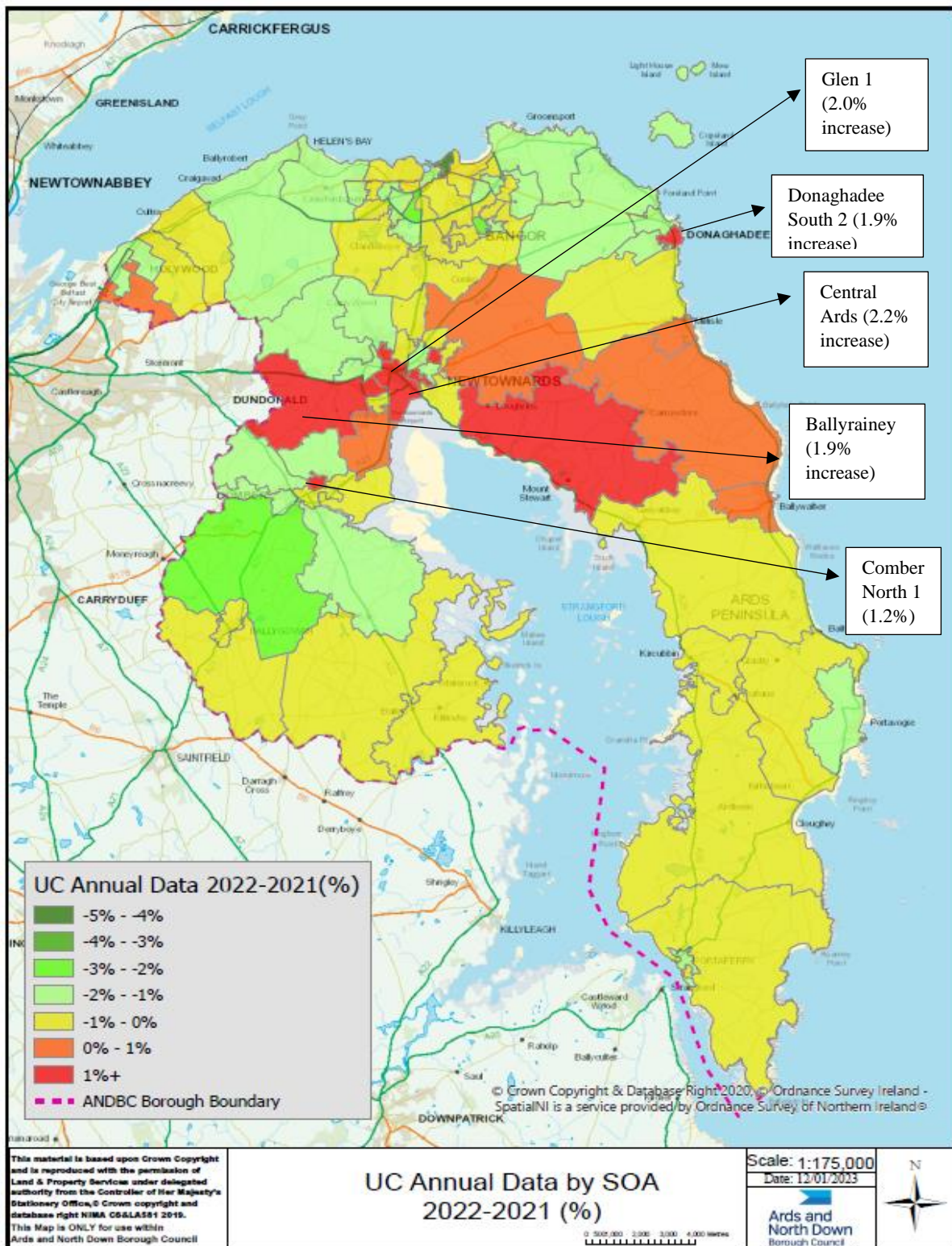
- changes in income or employment status resulting from the coronavirus pandemic;
- changes announced to support people through the coronavirus pandemic, including a temporary £1,040 a year increase to the standard allowance and an increase to local housing allowance rates;
- a temporary policy change whereby nil payment awards were kept open for up to six assessment periods of nil payment, rather than being closed if claimant earnings reduce their award to nil.

Figure GIS map showing proportion of universal credit claimant of working age population by SOA in AND.



* Data is presented by the number of universal credit claimants in 2022 by the mid-year population estimates of working age population (aged 16-64) in 2020 in selected SOA.

Figure GIS map showing the increase of proportion of universal credit claimant from 2021 to 2022 by SOA.



* Data is presented of the difference in the proportion of universal credit claimants in 2022 versus 2021. Positive values (red) showed increased in claimants count (%) while negative values (green) showed decreased in claimant count (%).

4.0 Trussell Trust

Key points

- The number of food parcel delivered by Trussell Trust in AND increased dramatically from 3,383 in 2019/20 to 5,383 in 2020/21, possibly due to Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis. In 2021/22, the number of food parcel delivered decreased to 4,455, however, this was still around 32% higher compared to 2019/20.
- Same trend was observed for both number of food parcels delivered for adults and children. However, the drop was less significant in children in 2021/22.

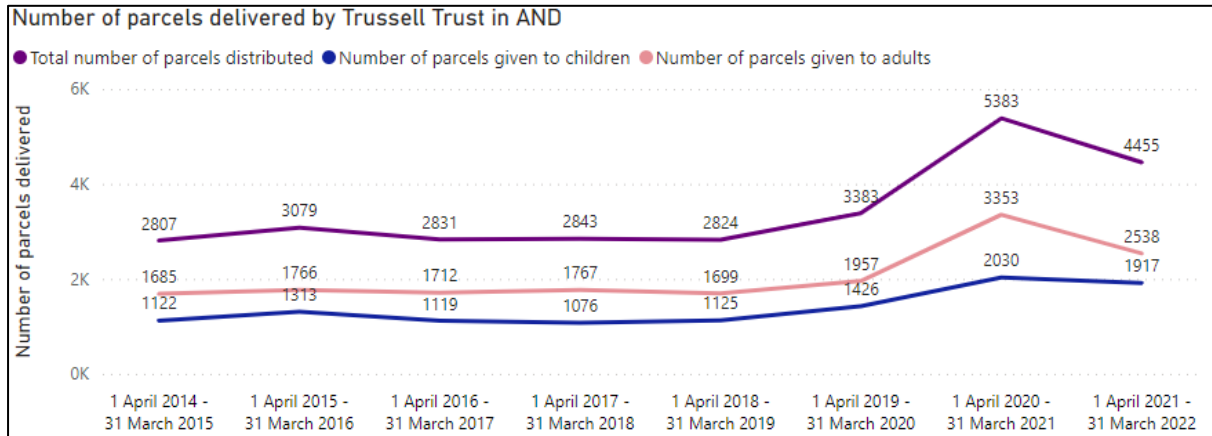
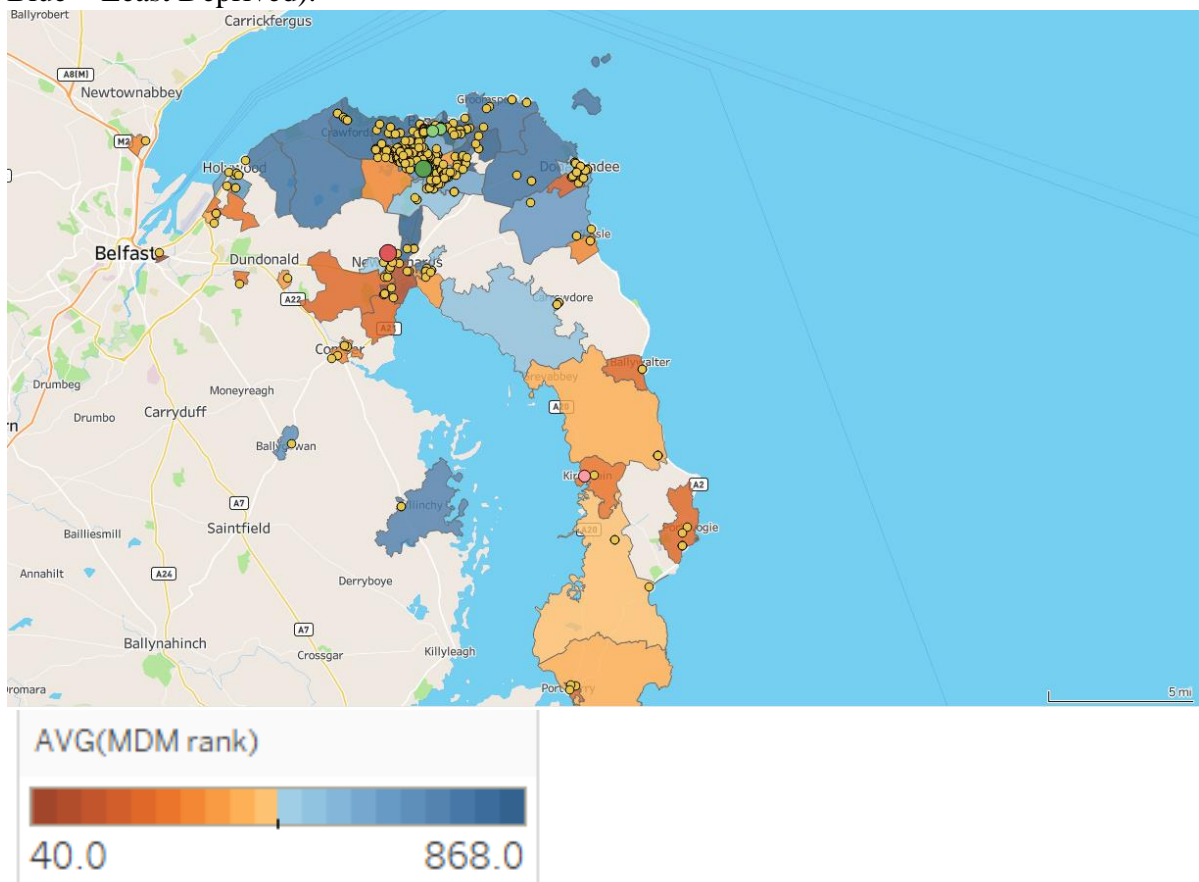


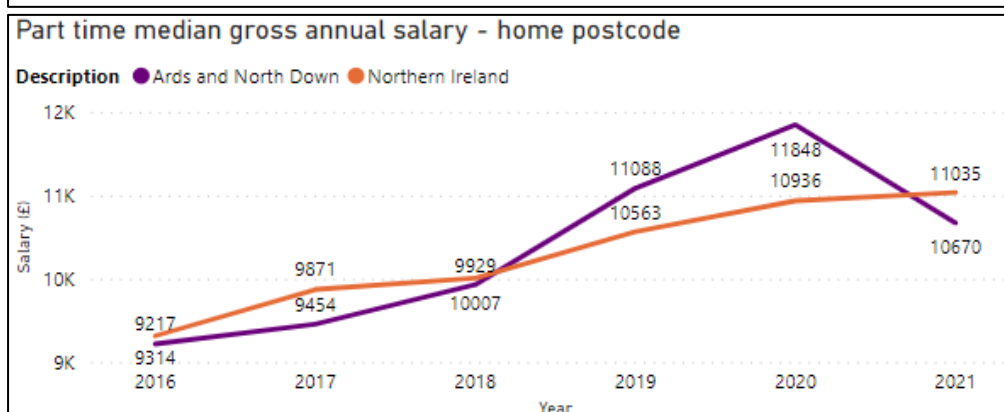
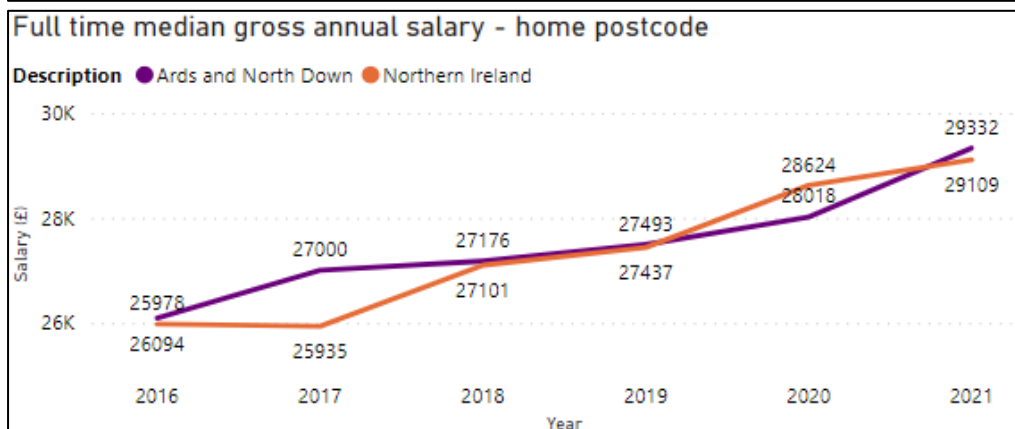
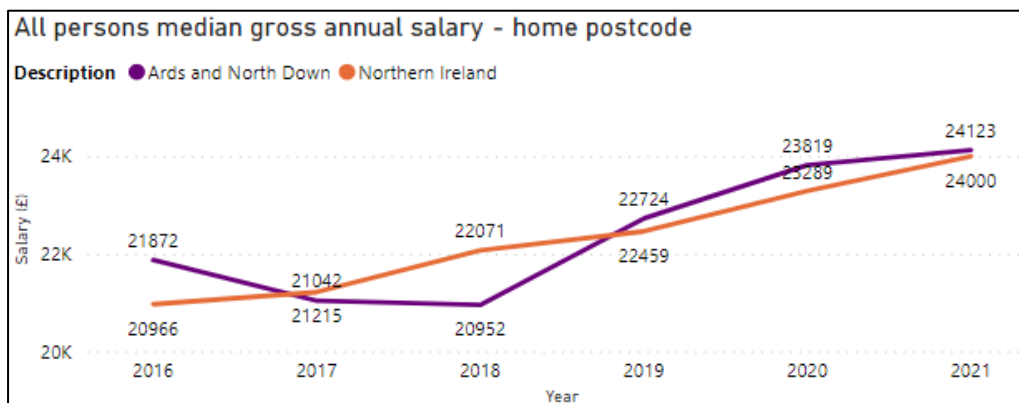
Figure Full distribution of food bank users for Bangor NI foodbank (Orange = Most Deprived Blue = Least Deprived).



5.0 Median Salary

Key points

- In 2021, the median gross annual salary for people living in AND was £24,123, similar to the NI average of £24,000.
- The median gross annual salary for AND residents working on a full time job was £29,332 and part time job was £10,670.



6.0 Children in low-income families

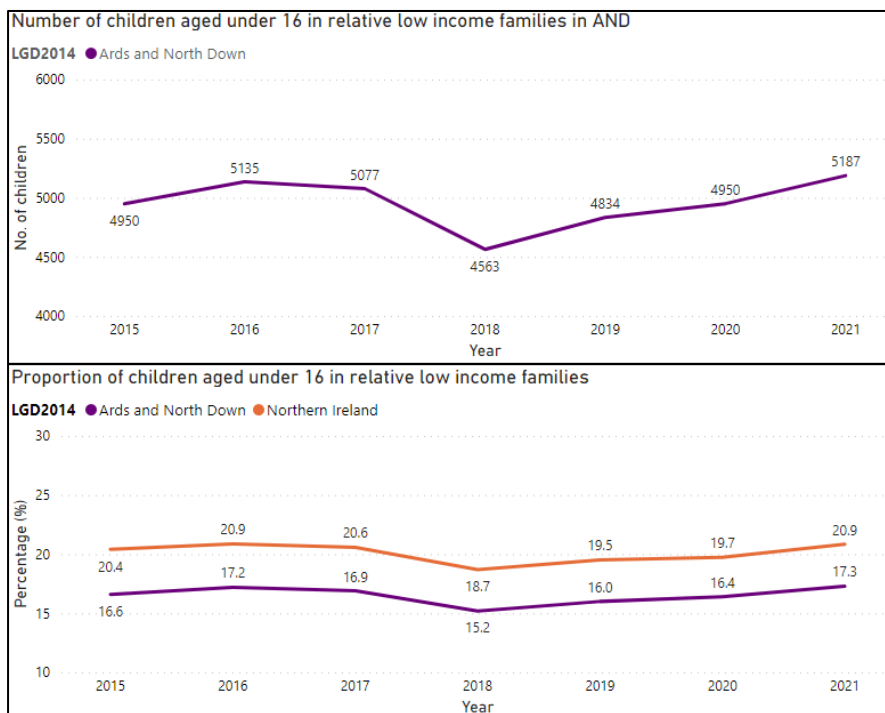
A family must have claimed Child Benefit and at least one other household benefit (Universal Credit, tax credits or Housing Benefit) at any point in the year to be classed as low income in these statistics. Relative low-income measures families in low income in the reference year,

whereas Absolute low-income measures families in low income based on what low income looked like Financial Year Ending (FYE) in 2011. Income is Before Housing Cost (BHS) and is equivalised to adjust for family size and composition.

Note: At present, it's not possible to calculate under 16 children in low income as a proportion of all under 16 children for each of the wards in Northern Ireland due to child population counts not being available at ward level in NI.

Key points:

- In FYE 2021, there were 5,187 children in AND living in families in Relative low income, which equivalent to 17.3% of children (aged below 16) in AND.
- The proportion of children in AND living in families in Relative low income increased consistently from 2018 to 2021 in AND.
- Ards and North Down was the local authority in Northern Ireland with the second lowest proportion of children aged under 16 in low-income families for Relative poverty at 17.3%.
- The top three wards in AND with highest number of children living in families in Relative low income were Kilcooley (285 children), Movilla (261 children) and West Winds (261 children).



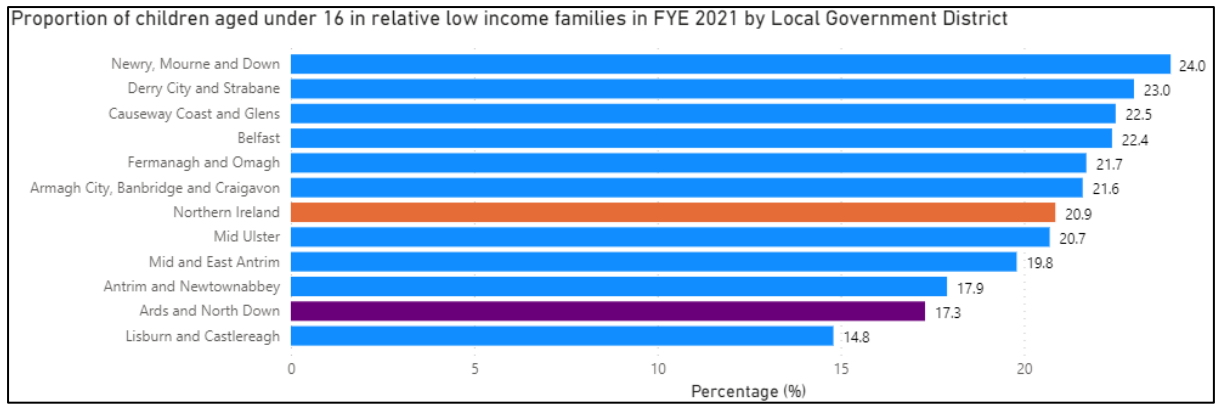
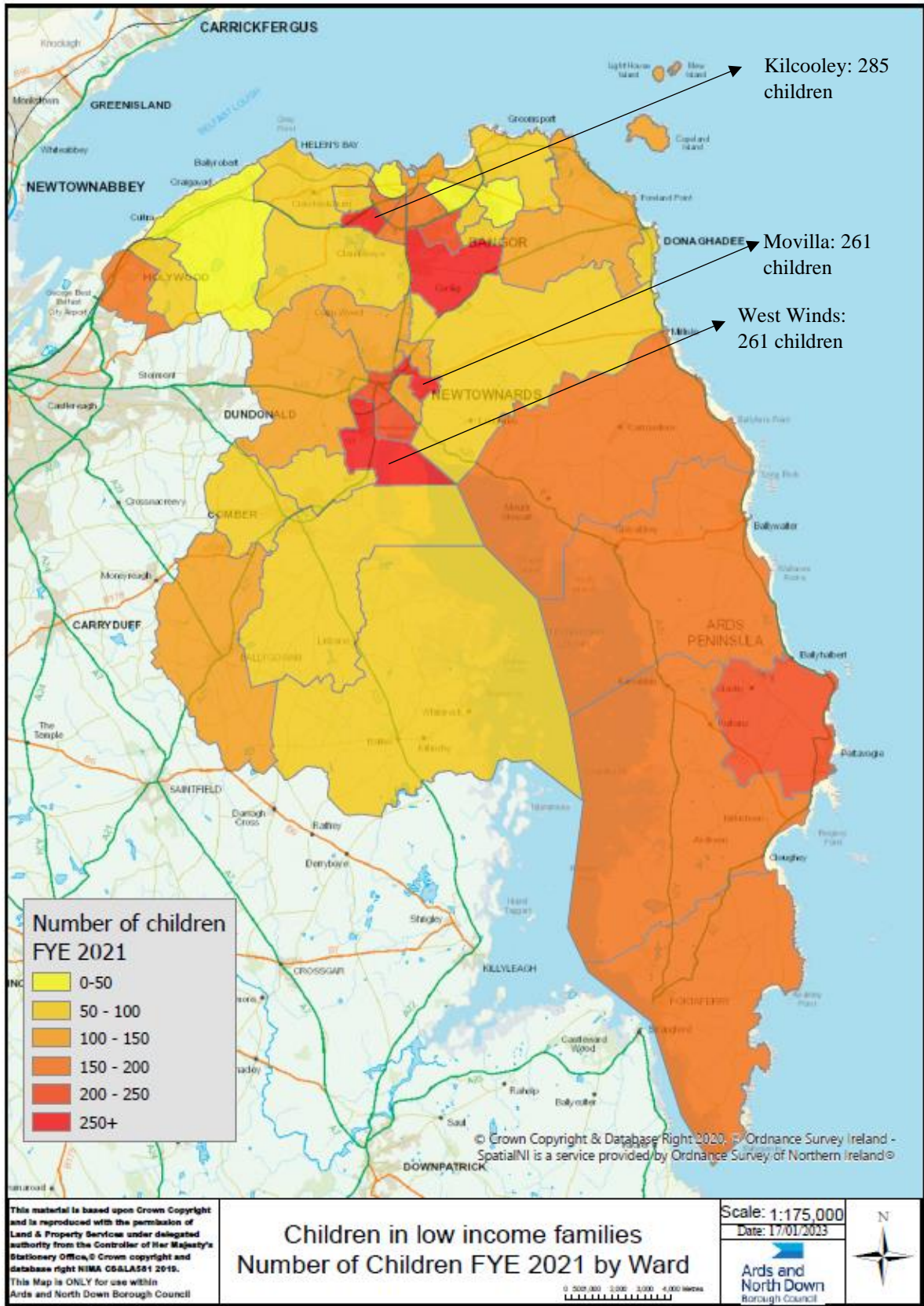


Figure Number of children living in families in relative low income by ward (FYE 2021).



Kilcooley: 285 children

Movilla: 261 children

West Winds: 261 children

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ITEM 18**Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Director of Organisational Development and Administration
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Administration
Date of Report	17 January 2023
File Reference	EQ33
Legislation	S75 Northern Ireland Act 1998
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If other, please add comment below:
Subject	EQIA on the flying of the Union Flag
Attachments	1. ECNI Guidance on EQIA Process 2. Draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and Surveys 3 Draft Equality Impact Assessment Final Decision Report.

Background

At a meeting of Council on 30 March 2022 it was resolved that ‘subject to the completion of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), Council amends the current flag policy to fly our Union Flag at every war memorial all year round, and will also include Church Street, Newtownards Council building’.

In accordance with the Council’s Equality Scheme, this decision was Equality screened. It was identified that the decision should be ‘screened in’ and subject to an EQIA as there was evidence that there could be a differential impact for the public and employees on two Section 75 grounds in particular, i.e., religious belief and political opinion, although it could be argued that the issue of emblems and national identity (i.e. flags) also brings into play a third category, ethnic origin. In general, the

impact would relate to the perceptions of the Union flag by different communities in Northern Ireland, in turn related to considerations of national identity and allegiance.

EQIA Process (Appendix 1)

The Equality Commission has provided guidance on the EQIA process which sets out seven distinct stages:

1. Define the aims of the policy.
2. Consider available data and research.
3. Make an assessment of impacts.
4. Other factors to consider.
5. Consult on the actual impact of existing policies and the likely impact of proposed policies.
6. Decision by public authority & publication of report on results of EQIA.
7. Monitoring for adverse impact in the future and publication of the results of such monitoring.

Stages 1 – 5

The Council has completed stages 1 – 5 of the EQIA process as set out above.

Following completion of steps 1 to 4 of this process, a 20-week consultation period took place from Thursday 9 June 2022 until Tuesday 1 November 2022. The extension to the usual 12-week period was to allow the Council to facilitate public meetings and a staff meeting as requested by several respondents in response to the initial consultation.

The Draft EQIA report that was issued for consultation in June 2022, along with a public survey and a staff survey, are attached at Appendix 2. The consultation was widely publicised using press advertisements in local papers, via social media, the Council website and, for staff, through internal email and newsletter. Further to requests received in survey responses, three public consultation meetings were held (one in Portaferry, one in Newtownards, and one via Zoom) and a staff meeting was also held.

Stage 6

At the end of the consultation period the initial draft EQIA report was revised to provide details of the consultation process and to reflect the comments made by consultees. This final draft report is attached at Appendix 3 and is now placed before the Council in order that it may make a decision.

The Council's decision will be incorporated into a final summary document and the results of the EQIA will be published via the Council's website and in the Council's annual report to the Equality Commission.

Section 7

Monitoring of potential adverse impact in the future and publication of the results of such monitoring will be undertaken using existing Council engagement channels:

- Biannual Residents Survey
- IIP Staff Surveys

- Visitor Market Research

A summary of any section 75 complaints received is included in the equality update reports provided to Corporate Services Committee on a quarterly basis. Therefore, any complaints received further to the Council's decision on the EQIA will be captured within the quarterly report and details of any actions taken or proposed to be taken as a result of the complaint(s) will be included within the report. Details of complaints received, and outcomes are also reported upon in the Equality Annual Progress Report that Council must submit to the Equality Commission each year.

In its response to the Draft EQIA Consultation Report, the Equality Commission makes explicit the need to determine 'the rationale for flying the flag at each location.', with an inference that the final decision should accommodate and reflect on a stated rationale.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council, having taken into account the final draft EQIA report attached at Appendix 3, considers the proposal to:

- (i) Amend its flag policy to include the flying of the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round; and
- (ii) Amend its flag policy to include the flying of the Union Flag at the Church Street, Newtownards Council building, all year round.

ECNI Guidance on EQIA Process

EQIA Process

The EQIA process is set out by the Equality Commission and contains seven distinct stages :

1. Define the Aims of the Policy

At the beginning of an EQIA, it is important to spend time determining the aims of the policy. This is the foundation stage in the development of an EQIA and should therefore be afforded due attention. The policy aim is the focal point defining the public authority's intended outcomes, in terms of results and visible effects ultimately on members of the public, and will guide the subsequent development of an EQIA.

2. Consider Available Data and Research

Public authorities should consider how they will collect information which will enable them to make a judgment on the extent of impact on the nine Equality categories (religious belief, political opinion, race, age, gender, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, people with dependants or without). The Commission encourages public authorities to work collectively on this.

For example authorities operating within the education or health and social services sectors may wish to work together both to ensure the most effective and efficient use of public resources and to access the optimum information. Likewise, information available within the public sector should be made available to those likely to be affected by policies to enable them to be fully informed of the basis on which decisions are made.

3. Make an Assessment of Impacts

The authority must use the information gathered to decide whether there is, or is likely to be, a differential impact, whether direct or indirect, upon the relevant group (or groups).

If an adverse effect on any of those groups can be identified, policy makers will need to assess whether the policy is unlawfully discriminatory taking into account that some policies are intended to increase equality of opportunity by requiring or permitting affirmative or positive action, or action to redress disadvantages. They will then have to decide how to ensure that the public authority acts lawfully. Even if the policy is not unlawful, policy makers need to consider what to do in light of the adverse impact identified.

4. Other Factors to Consider

- Consideration of measures which might mitigate any adverse impact; and
- Alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality or opportunity

The consideration of mitigating measures and alternative policies is at the heart of the EQIA process. Different options must be developed which reflect different ways of delivering the policy aims. The consideration of these measures is intertwined with the consideration of alternative policies. Mitigation can take the form of lessening the severity of the adverse impact.

Ways of delivering policy aims which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Equality category, or which better promote equality of opportunity for the relevant Equality category, must in particular be considered. Consideration must be given to whether separate implementation strategies are necessary for the policy to be effective for the relevant group

5. Consult on the Actual Impact of Existing Policies and the Likely Impact of Proposed Policies

An Equality Impact Assessment requires consultation which must be carried out with relevant interest groups as well as the Equality Commission. This includes other public bodies, voluntary, community, trade union and other groups with a legitimate interest in the matter. Consultation should also include those directly affected by the policy to be assessed, whether or not they have a personal interest. Consultation should be timely, open and inclusive.

6. Decision by Public Authority and Publication of Report on Results of EQIA

The legislation requires that in making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted by it, the public authority shall take into account any EQIA and Consultation carried out in relation to the policy. A commitment to this is included within Equality Schemes. It is therefore essential that the public authority fully complies with this commitment.

Clear evidence of the consideration of mitigation of impacts must be apparent, and detail of mitigation and plans for its implementation must be included in the final recommendations presented during decision making. Justifications must be given if these alternatives have not been accepted.

The law required public authorities to publish a report on the results of the EQIA. The Equality Scheme must detail both how and where the report on EQIA results will be published.

7. Monitoring for Adverse Impact in the Future and Publication of the Results of Such Monitoring

A system must be established to monitor the impact of the policy in order to find out its effect on relevant groups. The results of ongoing monitoring must be reviewed on an annual basis. The public authority is required to publish the results of this monitoring. And they must be included in the public authority's annual review on progress to the Equality Commission. The Equality Scheme must specify how and where such monitoring information will be published. It is therefore essential that monitoring is carried out in a systematic manner and that the results are widely and openly published.

If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the public authority must ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups.

**Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying
of the Union Flag**

Public Questionnaire



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

Background

Further to the creation of Ards and North Down Borough Council on April 1st 2015, the new Council continued to operate the existing Flags Policies of the two legacy councils (Ards BC and North Down BC), until July 2021, when an updated policy was introduced. The updated policy is shown below (with change to the previous policy shown in bold).

Amended Ards and North Down Borough Council Flags Policy (July, 2021)

- I. The Union Flag be flown permanently at seven designated sites i.e. Castle Park, Bangor; Conway Square, Newtownards (beside Blair Mayne Memorial); Ballygowan (adjacent to the War Memorial); The Square, Comber (adjacent to the War Memorial); The Maypole, Holywood; The Moat, Donaghadee; and Queen's Hall, Holywood.
- II. The Union Flag be flown only on designated days (currently 15) at Church Street, Newtownards.
- III. The Union Flag be flown at war memorials for the period of remembrance (around 11 November) or for the Remembrance Service in line with existing local custom and practice but for a period which must not exceed two weeks. **In addition to the period of Remembrance, flags at war memorials will be flown at half-mast following the death of the reigning Monarch.**
- IV. Flags commemorating specific days or events (to include Commonwealth Flag, Armed Forces Day Flag or Red Ensign) be flown at Castle Park, Bangor and Conway Square, Newtownards. Additional flags may also be considered that have a national significance at one or both sites. (Council approval will be required for these on a case-by-case basis).
- V. Each flag be maintained and serviced at regular intervals by Council staff and will only be flown at half-mast following the death of a member of the Royal Family, a serving or former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, a serving or former First or Deputy First Minister, or at a time of designated national disaster.

Update

At Council on 30th March 2022 it was RESOLVED that, subject to the completion of an equality impact assessment, Council amends the current flag policy to fly the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round, and will also include Church Street Newtownards Council building.

It is against this backdrop that the current EQIA is being undertaken, with the intent of consulting widely on the proposed revisions to the policy.

It is intended that the consultation will furnish an opportunity to consider options regarding proposed revisions to the policy, including the option of not changing the policy.

War memorials that fly the Union Flag in line with the current policy, and that would be affected by the proposed amendments, include:

- Ballygowan War Memorial
- Ballyhalbert War Memorial
- Ballywalter War Memorial
- Castle Street War Memorial Newtownards
- Comber War Memorial
- Cloughey War Memorial
- Donaghadee War Memorial
- Greyabbey War Memorial
- Groomsport War Memorial
- Hollywood War Memorial
- Millisle War Memorial
- Portavogie War Memorial
- Ward Park War Memorial Bangor

The list below shows the days in 2022 for hoisting flags on government buildings in Northern Ireland as directed via circular by the Department of Communities, Local Government & Housing Regulation Division. The circular is for guidance only, as it is a matter for each council to make a decision regarding flags flown from its own buildings.

Designated Days (2022)

9th January	Birthday of The Duchess of Cambridge
20 January	Birthday of The Countess of Wessex
6 February	Her Majesty's Accession
19 February	Birthday of The Duke of York
14 March	Commonwealth Day (second Monday in March) TBC
10 March	Birthday of The Earl of Wessex
17 March	St. Patrick's Day (in Northern Ireland only)
21 April	Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen
2 June	Coronation Day
11 June	Official Celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday TBC
21st June	Birthday of The Duke of Cambridge
17 July	Birthday of The Duchess of Cornwall
15 August	Birthday of The Princess Royal
13 November	Remembrance Day (second Sunday) TBC
14 November	Birthday of The Prince of Wales
Also	The day of the opening of a Session of the Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty and the day of the prorogation of a Session of the Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty

Why your views matter

The Council is committed to ensuring it meets its equality and good relations duties and responsibilities, as identified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

As part of this commitment, an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been undertaken on the Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag.

As part of the EQIA process the Council is consulting with the public. The Council would welcome all views on the proposals.

Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and will be completely anonymous at all times. The results of this consultation will be made available on Ards and North Down Borough Council's Website.

Thank you

Public Questionnaire

Q1: To what extent do you agree with the Council's current policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street, Newtownards (i.e. designated days only)? (please tick one)

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q2: To what extent do you agree with the Council's proposed policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street, Newtownards permanently (please tick one)

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q3: To what extent do you agree with the Council's current policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag on war memorials within the Borough only for the period of remembrance? (please tick one)?

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q4: To what extent do you agree with the Council's proposed policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag permanently at war memorials within the Borough (please tick one)?

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q5: On a scale from 0 to 10, please indicate how you feel in general about the flying of the Union Flag on or close by Council buildings?

Where 0 = very uncomfortable, 5 = neutral and 10 = very comfortable

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

In a few words, could you please explain why?

Q6: On a scale from 0 to 10 please indicate how you feel in general about the flying of the Union Flag on war memorials within the Borough?

Where 0 = very uncomfortable, 5 = neutral and 10 = very comfortable

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

In a few words, could you please explain why?

Q7: In relation to Council Offices at Church Street, Newtownards, do you think that the Council should fly the Union Flag (please tick one):

Always (permanently)	
On specific designated days only (currently 15 days in 2022)	
Never	

Q8: In relation to war memorials within the Borough, do you think that the Council should fly the Union Flag (please tick one):

Always (permanently)	
During the period of remembrance or in line with local custom and practice	
Never	

Q9: Do you have any other comments on the proposed changes to the policy on the Flying of the Union Flag?

Q10. Please provide details of any other issues which you think should be included in the EQIA and your reasons for suggesting them.

Q11. To what extent do you agree with the assessment of impacts as set out in the EQIA?

Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly Disagree	

Q12. If you do not agree with the assessment of impacts, please tell us your reasons and any changes you think should be made.

Q13. Are you aware of any further data and / or research which may be relevant?

Q14: Do you agree with the rural needs assessment?

Yes	
No	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q15: Do you have any further comments on the EQIA report, the rural needs assessment and / or the consultation process?

Q16: Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation:

Q17 Are you either a resident or ratepayer in the Borough of Ards and North Down? (Please tick.)

Yes No

If YES, what is the **first part** of your post code BT ____

If NO, what is your primary interest in the Borough?

NI resident Employed in the Borough
Visitor Student
Council Employee Other

(If other please specify) _____

About you

Q18: Which of the following community backgrounds do you identify with the most?

Please tick one:

Roman Catholic	
Protestant	
Other Christian (including Christian related)	
Other faith or non-Christian community background	
No religion	
Prefer not to say	

Q19: How would you describe your national identity?

Please tick one.

British	
Irish	
Northern Irish	
English	
Scottish	
Welsh	
Other (please specify)	

Q20: What is your ethnic group?

Please tick one.

White	
Irish Traveller	
African / Black	
Caribbean	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	
Other ethnic group	
Prefer not to say	

Q21: What is your age category?

Please tick one.

Under 18	
18 -24	
25-34	
35-44	
45-54	
55-64	
Over 65	

Q 22: What is your gender?

Please tick one.

Male,	
Female	
Prefer not to say,	
Identify as	

Q23: Would you like Ards and North Down Borough Council to hold a Public Meeting in relation to this EQIA?

Please tick

Yes		If you have ticked YES Please ensure you have completed Q17 and you have given us the first part of your postcode, this is to determine a suitable local venue.
No		

What happens next?

Following the 12 week consultation running from Thursday 9th June 2022 to Thursday 1st September at 4pm and once finalised the EQIA Final Decision Report will be made available on Ards and North Down Borough Council's Website.

**Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying
of the Union Flag**

Staff Questionnaire



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

Background

Further to the creation of Ards and North Down Borough Council on April 1st 2015, the new Council continued to operate the existing Flags Policies of the two legacy councils (Ards BC and North Down BC), until July 2021, when an updated policy was introduced. The updated policy is shown below (with change to the previous policy shown in bold).

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- V. Each flag be maintained and serviced at regular intervals by Council staff and will only be flown at half-mast following the death of a member of the Royal Family, a serving or former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, a serving or former First or Deputy First Minister, or at a time of designated national disaster.

Update

At Council on 30th March 2022 it was RESOLVED that, subject to the completion of an equality impact assessment, Council amends the current flag policy to fly the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round, and will also include Church Street Newtownards Council building.

It is against this backdrop that the current EQIA is being undertaken, with the intent of consulting widely on the proposed revisions to the policy.

It is intended that the consultation will furnish an opportunity to consider options regarding proposed revisions to the policy, including the option of not changing the policy.

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- Ballywalter War Memorial
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- Greyabbey War Memorial
- Groomsport War Memorial
- Holywood War Memorial
- Millisle War Memorial
- Portavogie War Memorial
- Ward Park War Memorial Bangor

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17 July	Birthday of The Duchess of Cornwall
15 August	Birthday of The Princess Royal
13 November	Remembrance Day (second Sunday) TBC
14 November	Birthday of The Prince of Wales
Also	The day of the opening of a Session of the Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty and the day of the prorogation of a Session of the Houses of Parliament by Her Majesty

Why your views matter

The Council is committed to ensuring it meets its equality and good relations duties and responsibilities, as identified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

As part of this commitment, an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been undertaken on the Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag.

As part of the EQIA process the Council is consulting with staff. The Council would welcome all views on the proposals.

Your replies will be treated in strictest confidence and will be completely anonymous at all times. The results of this consultation will be made available on Ards and North Down Borough Council's Website.

Thank you

Staff Questionnaire

Q1: To what extent do you agree with the Council's current policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street Newtownards (i.e. designated days only)?

Please tick one

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q2: To what extent do you agree with the Council's proposed policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street Newtownards (permanently)?

Please tick one

Strongly agree	
Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q3: In relation to Council Offices at Church Street Newtownards, do you think that the Council should fly the Union Flag?

Please tick one:

Always (permanently)	
On specific designated days only (currently 15 days in 2022)	
Never	

Q4: What impact do you feel that the Council's current policy on the flying of the Union Flag on Council buildings has on the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment within the Council?

Please tick one:

Very positive	
Positive	
Neutral	
Negative	
Very negative	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q5: What impact do you feel that the Council's proposed policy on the flying of the Union Flag on Council buildings will have on the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment within the Council?

Very positive	
Positive	
Neutral	
Negative	
Very negative	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q6: Do you have any other comments on the proposed changes to the policy on the Flying of the Union Flag?

Q7. Please provide details of any other issues which you think should be included in the EQIA and your reasons for suggesting them.

Q8. To what extent do you agree with the assessment of impacts as set out in the EQIA?

Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	
Strongly Disagree	

Q9. If you do not agree with the assessment of impacts, please tell us your reasons and any changes you think should be made.

Q10. Are you aware of any further data and / or research which may be relevant?

Q11: Do you agree with the rural needs assessment?

Yes	
No	

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Q12: Do you have any further comments on the EQIA report, the rural needs assessment and / or the consultation process?

About you

Q13: During a typical working week pre-covid arrangement, on how many days would you work in or attend the Council Offices, Church Street, Newtownards?

Please tick one

Every day	
3-4 days per week	
1-2 days per week	
Rarely	
Never	
Prefer not to say	

Q14: Which of the following community backgrounds do you identify with the most?

Please tick one:

Roman Catholic	
Protestant	
Other Christian (including Christian related)	
Other faith or non-Christian community background	
No religion	
Prefer not to say	

Q15: How would you describe your national identity?

Please tick one.

British	
Irish	
Northern Irish	
English	
Scottish	
Welsh	
Other (please specify)	

Q16: What is your ethnic group?

Please tick one.

White	
Irish Traveller	
African / Black	
Caribbean	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	
Other ethnic group	
Prefer not to say	

Q17: What is your age category?

Under 18	
18 -24	
25-34	
35-44	
45-54	
55-64	
Over 65	

Q 18: What is your gender?

Please tick one.

Male,	
Female	
Prefer not to say,	
Identify as	

Q19: Would you like Ards and North Down Borough Council to hold a Staff Meeting in relation to this EQIA?

Yes	
No	

What happens next?

Following the 12 week consultation running from Thursday 9th June 2022 to Thursday 1st September 2022 at 4pm and once finalised the EQIA Final Decision Report will be made available on Ards and North Down Borough Council's Website.

**Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the
Flying of the Union Flag**

Draft

**Equality Impact Assessment
Final Decision Report**



**Ards and
North Down**
Borough Council

January 2023

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Preface

Under the statutory duties contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Ards and North Down Borough Council gave an undertaking to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA) on each policy or group of co-joined policies where screening had indicated that there may be significant implications in relation to one or more of the nine Section 75 categories.

This Final Decision Report represents the concluding stage of the EQIA relating to the **Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag**, and is presented to Council in order to help inform its decision-making.

This EQIA Final Decision report is available on our website at:

www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/eqia

This EQIA has been undertaken in accordance with the ECNI Guidance:

<http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/PracticalGuidanceonEQIA2005.pdf>

If you have any queries about this document, and its availability in alternative formats (including large print, Braille, disk and audio, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English) then please contact:

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Introduction

Background

Further to the creation of Ards and North Down Borough Council on 1 April 2015, the new Council continued to operate the existing Flags Policies of the two legacy councils (Ards BC and North Down BC), until July 2021, when an updated policy was introduced. The updated policy is shown below (with change to the previous policy highlighted in bold).

Amended Ards and North Down Borough Council Flags Policy (July, 2021)

- I. The Union Flag be flown permanently (365/6 days) at seven designated sites i.e. Castle Park, Bangor; Conway Square, Newtownards (beside Blair Mayne Memorial); Ballygowan (adjacent to the War Memorial); The Square, Comber (adjacent to the War Memorial); The Maypole, Holywood; The Moat, Donaghadee; and Queen's Hall, Holywood.
- II. The Union Flag be flown only on designated days (currently 15) at Church Street, Newtownards.
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At a meeting of Council on 30 March 2022 it was resolved that 'subject to the completion of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), Council amends the current flag policy to fly our Union Flag at every war memorial all year round, and will also include Church Street, Newtownards Council building'.

It was against this backdrop that the current EQIA was undertaken, with the intent of consulting widely on the proposed revisions to the policy prior to the Council reaching a final decision.

It was intended that the consultation process would provide an opportunity to consider various options regarding proposed revisions to the policy, including the option of not changing the policy.

The EQIA consultation commenced on June 9th 2022 and concluded on November 1st 2022. (The normal period of consultation was extended beyond 12 weeks to accommodate public holidays and the need to accommodate additional public meetings as requested by a number of respondents to the two surveys.)

With regard to the war memorials affected by the policy, while legacy Ards War Memorials are included in the Asset Register, legacy North Down ones are not and so this list may not be complete but affected war memorials within the Borough are likely to include at least the following (n = 14):

- Donaghadee War Memorial
- Comber, Gillespie's Monument
- Ballywalter War Memorial
- Newtownards Castle Street War Memorial
- Greyabbey War Memorial
- Ballyhalbert War Memorial
- Portavogie War Memorial (x2)
- Bangor Ward Park War Memorial
- Holywood War Memorial
- Groomsport War Memorial
- Ballygowan War Memorial
- Millisle War Memorial
- Groomsport War Memorial

Relevant Legislation and Agreements

(a) *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement*

In the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the participants endorsed the commitment:

‘that whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities.’

Also, in relation to national identity, Article 1 (xi) of the Agreement provides that the two Governments,

‘recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both as they may so

choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish Citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland.’

(b) *Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000*

The 2000 Order gives the Secretary of State the power to make regulations regulating the flying of flags at government buildings and court-houses. In exercising these powers, the 2000 Order requires that the Secretary of State shall, among other things, have regard to the Belfast Agreement.

(c) *Flags Regulations (NI) 2000 (as amended)*

The 2000 Regulations govern the flying of the Union flag on government buildings. Under the 2000 Regulations, the Union Flag must be displayed at specified government buildings on 15 specified days per year (see Appendix 1), and on other specified occasions, e.g. on the occasion of a visit by the Queen (in certain circumstances) or other Head of State. Except as provided by the 2000 Regulations, it is not permissible to fly the Union Flag on any government building except on these specified days.

While the Flags (NI) Order sets out the position on the flying of the Union Flag on government buildings, it does not specifically apply to District Councils. The Order was the subject of a Judicial Review in response to an application from Mr Connor Murphy MLA (Sinn Féin), and the Judge in his decision in October 2001, stated,

‘The Regulations are consistent both with the principles of the Belfast Agreement and with the wishes of the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland from both traditions, who wish to see flag flying handled in a sensitive, respectful and, above all, non-provocative way...the Regulations follow the principle that it is the inappropriate or excessive use of symbols, including flags, which should be eliminated, not their constitutional significance. The Regulations achieve a balance based on respect for diversity and tolerance of difference, in full accord with principles and spirit of the Belfast Agreement.... The decision to fly the Union Flag on the days designated by the Secretary of State seems to me to exemplify a proper regard for partnership, equality and mutual respect.’

(d) *Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (including ECNI Advice on flying the Union Flag in Councils)*

In January 2013 the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland issued advice to Councils in relation to the flying of the Union Flag. The Equality Commission’s remit in this area stems from their duties under the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (‘FETO’) to promote equality of opportunity, affirmative action and to work for the elimination of religious/political discrimination¹, and their duty to offer advice to public authorities in relation to Section 75 of the 1998 Act ².

¹ Article 7, FETO.

² Paragraph 1(b), Schedule 9, Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The advice included the following:

‘[FETO] does not make any express reference to flags but makes discrimination on the grounds of religious belief and political opinion unlawful, both in the workplace and in the provision of goods, facilities and services. Also, in the workplace, it bans ‘harassment’ on these grounds³. In addition to the issue of discrimination and harassment, employers also have legal obligations which require them to promote fair participation in employment and associated responsibilities to promote a good and harmonious workplace.’

In the field of employment, the Fair Employment Code of Practice provides general guidance for employers on these matters. The Code has been cited with approval by the Fair Employment Tribunal when upholding complaints against employers in numerous discrimination cases. A small number of these concerned the display of flags and emblems⁴.

The relatively new statutory definition of harassment under FETO, first enacted in 2003, has not yet been explicitly considered by the Tribunal in any case dealing specifically with flags and emblems issues. However, the case law that preceded 2003 can, with a reasonable degree of confidence, be used to predict how the Tribunal would approach these questions if raised today. It is noted that the Tribunal has not considered a complaint relating solely to the official display of a Union Flag at a Council’s premises.

In relation to fair employment obligations relating to the provision of goods, facilities and services, it is also not clear to what extent FETO impinges on the issue, as there has been no case law to date in respect of these provisions regarding the display of flags and emblems. Furthermore, the coverage of the statutory provisions differs from those which apply to employment-related matters⁵.

(e) ECNI Guidance on Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment

In October 2009, the Equality Commission issued guidance on promoting a good and harmonious working environment. This guidance states that:

‘A good and harmonious working environment is one where all workers are treated with dignity and respect and where no worker is subjected to harassment by conduct that is related to religious belief or political opinion....This of course does not mean that working environments must

³ The definition is: Harassment occurs where, on the ground or religious belief or political opinion, an employee is subjected to unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating his/her dignity or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for him or her.

⁴ For example, the cases of Brennan-v-Short Brothers Plc [1995] and Johnston-v-Belfast City Council [2000] case ref 00241/97FET.

⁵ In the context of the relationship between a service provider and service users there is no corresponding definition of harassment or express ban on ‘harassment’ like that which applies in the case of the employer/employee relationship. Instead, aggrieved service users must allege that, on the ground of religious belief or political opinion, they have been subjected to less favourable treatment compared to others in relation to the quality or manner or terms on which they received a service.

always be devoid of anything that happens to be more closely associated with one or other of the two main communities in Northern Ireland....In other words an 'harmonious' working environment does not necessarily mean a 'neutral' one.'⁶

The guidance includes the following advice on the issue of workplace emblems:

'The Commission recommends that where an employer is seeking to provide or maintain fair participation, or to ensure that all services and facilities are widely utilised by all sections of the community, there is sensitivity concerning displays wholly or mainly associated with one section of the community.'

The document goes on to provide guidance specifically on the flying of the Union flag:

'The flying of the Union flag must be viewed within the context in which it is flown or displayed. Factors affecting the context include the manner, location and frequency with which flags are flown. The Union flag is the national flag of the United Kingdom and, arising therefrom, has a particular status symbolising the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. On the other hand, the Union flag is often used to mark sectional community allegiance. There is a world of difference between these two approaches. Thus, for example, while it is acceptable and appropriate, in the Commission's view, for a local Council to fly the Union flag at its Civic Headquarters, the rationale for its display at every Council location, facility and leisure centre would be questionable.'

(f) ECNI Advice on Flying the Union Flag in Councils

Building on this advice, in 2013, the ECNI produced specific guidance on the flying of the Union flag in councils. This reiterated the statement from the earlier (see f. above) but also went on to state:

'In developing or reviewing a policy on the flying of the Union Flag a Council should consider the policy aims and intended rationale for the policy. This is a matter for a Council to decide for itself. However the policy aims and objectives must be legitimate. The Commission accepts that there will be a range of legitimate policy options for flying the Union Flag which may be adopted. As noted above, the Commission considers that flying the Union Flag with the aim of acknowledging the constitutional position of Northern Ireland would be a legitimate aim. It also considers it legitimate to fly the Union Flag as a mark of commemoration, in a manner which symbolises the dignity and respect for those it is remembering.'

'It is for a Council reviewing or developing its policy to establish the aims and objectives for the policies it wishes to develop. The final Council policy should reflect the Council's legitimate policy aims and not cause unlawful

⁶ 'Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment, A Guide for Employers and Employees', Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, October 2009

discrimination or harassment, unintentionally or indirectly through its likely effects or impacts. In reaching that outcome the Council should also have complied with its Section 75 duties, that is to pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.'

(g) ECNI Advice on Good Relations in Local Councils

In September 2015, the Equality Commission published further advice to councils on 'how the Section 75 good relations duty applies to relevant areas of their business, as well as how it can inform councils' wider good relations policy development'. This guidance reiterates the Commission's view that,

'if a decision is made to initiate or continue with a policy that damages good relations or which is likely to frustrate the promotion of good relations, then it may raise a doubt that the decision-maker properly paid regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.'

The Commission goes on to state that,

'If such a decision is challenged by way of a complaint to the Equality Commission or otherwise, the decision-makers will have to provide convincing evidence that they considered the desirability of promoting good relations "in substance, with rigour and an open mind" and not as a mere "tick box" exercise.'

Other Relevant Guidance, Strategies and Policies

(a) Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The flying of flags is not the subject of statute law in England, Wales or Scotland but the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has responsibility for issuing guidance on the days designated for flying of the Union flag.

On 21 May 2021 DCMS changed its guidance advising that the Union flag be flown on UK government buildings from 20 designated days (see Appendix 3) to 365 days a year. It further states that, 'This guidance is aimed at UK government buildings. However, we would encourage local authorities and other local organisations to follow suit where they wish to fly flags.' However, 'In Northern Ireland, designated flag flying for Northern Ireland government buildings is governed by legislation rather than this guidance' (emphasis as published).

Therefore, it is not anticipated that this guidance should extend to Northern Ireland.

(b) Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition

The Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition published its final report in December 2021 but found 'no meeting point' between the:

'two diametrically opposed political and public positions relating to the official flying of flags on public buildings – that either the Union Flag only,

should fly on public buildings, or; that the Union Flag and the Irish National Flag should both fly on public buildings together, or there should be no flags flown at all.'

In relation to council buildings, it stated:

'The flying of flags by local government is left to the discretion of each local authority. In developing or reviewing a policy on the flying of the Union Flag a Council is required to consider the policy aims, objectives, rationale and must not cause unlawful discrimination or harassment, unintentionally or indirectly through the effects or impacts of the policy. While the policy aims and objectives must be legitimate, ultimately the policy is a matter for each Council to decide for itself. In reaching an outcome on any review of its policy, a Council must comply with its Section 75 duties, namely to 'have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations'.'

(c) Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Review of the Policy on the Flying of the Union flag at Parliament Buildings

In 2014 the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission completed an EQIA on their policy on the flying of the Union flag at Parliament Buildings (Stormont). There are no statutory obligations in relation to the flying of the Union flag at Parliament Buildings; previously it had adhered to the designated days as set down in the Flags Regulations schedule.

During the consultation on the review, the Commission found that, 'people from the Nationalist community might experience a 'chill factor' in their dealings with the Commission as a result of the flying of the Union flag':

Comments were made regarding the current impact of the flying of the Union flag on designated days; it was suggested that there is a chill factor for those of a Nationalist or Republican community which makes the building less welcoming on such days, and it was reported that visitors had regularly commented likewise. Some consultees said that, on designated days, issues of identity were raised in consciousness and there was greater sensitivity to such matters [...] A number of interviewees felt that the flying of the Union flag was not in keeping with the spirit of the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, and was not likely to encourage mutual respect, nor did it help present the building as a shared space for all communities.

The final decision of the Commission on the matter was to adopt the recommendations in the EQIA report that the existing policy on the flying of the Union flag at Parliament Buildings on designated days should continue but that the designated days observed be based on 18 days as designated by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.⁷

(d) Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

⁷ Review of the Policy on the Flying of the Union flag at Parliament Buildings (niassembly.gov.uk)

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's 2013 report, *The Display of Flags, Symbols and Emblems in Northern Ireland*⁸, notes that:

'The display of flags, symbols or emblems in a public space may act as a territorial marker or a method of harassment, irrespective of the intention behind its erection. The ECt.HR has noted that expression, which is not, on its face, offensive, can be offensive in certain circumstances.

Consequently, when public authorities make decisions pertaining to the erection or removal of a flag, symbol or emblem, a broader discussion of the rights of those who live in the vicinity and those who travel in or through the area for purposes of accessing services is required. The existence of such displays may have an impact on individuals from other communities, acting as a form of intimidation which creates an access barrier to the area. This may have consequences for individuals accessing health care services and for children in accessing public recreational spaces, both of which are protected by international human rights law.'

(e) *Together: Building a United Community*

In 2013 the NI Executive launched the *Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC)* strategy. Its vision is:

'a united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation – one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.'

The Executive established an all-party group to consider contentious issues including flags and emblems.

1. Defining the aims of the policy

1.1 The Council's future decision on the flying of the Union Flag must aspire to be consistent with existing legislation, while taking into account the findings of the EQIA and including the views expressed by those consulted therein.

1.2 The Council must also ensure that it continues to keep in mind best value principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness while serving the needs and interests of ratepayers, residents and visitors within the Borough.

1.3 Bearing these considerations in mind, the overarching aim of the flags policy, and including proposed revisions, should be:

'Operating within available resources, and mindful of the Council's ongoing duty to protect and promote equality of opportunity and good relations

⁸ <https://nihrc.org/publication/detail/the-display-of-flags-symbols-and-emblems-in-northern-ireland2>

within the Borough, to have in place a policy with regard to the flying of the Union that is able to strike an appropriate balance between respecting the traditional flag of the United Kingdom while acknowledging that the flag has the potential to be used to mark sectional community allegiance in the context of Northern Ireland.'

2. Consideration of available data and research

2.1 Section 75 Profile of the Borough

A full breakdown of the Ards and North Down population by Section 75 categories is shown at Appendix 2.

In summary, on Census Day 27 March 2011, in Ards and North Down Local Government District:

- 13.1% belonged to or were brought up in the Catholic religion and 75.1% belonged to or were brought up in a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' religion;
- 72.4% indicated that they had a British national identity, 8.3% had an Irish national identity and 32.4% had a Northern Irish national identity;
- 19.0% were aged under 16 years and 17.68% were aged 65 and over (with a median age of 41 years);
- 48.5% of the usually resident population were male and 51.5% were female;
- 1.5% were from an ethnic minority population and the remaining 98.5% were white (including Irish Traveller);
- 20.1% of people had a long-term health problem or disability that limited their day-to-day activities;
- 80.6% of people stated their general health was either good or very good; and
- 13.3% of people stated that they provided unpaid care to family, friends, neighbours or others.

Initial results taken from the 2021 Census, with specific regard to the Ards and North Down district, were released on September 22nd 2022⁹. In summary, these interim statistics indicate that:

- The usual population of the Borough (163,664) had increased by 4.5% (6,992) from 2011 to 2021 and stands at 8.6% of the total NI population.
- The 2021 census day population comprised 83,958 females (51.3%) and 79,706 males (48.37%).
- Population increase was greatest in the older age group. Across Northern Ireland, the Borough had the largest increase in the number of people aged 65

⁹ <https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/news/ni-census-2021>

and over, and this figure had risen from 27,692 (17.7%) in 2011 to 36,226 (22.1%) in 2021.

- Children (aged 0 to 14) make up 17.0% of the Borough population, a fall of 0.8% from 2011.
- The number of people living in the Borough who were born outside Northern Ireland has grown from 18,164 people (11.6%) in 2011 to 21,545 people (13.2%) in 2021. Of these, 12,080 people were born in Great Britain, 2,040 in Ireland and 7,425 outside UK and Ireland.
- In 2021, the number of people from a white ethnic background was 159,892 (97.7% of the population). The percentage from a minority ethnic background had increased from 1.5% to 2.3%. Within this classification, the largest groups were mixed ethnicities (1,236) and Chinese (500).
- In relation to national identity, 48.8% of the population identified as 'British only', 21.6% as 'Northern Irish only', 14.4% as 'British and Northern Irish only' and 5.9% as 'Irish only'. The percentage of people who self-defined as 'British only' has decreased from 57.7% to 48.8%, while those who identify as 'British and Northern Irish' has increased from 11% to 14.4%, 'Northern Irish only' from 18.9% to 21.6%, and Irish only from 5.1% to 5.9%.
- Combining current religion and religion of upbringing, in 2021 68.0% of the Borough population self-declared as 'Protestant, other Christian or Christian related' and 11.3% 'Catholic', substantially higher than the respective Northern Ireland averages of 43.5% and 45.7%. In 2011 the equivalent percentage figures were 75.1% 'Protestant, other Christian or Christian related' and 13.1% 'Catholic'.
- In 2021, the main current religions for Borough residents were: Presbyterian (28.5%), Church of Ireland (13.6%) and Catholic (11.3%). By comparison, across Northern Ireland the main current religions were: 'Catholic (42.3%), Presbyterian (16.6%) and Church of Ireland (11.6%).
- 30.6% declared 'no religion'. This is higher than the Northern Ireland average (17.4%) and the highest of all 11 district council areas. This is also a marked increase from 2011 when 19.1% stated 'no religion'.

2.2 Policies of other Local Authorities in Northern Ireland

The 11 Local Authorities in Northern Ireland currently adopt a range of positions with regard to the flying of the Union flag, with many continuing to work with arrangements as handed down from legacy councils and in the absence of new, overarching policies.

These arrangements range from the flying of no flags (Mid Ulster District Council; Newry, Mourne and Down District Council; Derry City and Strabane District Council); to flying only the council flag (Fermanagh and Omagh District Council); to flying the Union flag only on designated days (Belfast City Council; Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council); to flying the Union flag permanently at a number of locations (Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council; Mid

and East Antrim Borough Council), to a combination of designated days and 365 days at different locations (Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council).

A summary of written policy positions, as draw up by legacy and current councils, is included below

(a) Belfast City Council (2012)

In 2012 Belfast City Council carried out an EQIA on proposed changes to its flags policy, which was then flown on City Hall 365 days a year and other council buildings (the Ulster Hall, a cultural venue, and the Duncrue Complex, a depot open to staff only) on designated days, some bank holidays and ad hoc occasions.

Legal opinion provided at this time by David A. Scoffield QC agreed with earlier legal opinion¹⁰ in that:

‘It is difficult to see how the flying of the Union flag on the exterior of Council buildings would be likely to have an intimidatory or chilling effect on persons working within the buildings.’

He did not agree, however, with previous counsel that flying the flag on a daily basis (or not at all) would be in breach of good relations duties under Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, ‘provided that the decision was taken after full consideration of the possible effects on the promotion of good relations’. This was further challenged by legal advice obtained by Sinn Féin from Eugene McKenna BL, which found ‘strong authority for the proposition that the flying of the Union flag on days other than in accordance with the Flags Regulations (NI) 2000 would be in contravention of the duties of the council under s.75’.

Overall, Scoffield found that, ‘The striking of such a balance’ as is set down for central government buildings in the Flags Regulations ‘seems to me to be a laudable aim’. Furthermore, it ‘is likely to be legally ‘safer’ than the present policy and very unlikely to give rise to a successful discrimination and less at risk of a successful legal challenge’.

The EQIA further pointed to evidence that some people from a Catholic and/or Nationalist community background regarded the flying of the Union flag as offensive and possibly intimidating, but that ceasing to fly the Union flag would be equally offensive to some people from a Protestant and/or Unionist community background. This included the results of a survey at City Hall which found that

- Protestant visitors were more likely to say they felt pleased/ proud (50 per cent) and comfortable (22 per cent) about the Union Flag flying. One percent said that they felt uncomfortable, with a further 1 per cent feeling offended by the Union flag flying;
- In contrast, 4 per cent of Catholic visitors said they felt pleased and proud, 8 per cent comfortable with 56 per cent saying they had no particular feelings. Twenty

¹⁰ Mr Nicolas Hanna QC, 2002

percent said they felt uncomfortable with the Union flag flying, with a further 12 per cent saying they felt offended;

- 72 per cent of protestant visitors believed that the Council should always fly the Union Flag compared with 16 per cent of Catholic visitors.

Consultation responses to the EQIA report confirmed these positions.

With regard to staff, those from a Protestant background were more likely to say they felt pleased/proud (78 per cent) and comfortable (14 per cent) about the Union flag flying. One percent said that they felt uncomfortable, with a further 0.5 per cent feeling offended by the Union flag flying. In contrast, 4 per cent of Catholic visitors said they felt pleased and proud, 14 per cent comfortable with 18 per cent saying they had no particular feelings. Thirty two percent said they felt uncomfortable with the Union flag flying, with a further 41 per cent saying they felt offended.

The Belfast City Council EQIA report concluded that:

‘... it would appear that the policy options which best promote good relations are – in descending order of effectiveness:

- Designated flag days only
- Designated flag days plus specified additional days
- No flag or a neutral flag
- Two flags’

The final decision of Belfast City Council in December 2012 in relation to their flags policy was to fly the Union flag at its civic headquarters, City Hall, on designated days; and not to fly the flag at all at its other buildings.

This decision was followed by extended civil unrest, which, according to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, ‘gives a strong indication of the likely adverse impact on good relations of any change in policy where one or more communities may feel disadvantaged by that change’.

(Postscript)

In 2013, the Council carried out a screening of a further policy on the flying of the Union flag in the Garden of Remembrance at the Cenotaph in the grounds of the City Hall¹¹. The proposal brought to Council was to fly the Union flag permanently and instead of only three days (the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme [1st July], Remembrance Sunday and the Monday immediately prior to Remembrance Sunday [cross laying day]).

As part of pre-consultation, the Council engaged with the Royal British Legion HQ Area Office (Ireland) for their views on the matter. In response, the Legion stated:

¹¹https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjv8_iP_J77AhXeSkEAHRSdAIUQFnoECBAQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fminutes3.belfastcity.gov.uk%2Fdocuments%2Fs34794%2FCenotaph%2F520Screening%2520Report.pdf&usg=AOvVaw39_6ptBKnfV-UN1uj830BT

'As the nation's custodian of Remembrance, the Legion is committed to helping everyone understand the importance of Remembrance, so those sacrifices are never forgotten.

Remembrance of all those who have fallen should unite, not divide. It is sacrosanct and should not be politicised in any way. We would therefore oppose the Garden of Remembrance becoming involved in the flag debate for that reason and, in the interests of keeping Remembrance free of controversy, cannot agree to any change to the current policy of flag-flying at the Cenotaph".

(b) Banbridge District Council (2009)

In 2009 Banbridge council carried out an EQIA on its existing policy of flying the Union flag at its civic headquarters and other buildings all year round. The vast majority of respondents (91 per cent) to the public consultation favoured the current policy.

In deciding to adopt the option of flying the Union Flag at its civic headquarters only throughout the year, the Council took account of the view that this reflected the constitutional status of Northern Ireland; that not to fly the Union Flag would cause offence to a large number of people; that the current presence of the Union flag had not deterred the Council from recruiting and retaining a workforce that was broadly in line with expected rates for the local Protestant and Catholic communities; and, in particular, noted the advice of the Equality Commission that, 'this would be an option that would be within the general context of a policy which symbolises the constitutional position of Northern Ireland'.

(c) Craigavon Borough Council (2005)

Craigavon Borough Council conducted an EQIA in 2005 of its policy on flying the Union flag on civic occasions. This EQIA raised the question of adding additional days to those designated under the Flags Regulations, such as 1 and 12 July. The Borough Solicitor advised at that time that the Equality Commission would probably not view these additions as sustainable due to political significance and commemoration could be divisive.

(d) Limavady Borough Council (2004)

In 2004 Limavady Borough Council conducted an EQIA on the adoption of a no-flags policy. The Council had previously flown the Union flag at its main headquarters building on designated flag days.

The EQIA considered that there was a possibility that the policy on flags may have a differential impact upon people as to whether they feel free to fully access the public services available to them. It suggested that there was a possibility that people may experience a 'chill factor' in their dealings with Council or visits to the Council offices. This 'chill factor' may not prevent people from entering a building or accessing a service but may detract from their ability to participate and benefit fully.

The EQIA also recognised that some employees may experience a 'chill factor' when working in a building displaying a flag which would lead them to associate the building

with a different political identity. Also, that some employees may experience a 'chill factor' when working in a building where their political identity was not recognised in the flag flying practice.

Having taken into account the findings of the EQIA and the consultation responses, the Council adopted the no-flags policy, noting that the stated intent behind the policy, 'in the interests of creating a neutral environment', was reflective of the Council's own policies in relation to promoting equal opportunities and combating harassment.

(e) Armagh City and District Council (2004)

In 2004 Armagh City and District Council conducted an EQIA of a composite policy which included the flying of the Union flag at its civic headquarters on designated days. The Council reported that strong opinions were voiced by the Unionist and/or Protestant community who generally felt that the Union flag was often singled out for causing offence. There was a 'genuine sense of hurt' that 1 and 12 July were not included in the designated days and that this indicated a lack of recognition for Unionist and/or Protestant traditions. There was not the same depth of feeling expressed by the Nationalist and/or Catholic community.

As a result of the EQIA the Council decided to continue to fly the Union flag on designated days. It was acknowledged that both main communities might feel that the policy created an adverse impact for them, but the Council considered that the policy best suited its corporate aim of 'creating an inclusive place'.

(f) Newtownabbey Borough Council (2003)

In 2003 Newtownabbey Borough Council undertook an EQIA of its existing policy that the Union flag should be flown at all times on its administrative buildings and leisure centres.

In carrying out the EQIA the Council acknowledged that there were alternative policies that would reduce the perceived barrier to Nationalists or Republicans and challenge the stereotype that Newtownabbey was a Unionist-controlled Council which did not take account of the views of other traditions. It was recognised that if the Council did not adopt an alternative policy then those from a Nationalist or Republican tradition would continue to perceive the Council facilities as being unwelcoming. However, the Council determined that the existing policy should be retained on the basis that:

- the policy was lawful;
- although an adverse impact had been identified, the greater number of respondents had indicated that they would not wish to see a change in the policy; and
- altering the policy would have an adverse impact on a greater number of people.

(g) Antrim Borough Council (2007)

In 2007, Antrim Borough Council carried out an EQIA on the flying of the Union Flag at the Council's Headquarters (Civic Centre) and the Antrim Forum Leisure Centre.

The existing policy (to fly the flag permanently at both locations) was examined in the light of information obtained to assess whether or not there was seen to be an adverse impact on any of the nine Section 75 grounds and to ascertain if further action could be taken to help promote good relations.

The EQIA determined that the Council’s existing policy did not impact significantly on any Section 75 ground. In light of this assessment the Council proposed to continue to fly the flag at both locations.

(h) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (2022)

In November 2022, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council concluded an EQIA based on a notice of motion submitted to Council in 1 June 2021. The notice proposed that the council should adopt the following policy:

“That this Council falls in line with the new guidance published by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to have the Union flag flown on Council and Civic buildings every day (365 days). Therefore, the following buildings would fly the flag in accordance with this policy; Coleraine Town Hall, Cloonavin Council Headquarters, Limavady Office (Connell St), Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre, Ballymoney Town Hall, Riada House, Portrush Town Hall and Portstewart Town Hall.¹² This list of buildings will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. The Union Flag is the National Flag of the United Kingdom, and it is so called because it embodies the emblems of the constituent nations united under one Sovereign – the Kingdoms of England and Wales, of Scotland and of Northern Ireland”.

At a full meeting of Council on 1 November 2022, this policy was duly adopted.

2.3 Views on the Flying of Flags

No research has been carried out on local views with regard to the flying of flags. However, the Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey does provide regional statistics. The tables below give views on the flying of flags in the 2013, 2019 and 2020 surveys, by religion.

2013 Survey	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Union flag flown from all public buildings all the time	5	44	23
Union flag flown on designated days only	59	48	54
Union flag not flown at all from any public building	28	3	13
Don't know	9	5	10

2019 Survey	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion

¹² Portstewart Town Hall is no longer part of the Council estate and has been removed from the list.

Union flag flown from all public buildings all the time	3	38	22
Union flag flown on designated days only	60	56	50
Union flag not flown at all from any public building	28	2	13
Don't know	10	4	16

2020 Survey	%		
	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Union flag flown from all public buildings all the time	2	38	13
Union flag flown on designated days only	35	51	53
Union flag not flown at all from any public building	54	4	25
Don't know	9	7	8

Source: Life and Times Surveys, 2013; 2019; 2020

In 2003, a further question was asked: When you see the Union Jack, does it make you feel proud, hostile or do you not feel much either way? Responses by religion are shown below.

	Total	Catholic	Protestant	No religion
Very proud	17%	0%	31%	6%
A bit proud	11%	1%	19%	9%
Does not feel much either way	59%	75%	46%	71%
A bit hostile	5%	11%	1%	4%
Very hostile	2%	6%	0%	3%
It depends	3%	3%	2%	4%
Other	1%	2%	0%	2%
Don't know	2%	2%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source : Life and Times Survey 2003

Once more, the survey highlights the striking difference in opinion by community background.

2.4 Other Relevant Council Strategies, Policies and Documents

A number of the Council's strategies and policies have a bearing on the proposed policy under consideration. These include the following:

- ANDB Council - Corporate Plan
- ANDB Council Equality Scheme
- ANDB Good Relations Strategy and Action Plan
- ANDB Lands and Property Policy
- ANDB Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure
- ANDB Dignity at Work Policy and Procedures

These are all available on the Council's website or by contacting Head of Administration (see contact details page 4.)

3. Assessment of impacts

3.1 In accordance with the EQIA process, having gathered information on the policy and those affected by it, the Council must: (i) assess whether there is a differential impact on one or more of the nine Section 75 grounds; (ii) determine the extent of any differential impact; and (iii) decide whether that impact is adverse.

3.2 Differential impact suggests that a particular group has been affected differently by the policy (either favourably or unfavourably), while adverse impact is an indication that the effect is less favourable (i.e. negative) and is potentially unlawful.

3.3 In order to determine whether the policy has any adverse differential impact, it is necessary to consider the people affected by the policy, their needs and experiences and the equality categories to which they belong.

Differential impact

3.4 The evidence suggests that the policy may have a differential impact on two Section 75 grounds in particular, i.e. religious belief and political opinion, although it could be argued that the issue of emblems and national identity (i.e. flags) also brings into play a third category, ethnic origin. In general, the impact would relate to the perceptions of the Union flag by different communities in Northern Ireland, in turn related to considerations of national identity and allegiance.

3.5 No evidence has been identified during the consideration of this policy to suggest that the proposed revisions to the policy are likely to have a differential impact with regard to other Section 75 grounds (i.e. age, marital status or sexual orientation, men and women generally, persons with a disability and persons without, persons with dependants and persons without).

Adverse impact

3.6 The decision may have the potential to adversely impact people with regard to religious belief, political opinion and ethnicity, but the full extent of this impact has not yet been fully determined locally. It is therefore necessary to use the EQIA process, and including public consultation and stakeholder engagement, to consider further the impacts of the policy in terms of: (i) the promotion of good relations generally across the

Borough; (ii) the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment for those who are employed by the Council, and, more generally: (iii) the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations among all employees, users and potential users of Council facilities and premises within the Borough.

Assessment of impacts

3.7 In carrying out this EQIA, the following potential adverse impacts were initially identified.

Access to services:

3.8 Any proposed increase in the number of flags flying on or close by Council premises may create a potential 'chill factor', and hence adverse impact, for:

- Users and potential users of Council facilities and premises, and in particular those from a Roman Catholic and/or Nationalist and/or Republican background;

Good and harmonious working environment:

3.9 Any proposed increase in the number of flags on Council premises may have the potential to create an adverse impact on employees from a Roman Catholic and/or Nationalist and/or Republican background, or those who do not identify with any community background, by disrupting a good and harmonious working environment.

Promoting good relations:

3.10 More generally, the proposed increase in the number of flags on Council premises and across the Borough generally may have an adverse impact on residents, visitors and employees from a Roman Catholic and/or Nationalist and/or Republican community background, in terms of an expectation that the Council will have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations through its policies.

4. Consideration of alternative policies and measures to mitigate

4.1 The EQIA process requires that, if it is decided that the policy has an adverse impact on one or more of the nine equality grounds, a series of alternatives should be put forward for consideration, and an assessment of the possible impact of these alternatives undertaken. In other words, the Council must consider measures that may mitigate any identified or perceived adverse impact and alternative ways of delivering policy aims that may reduce the adverse impact on the relevant equality ground or that may better promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

4.2 The Equality Commission Guidance on this section advises that the Council should give consideration to options/measures which may mitigate any adverse impact, and to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity. The guidance states:

The consideration of mitigating measures and alternative policies is at the heart of the EQIA process. Different options must be developed which reflect different ways of delivering the policy aims. The consideration of these measures is intertwined with the consideration of alternative policies. Mitigation can take the form of lessening the severity of the adverse impact.

Ways of delivering policy aims that have a less adverse effect on the relevant equality category, or which better promote equality of opportunity for the relevant equality category, must in particular be considered. Consideration must be given to whether separate implementation strategies are necessary for the policy to be effective for the relevant group.

4.3 In light of the above, and in order to help the Council reach a decision in relation to the proposed revisions, the following options were offered for consideration:

Council Premises and Facilities

- **Option 1:** No change to the existing policy;
- **Option 2:** No change to the existing policy except to fly the Union flag for 365/6 days at Council Offices, Church Street; Newtownards;

War Memorials

- **Option 1:** No change to the existing policy;
- **Option 2:** The Union flag to be flown 365/6 days at all designated and affected war memorials within the Borough.

4.4 The Council decided to seek views on the flying of the Union flag, and including the proposed options, through public consultation. The Council also committed to collate and analyse all comments received in relation to the proposed revisions to the policy.

4.5 The outcome of the engagement and consultation will be used to inform emerging mitigating measures or alternative policies if appropriate, alongside all other relevant information and data.

4.6 The Council commits to remaining open to feedback and will respond in a positive manner to views expressed through the consultation process.

5 Summary of consultation process

5.1 Chapter 3 of the Council's Equality Scheme commits the Council to a consultation period normally lasting for a minimum of twelve weeks, to allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view.

5.2 Mindful of this commitment, while also allowing for other contingencies including public holidays and requests for public meetings and extensions, the present consultation period ran from Thursday 9th June 2022 until Tuesday 1st November 2022.

5.3 For the purpose of this EQIA, the Council committed to carrying out a transparent and meaningful consultation with a broad range of stakeholders in a range of formats and using different media and selected locations. Included in the survey was the option to request a public meeting. The Council committed to arranging such meetings if more than one person made a request.

5.4 All consultees listed in the Council's Equality Scheme were informed of the EQIA by email and the EQIA consultation document and accompanying questionnaire (for the general public) was made available on the Council's website consultation page at www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/eqia. The questionnaire included a covering explanation and request for completion as the Council aimed to gather as broad a range of comments as possible.

5.5 A staff questionnaire was also issued to all employees of Ards and North Down Borough Council. The questionnaire included a covering explanation and request for completion, as the Council aimed to garner as broad a range of opinion as possible. The questionnaire could be completed confidentially either online or as a paper version with an addressed envelope, to return the completed questionnaire to the Compliance Officer (Equality and Safeguarding).

5.6 Employees were also invited to attend a face-to-face event where they could present their views verbally, either in groups or as individuals. This event was advertised to Council employees and took place at 4.00pm to accommodate different shift patterns (24/10/22, 2.00 – 4.00pm). Two members of staff attended this meeting.

Where employees were concerned about attending staff meeting but still wanted to contribute, face-to face and virtual meetings were offered. No staff took up the invitation to attend one-one-one meetings

5.7 Two public meetings were arranged at different times and different locations (Market House, Portaferry, 24/10/22, 12.00am; Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre, 24/10/22, 7.00pm). These events were advertised widely using social media and local press publications. Further to representations at both these events, it was agreed to hold an on-line 'Zoom' meeting on the final day of the consultation period (1/11/22, 7.00pm). This was in order to accommodate those who had been unable to attend earlier events.

5.8 The EQIA was advertised within the Borough using the publications of the County Down Spectator and Newtownards Chronicle. The advertisement indicated the methods of engagement with the Council. It also offered meetings, either on-line or face-to-face as required.

5.9 The Council's social media and website was used to inform readers of the EQIA and the consultation period and how they were able to participate. Stakeholders were informed as to how they could participate in confidence should they wish to remain anonymous.

Consultation events

Public: Two public consultation meetings were arranged, one in Market House, Portaferry and one in Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre, Newtownards, with a subsequent on-line Zoom meeting arranged for those who were unable to attend either event. Each meeting included a short presentation, giving detail of the existing and proposed policies, together with outlines of relevant legislation / guidance and the EQIA process. A summary of comments from these meetings is included at Appendix 4.

The Portaferry meeting was attended by eight members of the public together with two elected members and four Council officers. A number of contributors indicated their support for either the existing policy or a no flags policy, while other attendees expressed support for the proposed policy. It was argued that flying the flag may deter the unauthorised flying of flags across the Borough, although it was acknowledged that this theory has yet to be tested. In relation to Church Street, it was argued by some that flying the Union flag permanently could be seen as a retrograde step with regard to the promotion of good relations and inclusivity, while others considered it to be a fitting acknowledgement of the position of Northern Ireland within the UK.

Regarding war memorials, while some saw the existing policy as proportionate, others felt that permanent displays would be more appropriate, and in particular given the need to acknowledge events across the year other than the traditional period of remembrance in November. The costs associated with raising and lowering flags was also mentioned, along with maintenance and replacement of flags due to wear and tear. The timing of the meeting was called into question and it was agreed to consider alternatives for those who were unable to attend (see above).

The Newtownards meeting was attended by 55 members of the public together with four elected members and four Council officers. The meeting was characterised by a high level of emotion among those present, along with unanimous support for the flying of the Union flag permanently at both Church Street and affected war memorials.

Strong support was forthcoming from a considerable number of contributors who wholeheartedly welcomed the permanent flying of the Union flag at numerous sites across the Borough, and including Church Street and war memorials, as a mark of respect to those who had sacrificed for their country, and also given the constitutional status of Northern Ireland within the UK. The need for the EQIA was called into question by several attendees; it was felt this was superfluous and for the Council to determine.

The subsequent on-line Zoom meeting was well attended by over 50 people, and was once more characterised by overwhelming support for the proposed policy, both with regard to Church Street and affected war memorials. Strong sentiments were once more expressed, both in the meeting itself and in the chat room attached to the on-line meeting, regarding the importance and significance of the Union flag within the local community, and the need to show respect to those who had fought and died for their country. (A far smaller number of people expressed concerns about the proposed policy but these comments tended to be in the chat room rather than being made directly in

the meeting, and it was suggested that it may have been too intimidating to voice these views openly in the meeting).

Staff: Two consultation events were arranged, one offering an opportunity for one-to-one interviews and the other adopting a general meeting format (in Ards Blair Mayne Leisure Centre). While two people suggested they would not be comfortable attending a public forum to voice their opinion and were offered one-to-one interviews, no staff attended any of the one-to-one sessions. Two members of staff did take part in the group meeting (see Appendix 5 for a summary of responses).

At this meeting, there was discussion of the impact of the proposed policy on the maintenance of good relations among staff, and the need for the Council to ensure that it continued to promote a good and harmonious working environment. The costs associated with maintaining, raising and lowering flags were also highlighted.

Responses from the general public survey

There was a total of **281** responses to the survey, with only one on behalf of an organisation (Doasim North Down).

Demographic Profile

269 returns (95.7%) were from either residents or ratepayers in the Borough. 276 (98.2%) declaring their ethnicity as white, with 69.0% male and 29.2% female (1.8% undeclared). The age profile of the sample suggests the majority of respondents (79.7%) were over the age of 35 years, with a relatively even distribution across the ages 25 to over 65.

Age	N	%
Under 18	2	0.7%
18 -24	13	4.6%
25-34	42	15.0%
35-44	61	21.7%
45-54	66	23.5%
55-64	54	19.2%
Over 65	43	15.3%

Respondents were also asked to indicate the first four digits of their postcode. Of those who answered this question (n = 111; 39.5%), a significant proportion (n = 89; 80.1%) lived in either BT22 (Millisle to Portaferry) or BT23 (Ards to Ballygowan), with only 11 (9.9%) in Bangor or Holywood.

Postcode	Area Covered	N
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BT18	Hollywood	1
BT19	Bangor West	7
BT20	Bangor Central	3
BT21	Donaghadee	7
BT22	Millisle to Portaferry	18
BT23	Ards to Ballygowan	71
Other		4
Total		111

A breakdown of respondents by religion and national identity is shown below. The overwhelming majority (81.5%) self-declared as Protestant, with only 13 respondents (4.6%) stating Roman Catholic and 23 (8.2%) no religion).

In terms of national identity, 67.6% indicated British, 25.3% Northern Irish and 3.6% Irish. While the Borough includes the highest proportion of those self-defined as Protestant across Northern Ireland (68%) according to the latest 2021 census, the extremely low response rate from Roman Catholics to the survey (13; 4.6%) is perhaps noteworthy, and may impose restrictions on the opportunity for detailed statistical breakdowns by religious belief.

Religion	N	%
Roman Catholic	13	4.6%
Protestant	229	81.5%
Other Christian (including Christian related)	6	2.1%
Other faith or non-Christian community background	3	1.1%
No religion	23	8.2%
Prefer not to say	7	2.5%

National Identity	N	%
British	190	67.6%
Irish	10	3.6%
Northern Irish	71	25.3%
English	2	0.7%
Scottish	2	0.7%
Welsh	0	0.0%
Other	6	2.1%

Responses to each of the survey questions are summarised below, together with a coding of additional comments.¹³

1: To what extent do you agree with the Council’s current policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street Newtownards (i.e. designated days only)?

Current Policy: Church Street	Total	%
Strongly agree	44	15.7%
Agree	26	9.3%
Neutral	19	6.8%
Disagree	43	15.3%
Strongly disagree	149	53.0%

Overall, 68.3% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the existing policy, including 60.7% of Protestants and 46.2% of those self-declared as Roman Catholic. The majority of generally short comments tended to reinforce the significance of flying the Union flag within the context of the UK (see below), with a smaller number highlighting the impact this may have on those with different allegiances:

‘It should be flown every day. It is the official flag of the country. Common practice in most countries, including the RoI I’m sure.’

‘I think the flag should be flown permanently. We are a geographical part of Ireland and I feel British as well as Northern Irish, however until sovereignty changes then the flag is what it is representative of the country we live, the UK. I don’t believe this would affect anyone’s sensitivities as it reflects the current political reality.’

‘Don’t believe the flag represents all communities which live in the area.’

‘The union flag should be flown from all Government buildings, war memorials etc all year round, PROUDLY.’

‘There is an obsession with flags here - designated days is an acceptable compromise to 365 days a year.’

‘The Union Flag should be flown all year round. We are part of the United Kingdom and should be very proud of where we come from.’

¹³ A full analysis of the survey data, including comments, is available on request.

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	15
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	1
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	4
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	10
R5	No Interest	1
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice	7
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently	102
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	18
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	28
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	2
R11	Other comments	11

2: To what extent do you agree with the Council's proposed policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street Newtownards, permanently?

Proposed Policy: Church Street	N	%
Strongly agree	216	76.9%
Agree	15	5.3%
Neutral	5	1.8%
Disagree	10	3.6%
Strongly disagree	35	12.5%

A significant majority, 82.3% of those surveyed, supported the proposed policy (76.9% strongly agreed), while only 16.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This support included 89.5% of Protestant respondents but only 15.4% of those declaring themselves as Roman Catholic.

92.6 of those identifying as British supported the proposed policy but only 10% of those declaring their identity as Irish, and 70.4% of those identifying as Northern Irish. Once more, the vast majority of comments tended to affirm the desire to fly the flag permanently as an appropriate mark of respect and national symbol, although there were also a smaller number of those who felt its permanent display at numerous sites may be problematic for the Council

'The flag should be flown all year round. There is absolutely no reason that it should not be flown.'

'Flying it every day means the flag is no longer special and becomes a permanent feature that people pay no attention to.'

‘If you want to alienate part of our population, this is the way to go about it. Why fly flags at all?’

‘The War Memorials represent those who gave their lives for our freedom and it’s right that the flag should be flown all year round to show those and the families respect.’

‘Flags are flown in NI not just to honour someone like her Majesty, but also to designate 'territory". NI belongs to all its citizens and to claim it all 365 days a year under a Union flag is to dishonour those of Irish heritage and tradition who live here and who must go through Newtownards to get to other parts of NI. Increasing the number of days it is flown is provocative. We need to promote peace not division.’

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	7
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	1
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	4
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	20
R5	No Interest	1
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice/Pride	11
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently/ Agree	55
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	19
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	30
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	1
R11	Other comments	4

3: To what extent do you agree with the Council’s current policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag on war memorials within the Borough only for the period of remembrance?

Current Policy: War Memorials	N	%
Strongly agree	36	12.8%
Agree	28	10.0%
Neutral	18	6.4%
Disagree	44	15.7%
Strongly disagree	155	55.2%

In relation to war memorials, a very similar pattern can be seen in the data. Overall, 70.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the current policy, including 63.8% of Protestants but only 34.8% of Roman Catholics. Comments tended once more to affirm the need to recognise those who had made a sacrifice for their country with a permanent display, with far fewer comments supporting the existing policy:

‘War memorials are to remember those that died for their country. The Union flag should be flown every day at these locations.’

‘The sacrifice of the men and women remembered on the memorials should be marked every day and not just for two weeks in November.’

‘A period of remembrance isn’t just one day or one week, it’s every day of each year we should remember, because it’s every day of each year we get to live in peace because of these men and women that gave their lives.’

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	8
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	0
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	2
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	3
R5	No Interest	0
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice/Pride	82
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently/ Agree	66
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	0
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	3
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	0
R11	Other comments	9

4: To what extent do you agree with the Council's proposed policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag permanently at war memorials within the Borough?

Proposed Policy: War Memorials	N	%
Strongly agree	218	77.6%
Agree	15	5.3%
Neutral	8	2.9%
Disagree	4	1.4%
Strongly disagree	36	12.8%

Turning next to the proposed policy on war memorials, 90.4% of Protestant respondents were in favour (agreed or strongly agreed), but only 15.4% of those self-declaring as Roman Catholic. Comments tended again to focus on respect for those who had made a sacrifice for their country, with very few comments raising concerns.

'Should be flown every day to remember those that paid the ultimate sacrifice.'

'Those being remembered died for the ideals the flag represents. Honouring them by flying it every day should be seen as the least these heroes deserve.'

'The men and women remembered on the local war memorials died in the service of their country and as such the flying of the flag of that country at a place of remembrance should not cause offence. In fact, it should act as a reminder to people that it was these peoples sacrifices that ensured we had the freedom to fly the flag of our nation.'

'It loses the respect and meaningfulness, probably deteriorates and becomes tired looking and probably dirty and therefore less respectful.'

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	8
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	0
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	6
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	12
R5	No Interest	0
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice/Pride	67
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently/ Agree	37
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	2
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	2
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	0
R11	Other comments	5

5: On a scale from 0 to 10, please indicate how you feel in general about the flying of the Union Flag on or close by Council buildings?

Where 0 = very uncomfortable, 5 = neutral and 10 = very comfortable.

Score	N	%
0	19	6.8%
1	1	0.4%
2	2	0.7%
3	3	1.1%
4	2	0.7%
5	10	3.6%
6	1	0.4%
7	2	0.7%
8	4	1.4%
9	5	1.8%
10	232	82.6%

206 Protestant respondents (98.6%) stated that they were 'very comfortable' with flying the flag on or close to Council buildings (i.e. scored 10 out of 10). By way of contrast seven (53.8%) Roman Catholic respondents noted that they were 'very uncomfortable' (i.e. scored 0 out of 10). Once more, most comments tended to emphasise the Union flag being the flag of the UK.

'Simply this is our flag. Those who do not acknowledge this don't have to participate as can chose their own way of remembrance. Thankfully we live in a free country and can decide how we wish to remember the fallen.'

'The Union flag is widely acknowledged as a symbol of all that is best about the UK. It has the respect of the vast majority of UK citizens and is incorporated with pride into the flags of many peoples around the globe.'

'It is the only official flag of Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement recognised that Northern Ireland was and shall remain an integral part of the United Kingdom until the majority of people decide otherwise. Therefore people should accept that the Union Flag is the official flag of NI and should be flown on official buildings or anywhere else in NI where people choose to fly it. It should not be politicised.'

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	6
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	1
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	1
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	15
R5	No Interest	2
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice/Pride	16
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently/ Agree	9
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	7
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	84
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	3
R11	Other comments	6

6: On a scale from 0 to 10, please indicate how you feel in general about the flying of the Union Flag on war memorials within the Borough?

Where 0 = very uncomfortable, 5 = neutral and 10 = very comfortable,

Score	N	%
0	11	3.9%
1	0	0.0%
2	1	0.4%
3	4	1.4%
4	0	0.0%
5	12	4.3%
6	4	1.4%
7	2	0.7%
8	2	0.7%
9	1	0.4%
10	244	86.8%

Regarding war memorials, 216 Protestant respondents (94.3%) circled '10' (very comfortable), while the 13 Roman Catholic's views were spread more evenly across the scale, 4 (30.8%) stating 'very uncomfortable' and 3 (23.1%) 'very comfortable'. The majority of responses (67) made reference to an appropriate mark of respect for those who had made a sacrifice for their country.

'I believe war memorials all over the borough should be kept clean and tidy and with the Union flag flying all year round and not just for two weeks around remembrance day.'

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	9
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	0
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	7
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	8
R5	No Interest	0
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice/Pride	67
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently/ Agree	20
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	1
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	17
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	0
R11	Other comments	5

7: In relation to Council Offices at Church Street Newtownards, do you think that the Council should fly the Union Flag:

Flag Days: Church Street	N	%
Always (permanently)	239	85.1%
On specific designated days only (currently 15 days in 2022)	29	10.3%
Never	13	4.6%

85.1% of respondents felt the flag should fly permanently at Church Street, including 93.0% of Protestant respondents but only 15.4% of Roman Catholics.

8: In relation to war memorials within the Borough, do you think that the Council should fly the Union Flag:

Flag Days: War Memorials	N	%
Always (permanently)	238	84.7%
During the period of remembrance or in line with local custom and practice	38	13.5%
Never	5	1.8%
Not Answered	0	0.0%

91.7% of Protestant respondents stated that the Union flag should always fly at war memorials, but only 15.4% of Roman Catholics, who were more likely to suggest only during periods of remembrance (61.5%)

9: Do you have any other comments on the proposed changes to the policy on the Flying of the Union Flag?

There were 125 responses, representing perhaps a wider range of views than previous questions, with the majority still supportive of the proposed policy:

‘Northern Ireland is an important part of the United Kingdom and has to be recognised as such. The removal of our national flag is extremely offensive and is merely to erode all signs of our national identity to appease the nationalist/ republican agenda. ‘I wish our Borough to be inclusive. Many nationalities now live here and too much flag waving will make them feel excluded. All are welcome, please show it.’

‘Yes. Why do we need to have this debate. We are part of the UK. Union flags should be flown. To me we should be debating what can council be doing for young people, older people, roads the list goes on. Planning properly run social events for families for eg Christmas, Easter, what about bringing back civic week and have floats, a carnival atmosphere for families. This is wasting taxpayers money debating flags. Part of the UK we fly the union flag.’

‘I would feel offended if the policy on the flying of the Union flag were to be reduced, respect should always be given to it, we should be proud of our national emblem.’

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	8
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	0
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	1
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	12
R5	No Interest	1
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice/Pride	10
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently/ Agree	33
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	2
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	24
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	0
R11	No	14
R12	Other comments	20

10: Please provide details of any other issues which you think should be included in the EQIA and your reasons for suggesting them.

There were 58 responses to this part of the question, although very few were directed towards the EQIA itself, more often towards the Council’s priorities, for example:

‘As we live in part of the United Kingdom you have to accept that the Union flag is our flag no matter which group we identify with, therefore it should not cause offense, similarly if we lived in Dublin we should not be offended by the flying of the Tricolour.’

‘Why does the Council have to fly any flags? Can they not just leave this issue alone. There are more problems in the Borough than worrying about the flag. Their constituents are finding life very tough with the cost of living rising and children in their Borough not eating, why do they waste time on this matter.’

‘Thousands of people have been affected by the 30+ years of bombings and killings on both sides. Those people will not be helped or hindered simply by the raising, or not raising a flag. It’s the service they receive not the flag that’s flown over a building. Let’s concentrate on that first and foremost.’

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues	1
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag only	0
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	0
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	8
R5	No Interest	0
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice/Pride	2
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently/ Agree	7
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	0
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	6
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space	0
R11	No	19
R12	Other comments	12

11: To what extent do you agree with the assessment of impacts as set out in the EQIA?

Option	N	%
Strongly Agree	31	11.0%
Agree	53	18.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	97	34.5%
Disagree	27	9.6%
Strongly Disagree	73	26.0%

The majority of respondents (64.4%) either agreed with, or were neutral to, the assessment of impacts as set out in the EQIA.

12: If you do not agree with the assessment of impacts, please tell us your reasons and any changes you think should be made.

There were 81 responses to this part of the question. Most comments tended to reiterate earlier positions regarding the flying of the Union flag.

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Pointless/ Council will not listen to the people's opinion	1
R2	Council are giving in to a minority.	2
R3	Agree/ Fly 365	14
R4	The survey is not reflective of the whole borough/ some areas may be offended/people may be offended when using buildings	10
R5	No comment/N/A	7
R6	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	35
R7	No impact	5
R8	No flags should be flown	1
R9	The union flag should be flown out of respect/pride	3
R10	Other	1

13: Are you aware of any further data and / or research which may be relevant?

There were 64 responses to this part of the question, but only one stated the need for additional material to inform the EQIA .

Summary of Comments

Code	Response	N
R1	No	53
R2	Yes	1
R3	Other	8

14: Do you agree with the rural needs assessment?

There were 281 responses to this part of the question.

Option	N	%
Yes	204	72.6%
No	77	27.4%

Summary of Comments

Code	Response	N
R1	Yes	21
R2	No	3
R3	Don't understand/ Not relevant/ Didn't read	18
R4	No comment	4
R5	The Union Jack should be flown at all council building and War memorials throughout the council area 365 days a year.	7
R6	Other	12

15: Do you have any further comments on the EQIA report, the rural needs assessment and / or the consultation process?

There were 58 responses to this part of the question but only eight raised general matters or restated existing viewpoints.

Summary of Comments

Code	Response	N
R1	No	48
R2	Other	8

Responses from Council staff survey

There was a total of **81** responses to the staff survey, representing 10.7% of the current workforce (n = 757).

Demographic Profile

The sample included 33 (40.7%) male and 39 (48.2%) female responses, with 9 (11.1%) undeclared. No respondents declared their ethnicity as other than white. The age profile of the sample suggests the majority of respondents (84.0%) were distributed relatively evenly between ages of 35 and 65 years.

Age	N	%
24 or under	0	0.0%
25-34	7	8.6%
35-44	28	34.6%
45-54	21	25.9%
55-64	17	21.0%
Over 65	2	2.5%
Prefer not to say	6	7.4%

A breakdown of respondents by religion and national identity is shown below. 20 staff respondents (24.7%) self-declared as Roman Catholic with 36 (44.4%) Protestant and 14 (17.3%) no religion, indicating a higher proportion of Roman Catholic responses to the survey relative to the religious breakdown of all existing staff (80.1% Protestant; 13.9% Roman Catholic). Furthermore, among the sample, 35 (43.2%) identified as British, 24 (29.6%) as Northern Irish and 17 (21.0%) as Irish.

Religion	N	%
Roman Catholic	20	24.7%
Protestant	36	44.4%
Other Christian (including Christian related)	5	6.2%
Other faith or non-Christian community background	0	0.0%
No religion	14	17.3%
Prefer not to say	6	7.4%

National Identity	N	%
British	35	43.2%
Irish	17	21.0%
Northern Irish	24	29.6%
English	0	0.0%
Scottish	1	1.2%
Welsh	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	4	4.9%

Staff were also asked how often (in an average week), s/he would pass by or visit Church Street offices. 33 (40.1%) said every day, 13 (16.1%) replied 3-4 days, 11 (13.6%) 1-2 days, 18 (22.2%) rarely and 5 (6.2%) never.

Responses to each of the survey questions are summarised below, together with a coding of additional comments.¹⁴

1: To what extent do you agree with the Council’s current policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street Newtownards (i.e. designated days only)?

Current Policy: Church Street	N	%
Strongly agree	15	18.5%
Agree	16	19.8%
Neutral	22	27.2%
Disagree	10	12.4%
Strongly disagree	18	22.2%

38.3% of staff surveyed agreed with the current policy, while 34.6% disagreed. By religion, 38.9% of Protestant disagreed along with 35.0% of Roman Catholic staff. Comments tended to be split between those who felt the existing policy was sufficient and those who felt the flag should be flown permanently. A diverse range of often lengthy comments included:

‘Flags are divisive and these are work places however the current situation is a compromise.’

‘As local government we serve the national interest and should display the national flag permanently at the council buildings in each town.’

‘Personally I don't care when or where it is flown. There shouldn't be an issue over flags. We have got to move on from the flag issue in NI. Can I also say I'm an Irish catholic but feel flags shouldn't be an issue. Everyone has their own views and thoughts which is fine - we got to move on....’

‘I fail to see the need to fly the Union flag all year round (Protestant background). I personally feel that I would prefer a flag representing Northern Ireland to be flown, that is neither the Union Jack or the Irish Tricolour. I am Northern Irish, not British or Irish.’

‘The Union Flag is the national flag of the United Kingdom and has a particular status symbolising the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. Some Council employees may feel discriminated against. There may be complaints of discrimination in respect of the display of the flag and could potentially conflict with the Fair Employment Tribunal.’

¹⁴ A full analysis of the survey data, including comments, is available on request.

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current policy is sufficient/ No change/No issues/Neutral	13
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag/Tricolour/ both flags	1
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	0
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	6
R5	No Interest	0
R6	People died for flag/Shows respect to the fallen/Reminder of Sacrifice	1
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently	14
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public buildings/Civic building	1
R9	The Union flag is flag of our country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	7
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space/ Could make colleagues uncomfortable	1
R11	Other comments	3

2: To what extent do you agree with the Council's proposed policy regarding the flying of the Union Flag at Council Offices, Church Street Newtownards (permanently)?

Proposed Policy: Church Street	N	%
Strongly agree	27	33.3%
Agree	6	7.4%
Neutral	10	12.4%
Disagree	9	11.1%
Strongly disagree	29	35.8%

Regarding the proposed policy at Church Street, 72.2% of Protestant respondents strongly agreed or agreed in contrast with 95.0% of Roman Catholic who disagreed (with 85% stating 'strongly disagree'). Many comments made reference either to the legitimacy of flying the flag permanently or to this proposal being potentially divisive and/or a marker of territory. A wide range of often lengthy comments included:

'Church Street is now not the main ANDBC building ie; Town Hall where the CEO resides. The building is no different to other Council owned buildings. Councillors need to move on and not keep segregating back into legacy Councils.'

'It is the standard practice in many countries that the national flag flies from Government buildings 24/7. Furthermore, the intensification of flying of the Union Flag can be justified given that British Sovereignty of Northern Ireland (which was a central pillar of the Belfast Agreement) has been compromised through the imposition of the Northern Ireland Protocol

which has resulted in the citizens of Ards and North Down being subjugated to EU law without any form of democratic representation.'

'Flags in our country are unfortunately a very divisive issue overall and I feel that the appearance of a flag - any flag - unconsciously advertises a certain perceived viewpoint or belief system. I believe that any organisation that wishes to be seen as balanced, neutral, equal and open would be best to avoid any flag, so as not to risk alienating a particular section of the community.'

'The union flag has been used in Northern Ireland to intimidate and claim territory. It is unacceptable to have a union flag in your office so why would it be acceptable to have one flying above your place of work. Your place of work should be a neutral environment and an employee should not be made to feel intimidated in their place of work. There is a union flag in the Chamber in Newtownards which is only on show if you are in the Chamber and it is your choice to be there but flying above the building is unacceptable, intimidating and sending the wrong message to the Catholic employees who work there.'

'Council offices should be viewed as a safe and welcoming space for all employees and visitors/users of the facility. In NI the use of the Union Flag may be viewed by some communities as political/unwelcoming/not representing their community and thus these sections may not feel welcome.'

'Newtownards is unfortunately a heavily flagged area. On entry to the town there is a plethora of flags, including those associated with paramilitary organisations. It is incumbent upon the Council to ensure Ards presents itself as a town respecting both sections of the community and to promote a harmonious working environment. Flying the union flag over and above designated days ignores the identity of one section of the community. The union flag is displayed prominently and permanently within the Council building which is hardly conducive to a neutral or harmonious working environment.....The number of emblems (photographs, flags etc) within the building, glorifying one sense of identity (and the complete ignorance of another), is oppressive and makes for an uncomfortable and intimidating working environment.'

'These are places of work and people of all backgrounds have to work there.'

'We are part of the UK and the union, and the union flag is our national flag.'

In a few words, could you please explain your response?

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current policy is sufficient/ No change/No issues/Neutral	4
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag/Tricolour/Both flags	1
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	1
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	19
R5	No Interest	0
R6	People died for flag/Shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice	2
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently	9
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public buildings/Civic building	2
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	7
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space/Could make colleagues uncomfortable	6
R11	Other comments	1

3: In relation to Council Offices at Church Street Newtownards, do you think that the Council should fly the Union Flag?

Flag Days: Church Street	N	%
Always (permanently)	34	42.0%
On specific designated days only (currently 15 days in 2022)	34	42.0%
Never	13	16.1%

27 Protestant respondents (75%) stated that the Union flag should fly permanently at Church Street, with 22.2% stating designated days and one (2.7%) replying 'never'. In stark contrast, no Catholic respondents indicated 'always', 55% stated 'designated days' and 45% 'never'.

4: What impact do you feel that the Council's current policy on the flying of the Union Flag on Council buildings has on the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment within the Council?

Option	N	%
Very positive	4	4.9%
Positive	9	11.1%
Neutral	44	54.3%
Negative	18	22.2%
Very negative	6	7.4%

66.7% of Protestant staff who responded to the survey felt the impact has been 'neutral, with seven (19.4%) stating either 'positive' (13.8%) or 'very positive' (5.6%). 45% of Catholic respondents felt the impact had been 'neutral', with 45% indicating either 'negative' (30%) or 'very negative', and only 10% 'positive' (5%) or 'very positive' (5%). Once more a considerable number of lengthy comments were generated, including the following:

'The union flag flying on council buildings is a step backwards for a harmonious working environment, at present we have them flying from most lampposts in the area along with paramilitary flags. These flags are used to intimidate and claim loyalist territory. Why would the council wish to intimidate and ostracise their staff or make them feel unwelcome in the workplace.'

'I believe the impact is low, it seems perfectly acceptable that the national flag should be flown at our main civic buildings in designated days to commemorate a special day.'

'I don't think flying the flag outside the building does much to promote good harmonious relationships within the council. Perhaps a review of the decorations within the Mayor's Parlour and Chamber would do more.'

'I respect the right to fly the Union Flag on Council buildings, even though it does not reflect my own nationality/ identity. I find the measured approach to flag flying in the current policy inoffensive and accept that it reflects the fact that they are government buildings. However, it does not actively promote a good and harmonious working environment.'

'It's the flag of our country, nothing to be ashamed of. If they don't like it leave.'

'I agree with the current policy, but it is not something I would wish to discuss openly with other colleagues. There may be some who are not comfortable with it. Therein lies the problem. It is a contentious issue.'

'The use of flags and emblems in a Council setting promotes a bad and discordant working environment. It discriminates against some staff treating them unfairly.'

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current Policy is Sufficient/ No Change/No Issues/ neutral	6
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag/ Tricolor/ both flags	0
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	0
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	9
R5	No Interest	3
R6	People died for flag/Shows respect to the fallen/Reminder of Sacrifice	1
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently	3
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public buildings/Civic building	1
R9	The Union flag is flag of our country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	5
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space/ Could make colleagues uncomfortable	6
R11	Other comments	3

5: What impact do you feel that the Council's proposed policy on the flying of the Union Flag on Council buildings will have on the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment within the Council?

Option	N	%
Very positive	11	13.6%
Positive	8	9.9%
Neutral	24	30.0%
Negative	14	17.3%
Very negative	24	29.6%

52.8% of Protestant staff who responded to the survey felt the impact of the proposed policy would be 'neutral, with 33.3% stated it would have a positive (13.9%) or very positive (19.4%) impact, and only five (13.9%) stating the impact could be negative. Once more, in stark contrast, 90% of Catholic respondents felt the impact would be negative (65% 'very negative' and 25% 'negative'), with none arguing it would have a positive or very positive impact. Comments again reflected this division of opinion:

'Don't like to push flags down people's faces. Work in harmony and respect others. Everyone should respect the nominated days as listed in flying the Union flag in the Main Building as we are part of the UK.'

'Should not cause an issue within working environment - we should all work together, get along together no matter if flag is flown or not.'

'By flying the Union Jack this is showing that as a 'workplace' we are all from the one community this is not the case and we have many religions and political views this is what makes us a diverse workforce.'

'Whilst the current policy is inoffensive, to revert to an all year, every day flying of the union flag, would be a backward step politically and culturally, and could be economically detrimental to the Borough discouraging international visitors and offending visitors from the rest of Ireland.'

'I think people get easily offended by flags and perhaps if the Union flag was flown on council buildings this would eradicate the need for the flags of organised crime gangs to be flown elsewhere in the towns. It would also become the norm so would probably not be noticed after a length of time.'

'It is an acknowledgement of being part of the United Kingdom.'

'Think staff should be entitled to work in a neutral environment whereas flying of the flag all year round does not promote neutrality or harmony and can be contentious.'

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current policy is sufficient/ No change/No issues/neutral	8
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag/ Tricolor/ both flags	1
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/ Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to complacency	0
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	10
R5	No Interest	0
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice	1
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently	2
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public buildings/Civic building	0
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	2
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space/ Could make colleagues uncomfortable	9
R11	Other comments	3

6: Do you have any other comments on the proposed changes to the policy on the Flying of the Union Flag?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question, in the main reinforcing points that had already been made but also raising new concerns:

'Council buildings should be treated as other places of work - no emblems/flags should be on display as a mark of respect for everyone.'

'I hate all the Union flags flying during the summer months (May - August). It's so intimidating and I know people who refuse to come up North during this period as they don't feel comfortable. Territory demarcations show that the troubles really haven't gone away. Please don't be encouraging the flying of more flags on more buildings.'

'I welcome the change in policy. There is no evidence to suggest a differential impact.'

'To be honest I think that there is nothing wrong with the way things are now and I don't see why it needs changed. As a council as feel that maybe they should concentrate on the actual building in Newtownards, it's hardly a welcoming place and looks like its straight out of the 70s, not a progressive work environment that i would want to visit!'

'I believe the proposed changes are politically motivated and reprehensible, especially, at a time when the Borough is being showcased in television programmes highlighting the natural beauty and biodiversity that abounds in Strangford Lough and dramas such as Hope Street, where film makers had to negotiate the temporary removal of loyalist flags. This move works against engendering a sense of civic pride and the Council's purported commitment to inclusiveness.'

'Yes I do, I think there is a wider issue at hand, that ANDBC needs to stop being seen as a 'protestant' council and start representing the borough as a whole.

The borough has become more and more diverse with many living here and paying rates not from the UK. Why cant our Council lead the way with this issue (that is ongoing in other Council areas) and make up a Flag for the Borough? Then we can fly that instead.'

'Having flags up permanently will also help reduce the current workload of raising and lowering the flags to suit certain events, and to meet individual needs. Flag raising and lowering can and is often political, so having them permanently in place may help to alleviate such response, i.e. if the Union Flag is in permanent position, as opposed to regular raising and lowering, it's less likely to remind those, that see it as political, to make an issue of it!'

'Our nation's flag is a symbol of liberty, unity and freedom that creates a shared sense of civic pride. People rightly expect to see the Union Flag flying high on civic and Government buildings up and down the country, as a sign of our local and national identity.'

'I am astonished that the proposal has actually got this far. The elected members are supposed to serve the whole of their constituencies and not just their religious/political base and I expected better. I am very disappointed in the proposed policy changes and it would make me question my future as a member of staff for the Council.'

'The Council should adhere to the advice contained with the Equality Commission NI's Advice on Flying the Union Flag in Councils.'

Summary of Comments

Code	Code Response	N
R1	Current policy is sufficient/ No change/No issues/ Neutral	11
R2	Fly Northern Ireland flag/ Tricolor/ both flags	0
R3	Makes a special statement on specified days only/Could become invisible/ Unnoticed due to compliancy	0
R4	Marks territory/ Not representative of the community/divisive/ non inclusive/ Do not agree with flying the flag at all	11
R5	No interest/ Nothing to add	2
R6	People died for flag, shows respect to the fallen, Reminder of Sacrifice	1
R7	Should fly 356/Permanently	8
R8	Should fly on all Gov buildings/Public Buildings/Civic Building	2
R9	The Union flag is flag of our Country/UK/Great Britain/Government/N Ireland /Monarchy	0
R10	Workplace so should show a shared space/ Could make colleagues uncomfortable	3
R11	Other comments	5

7: Please provide details of any other issues which you think should be included in the EQIA and your reasons for suggesting them.

There were 21 responses to this part of the question. A number of new themes were introduced, including:

'I think that such a disregard for one section of the community calls into question how the Council operates equality of opportunity across the board including, but not limited to: recruitment, career advancement, policy implementation, and allocation of resources.'

'Only fly an Ards & N Down BC flag if serious on community / staff relations.'

'I consider that this is not a true EQIA as it does not explore the cumulative effect of all displays both inside and outside this building. This cumulative effect has the potential to heighten the following impacts:

- intimidation/'chill factor' in the workplace.
- access to services by discouraging the use of Council facilities, and participation in Council processes, from one section of the community.
- shows disregard for the promotion of good relations in the Borough.

Sadly, for the reasons outlined in this questionnaire I would not feel comfortable participating in a staff meeting in relation to this EQIA. I consider that this would be a highly intimidating experience for me for the reasons already explained.'

'Council should not be taking a political stance, especially in this current social climate there are much more important things going on that should be prioritised.'

'How is the potential chill factor for staff from a Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) background going to be assessed? Can all members of staff be informed of their legal rights in regards to employment law and implicit as well as explicit exclusion and isolation in the work place? Can all members of staff be informed of legal precedents that have been established in regards to supposedly inclusive public buildings being intentionally divisive so that they are readily prepared should the council attempt to instigate division and demarcate ownership? In what way is the flying of flags going to demonstrate the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness while serving the needs and interests of ALL ratepayers, ALL residents and ALL visitors within the Borough or is the assertion of the Unionist identity the only identity that is welcomed in these buildings?'

Summary of Comments

Code	Response	N
R1	Nothing to add/No	8
R2	Council should remain neutral and represent the Borough as a whole	3
R3	Other	8

8: To what extent do you agree with the assessment of impacts as set out in the EQIA?

Option	N	%
Strongly Agree	14	17.3%
Agree	17	21.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	45	55.6%
Disagree	4	4.9%
Strongly Disagree	1	1.2%

Only 6.1% of respondents either 'disagreed' (4.9%) or strongly disagreed (1.2%) with the assessment of impact as set out in the EQIA.

9: If you do not agree with the assessment of impacts, please tell us your reasons and any changes you think should be made.

Code	Response	N
R1	Nothing to add/No	3
R2	It's the flag of our country	3
R3	Other	5

The purpose of the EQIA was questioned by a small number of respondents, along with its scope, e.g.:

'I agree with the potential impacts that has been identified but further impact is that the Council building will appear to express partiality to one section of the community. Further, and significantly, it is my firm view that this EQIA is being carried out on a false premise. To consider the flying of the union flag on a daily basis in isolation is to ignore the cumulative impact of such a proposal given the highly flagged and emblematic environs of the building and within the building itself.'

'The flag of the country/state cannot have a detrimental effect. It is utterly ridiculous this EQIA has taken place.'

10: Are you aware of any further data and / or research which may be relevant?

Code	Response	N
R1	Nothing to add/No	11
R2	Council should remain neutral and represent the Borough as a whole	1
R3	Other	4

11: Do you agree with the rural needs assessment?

Option	N	%
Yes	63	77.8%
No	18	22.2%

Summary of Comments

Code	Response	N
R1	Nothing to add/No	1
R2	Don't know/Don't understand	2
R3	Agree	6
R4	Other	5

12: Do you have any further comments on the EQIA report, the rural needs assessment and / or the consultation process?

Summary of Comments

Code	Response	N
R1	No/Nothing to add	16
R2	Other	3

Other responses

Four substantive written responses were received. These are summarised below and are included in full at Appendix 7.

Response from the Alliance party

The Alliance party reiterated its support for the flying of the Union Flag from Council Civic Headquarters on designated days in line with DCMS guidance, and its opposition to the Council's existing policy of flying the flag permanently at seven sites.

With regard to war memorials, it was felt that flying the flag permanently could jeopardise good relations and have an adverse impact on those from a Roman Catholic and/or Nationalist community background. The concerns of those who do not identify as either Unionist or nationalist should also be shown due regard in these deliberations. The significance of flying the Union Flag during the remembrance period should remain paramount, and at Remembrance events throughout the year.

In relation to Church Street, the party restated the ECNI guidance on a good and harmonious working environment and in particular questioning flying the flag at more than one site. In light of case law elsewhere in NI, it was further suggested that the revised policy could open the Council to the risk of legal action as it is more extreme and acts against the Council's duties to ensure good relations and a good and harmonious working environment, 'potentially risking legal challenge from employees or service users.'

Response from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The Commission sought further clarity regarding the screening and in particular what was referred to as 'all council properties', and whether the proposed policy includes continuing to fly the flag at each designated site.

The Commission felt that an EQIA should contain a consideration of all alternative policies and measures to mitigate, and that consultees should be asked to make an informed consideration of each, including the rationale for each option. While the EQIA presents policy alternatives, 'no assessment of the potential impacts of these alternatives on equality and/or good relations have been included'. The Commission also recommended that monitoring arrangements are set out in the Final decision report.

Response from East End Residents Association

The resident's group are in support of the change in policy, and argued that this remedied a problem that had been created when the Equality Commission had previously challenged the flying of the Union flag permanently at Church Street. 'Hence the change in policy at that time. Now with this new amendment it is looking to return to the old previous policy.'

The group also expressed concerns that 'the Equality Commission will not take our views seriously as this will fly in the face of their recommendations at that time'.

Response from Cloughey and District Community Association

The response was confined to the flying of the Union flag year round on war memorials, and highlighted the need to ensure that the period of remembrance was duly respected and not 'politicised'. The Association argued that by extending the period that the flag was flown may diminish the significance of the act, and could lead to 'a degree of numbing or blaséness and ultimately even to disregard'. 'It is therefore incumbent on the council to consider that there is a very real risk of diluting the importance of the remembrance message that they wish to exalt by overexposure and overfamiliarity.' 'We would ask the council to please consider that it does not necessarily follow that amplified continual commemoration is better than contemplative background commemoration with recognised times that allow a high focus on communal remembering.'

The Association also highlighted the issue of perception. 'If we wish to have full and also cross-community support for the sacrifices made then perception really matters.' 'If there is a risk, even the slightest risk, that commemoration is perceived as being politicised then, surely the wise step to take is not to do anything which may increase that risk. Surely to do otherwise would only risk council 'shooting itself in the foot' and increase the risk of turning more people away from commemorating the great sacrifice made on all our behalf.'

6 Conclusions

6.1 Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that, in making any decision with respect to a policy, a public authority shall consider any EQIA and consultation carried out in relation to the policy (para. 9.2). This information should be considered in the context of the stated aim of the policy in question (see p.10).

6.2 There is no strict definition of what 'taking into account' entails. However, the Equality Commission guidance on how decisions should be recorded makes it clear that a public authority must be able to record the decision-making process (as well as the decision) and that the decision must be justified.¹⁵

6.3 The guidance also advises that all available data should be combined in making the decision. This includes the information gathered during the research phase of the EQIA, the results of the consultation and the analysis of alternative policy options in light of all relevant considerations and including case law, legislation and guidance.¹⁶

6.4 This information has been brought together in this report and the accompanying appendices in order to ensure that the Council is in a position to take account of all issues and relevant data when making a decision.

¹⁵ Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, ECNI 2004, p.45

¹⁶ Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, ECNI 2004, p.45

6.5 In any consultation, the number of people that have expressed a preference for a particular option cannot be ignored but this information must also be considered in the context of all other relevant concerns and including both quantitative and qualitative information.

6.6 Equally, it is to be expected that those who took the time and trouble to respond to the consultation would be those with strong opinions on the subject and they have made their views very clear. At the same time, the impact of the proposed policy on all those who engage with the Council or live within or visit the Borough but chose not to engage with the EQIA itself should not be disregarded.

6.6 In relation to Section 75 consultations, the Equality Commission has made explicit in the past that an *'EQIA should not be considered as a referendum whereby the views of consultees from a majority are counted as votes to decide the outcome.'* Instead, all available quantitative and qualitative data should be interrogated in order to help reach a decision that aspires to be fair, reasonable and proportionate.

6.7 The following summary of the key points arising from the EQIA and the consultation is provided to assist the Council in its decision making, but is not exhaustive and is not offered as a substitute for the detailed information as presented earlier in the report.

6.8 While the Council is grateful for the time and effort taken by respondents, the surveys of both staff (N = 81; 10.1% of staff total) and the public (N = 281; 0.17% of Borough population) have yielded relatively low return rates, and so cannot be relied upon to be representative of the respective populations as a whole.

6.9 Instead they are likely to be indicative of the depth of feeling felt by respondents regarding these issues, and who were then motivated to take part. In relation to the public survey, it is noteworthy that 81.5% of the sample self-declared as Protestant while only 4.6% identified as Roman Catholic. Equally, while 82.9% of the sample stated their national identity as British or Northern Irish, only 3.6% declared as Irish. This suggests a higher return from the Protestant / Unionist community than would be predicted from population census returns for the Borough (75.1% Protestant; 13.1% Roman Catholic; 11.8% Other).

6.10 The profile of respondents to the staff survey suggests a more even balance on grounds of religion, with 44.4% self-declaring as Protestant, 24.7% Roman Catholic and 30.9% Other. The latest Article 55 return to the Equality Commission indicated that 79.6% of the workforce was classified as Protestant, 13.1% Roman Catholic and 7.3% Other. Hence, a higher proportion of staff members who are Roman Catholic appear to have completed the survey than would be anticipated. In addition, the gender balance is more even in the staff survey, with 40.7% male and 48.2% female, in contrast with the public survey (69.0% male; 29.2% female).

EQIA Process

6.11 Respondents in both surveys were asked to comment on the EQIA process itself. The majority of respondents to both surveys either agreed with or were neutral to the assessment of impact as outlined in the Draft EQIA Consultation Report (64.4% public

survey; 93.9% staff survey), and very few called for additional data (1.6% public survey; 6.3% staff survey).

6.12 Of the additional comments received regarding the EQIA (including the need for any additional data), very few related to the content of the EQIA process itself but instead reiterated stated positions regarding the proposed policy and the flying of the flag.

6.13 There is no indication from the responses received to suggest that the EQIA process was seen as fundamentally flawed or required major revision.

6.14 Only four substantive written responses were received (see above). The written response from the Equality Commission did highlight issues relating to the EQIA process, and these have been noted and taken on board in the EQIA Final Decision Report. In particular, the need to consider monitoring arrangements, and the need to assess the potential impact of each option, and including the rationale.

Quantitative Data

6.15 In summary, the overwhelming majority of respondents to the public survey (85.1%) felt that the Union flag should fly all year round at Church Street, while 84.7% felt that the Union Flag should fly permanently at war memorials. This sentiment resonated through answers to related questions regarding the current and proposed policy, with 82.6% stating that they were very comfortable with the union flag flying on or close by Council buildings, and 86.8% in relation to flying the Union Flag on war memorials.

6.16 Not surprisingly, and in common with previous surveys, community background emerged as a highly significant predictor of attitudes towards this issue, with Protestant respondents and those who identified as British being overwhelmingly supportive of the proposed policy while Roman Catholic respondents largely rejected the proposal and most especially with regard to flying the Union flag permanently at Church Street.

6.17 While 93% of Protestants who responded maintained that the Union flag should fly permanently at Church Street, only 15% of those declaring themselves Roman Catholic felt likewise. Equally, less than 1% of those self-declaring as Protestant stated that the Union flag should never fly on Council buildings, in contrast with 54% of Roman Catholics. 93% of Protestant respondents also felt the Union flag should fly permanently at affected war memorials within the Borough whereas the majority of Roman Catholics (62%) opted for periods of remembrance or in line with local custom or practice

6.18 Furthermore, nearly 90% of Protestant respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed policy with regard to Church Street, in contrast with around 15% of Roman Catholic respondents (with 85% strongly disagreeing). In relation to war memorials, equivalent figures emerged, with 90% of Protestant respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposal but only 15% of those self-declared as Roman Catholic (with 77% strongly disagreeing)

6.19 Among staff, levels of support for the flying of the Union flag permanently at Church Street were less strong than among the general public. While 42% agreed that it

should fly permanently, an equal number (42%) stated that it should only fly on designated days, and 16% never. In relation to the proposed policy at Church Street, one third (33%) strongly agreed while 36% strongly disagreed. In other words, over half of all staff who responded (58%) showed support for either no flags or designated days only, and this figure included all Roman Catholic respondents.

6.20 When asked about the likely impact of the proposed policy on the promotion of a good and harmonious working environment, 24% either agreed or strongly agreed that the proposed policy would have a positive effect (including 33% of Protestant respondents), while close to half (47%) suggested that the effect would be either negative or very negative.

6.21 The current policy on flag flying was also seen as problematic, with nearly one third (30%) stating that it has had a negative or very negative impact on the promotion of a good and harmonious environment, rising to 45% of Roman Catholic respondents.

6.22 In combination, while the sample size in both surveys was relatively low in relation to the respective populations (and hence the scope for drawing strong statistical inferences is constrained), these data do suggest strong community support for the proposed policy in terms of both Church Street and affected war memorials, but a more equivocal reaction from staff. In both surveys, while numbers are low, those who self-declared as Roman Catholic are far less welcoming of the proposed change to policy.

Qualitative Data

6.23 At various points throughout both surveys, respondents were afforded the opportunity to provide additional comments or set out reasons for their answer.

6.24 Many of these comments were simply affirmations of personal opinions in relation to the flying of the Union flag, seeing it either as a legitimate expression of identity, or as an unwanted, and even intimidating, display of national allegiance with little personal resonance.

6.25 Several respondents expressed concern as to how the proposed policy may impact on good relations within the Borough, along with suggesting opportunities to reach a compromise that may satisfy both communities. It was also argued that the Borough should aspire to be welcoming and inclusive, and the display of so many Union flags could have the opposite effect - although it was suggested that the flying of authorised flags may help to curb the excessive display of unauthorised displays during the summer months when visitors to the Borough are most numerous.

6.26 Comments relating to the harm to good relations tended to be more common among staff who regarded the proposed policy as potentially divisive within the Council, and where a shared or 'neutral' space was often highly valued. Concern was expressed that further change to the existing policy may harm what were seen as good relations within the Council, and this was seen as unfortunate but potentially avoidable if a compromise position could be reached.

6.27 A number of comments suggested that this policy should not be taken in isolation but considered along with a more expansive audit of flags, memorabilia, regalia etc. within Council properties, and in particular Church Street. The cost implications attaching to the proposed policy were also mentioned, including ongoing maintenance to ensure that flags did not become 'old and tatty looking'.

6.28 It was noteworthy that a number of staff members penned lengthy statements regarding this and related issues, and a sample of comments have been included above. These statements suggest that opinions on this matter are deep rooted, well established and strongly held, and that the Council should be minded of the potential impact of the proposed policy on future staff relations and attitudes.

6.29 The two public meetings, in Portaferry and Newtownards, together with the on-line Zoom meeting, confirmed the depth of feeling which the topic of flags has the potential to provoke, and has already provoked, along with overwhelming support for the proposed policy among those who attended. The Newtownards and on-line Zoom meetings in particular were noteworthy for revealing the depth of emotion and indeed passion stirred by this topic, and the overwhelming support for the extension of the existing flags policy was unmistakable. The Portaferry meeting, although not well attended, was characterised by a range of views while the Newtownards and on-line Zoom meetings were notable for the number of participants and the strong expressions of support for one perspective. Indeed this message was so powerful that subsequent correspondence suggested that this environment may have been intimidating for those who held alternative opinions but felt constrained from expressing these.

Decision-making

6.30 In reaching a decision in relation to the proposed policy, a number of competing considerations must be borne in mind. For example, while public support for flying the Union flag permanently at both Church Street and on war memorials across the Borough is undeniable and clearly evident in the survey findings, there is also counter evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, and particularly from staff members and representative bodies, which would suggest the need to proceed with caution.

6.31 The consultation has served to confirm how the two elements contained within the proposal (relating to Church Street and affected war memorials respectively), while often eliciting similar survey responses in terms of attitudinal 'head counts', also triggered qualitatively different issues that should be considered separately in order to best inform the Council's decision-making. **For this reason, it is recommended that the two elements that make up the proposal should be regarded as separate and distinct for the purposes of the EQIA.**

6.32 While there are common concerns attaching to both elements, equally there are distinctions that may warrant closer consideration, not least the fact that one relates to symbols attaching to a place of work while the other relates to displays in a public space over which the Council has responsibility. Also, the flying of the Union flag at Church Street is best characterised as an acknowledgement of the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, while at war memorials, its primary function is more likely to be, 'as a

mark of commemoration, in a manner which symbolises the dignity and respect for those it is remembering.¹⁷

6.33 Taken in conjunction with guidance, case law and relevant anti-discrimination legislation, it would be prudent to suggest that the consultation alone should not be used to provide the Council with a clear mandate to move in a particular direction.

6.34 While community support for the proposed policy regarding both Church Street and affected war memorials was overwhelming, the Equality Commission is unequivocal in stating that an EQIA must not be regarded as a plebiscite or referendum. Instead, all available guidance and information, both quantitative and qualitative, should be brought together to help inform the decision-making process.

6.35 Although there is some support among staff, allied with strong support among the public, for the proposal to fly the Union flag permanently at Church Street and on affected war memorials, equally there is opposition, and sentiment for and against would appear to run high in both camps.

6.36 With this in mind it would be naïve and potentially imprudent of the Council to proceed without a recognition of potential challenges that may lie ahead, both legally (under anti-discrimination legislation) and locally (in terms of damage to good relations within the Borough and the Council itself).

6.37 In its response to the draft consultation EQIA report, the Equality Commission highlighted the need for the EQIA to assess the potential impact of alternative policy positions on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. The concluding section of this report endeavours to meet this objective by considering the two elements contained within the proposed policy separately.

6.38 The EQIA had identified the possibility that adverse impacts may not only relate to community background (i.e. religious belief and political opinion) but also ethnicity (e.g. nationality). However, the consultation did not reveal any evidence to suggest this was a significant concern and hence attention will focus on two section 75 grounds, religious belief and political opinion.

6.39 The Equality Commission has produced specific advice for Northern Ireland's Councils on the flying of the Union flag (see p.7). While this advice does not have the legal status of a code of practice, it is likely to be of assistance should a claim of unfair discrimination in relation to flags be made. In this advice the Commission makes very clear that there are legitimate grounds for the flying of the flag, both to mark the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and/or as a dignified and respectful symbol of commemoration.

6.40 However, the advice goes on to state that the flag may also be used to convey 'sectional community allegiance', and therefore advises that a Council must strike a proportionate balance that aligns with the stated aim of its policy (see p.10) and is also supported by a rationale that recognises contextual factors, including 'the purpose, manner, location and frequency with which flags are flown'. Consistency is not included

¹⁷ ECNI Advice on Flying the Union Flag in Councils, 2013

in this list of contextual factors but the advice does state that ‘the rationale for its display at every Council location, facility and leisure centre would be questionable’.

6.41 When finally reaching a decision in relation to each of the two elements of the proposed policy, Section 75 and broader statutory considerations must be afforded due regard by the Council, alongside all other matters that are seen to be germane to the policy in question. The EQIA, along with earlier legal advice, has made clear that there are a number of concerns attaching to the proposed changes to the policy. In particular these relate to the promotion of good relations within the Borough generally and the promotion of both good relations and equality of opportunity within the Council itself, but ultimately executive authority will continue to rest within the Council Chamber as to how these concerns are taken into account in its decision.

Church Street

6.42 Although the consultation showed considerable support from the public for flying the Union flag permanently at Church Street, in choosing to adopt this proposal the Council will have made a conscious decision to move yet further beyond the parameters of the Equality Commission’s guidance on promoting a good and harmonious working environment.

6.43 The rationale for this change in policy would appear to be founded on striving for consistency with other Council facilities, along with further acknowledging the constitutional status of Northern Ireland within the UK. However, when set in the context of guidance and relevant legal advice it is difficult to see this argument for consistency as compelling, and especially given opposition from staff not only to the proposed policy but also elements of the existing policy. While the number of staff who engaged with the survey was small, the depth of feeling and concern attached to a number of contributions cannot be disregarded and may be indicative of a wider perception of the Council that is disconcerting.

6.44 This EQIA specifically deals only with a proposed revision to the existing policy. However, the consultation process has revealed concerns not only with the proposed revision but also with the existing policy itself, not least given the Equality Commission’s guidance which suggests that, while the display of the Union flag at civic headquarters may be acceptable, ‘the rationale for its display at every Council location, facility and leisure centre would be questionable.’

6.45 In the context of this guidance, the potential status of Church Street as ‘civic headquarters’ is perhaps worthy of closer consideration. In the legacy Ards Council, Church Street was recognised as the primary civic headquarters for the council, but Newtownards Town Hall was also used for civic events and functions. Today, Church Street is primarily an administrative office building, but council committees do meet in the building, and including those with decision-making powers (e.g. planning).

6.46 Notwithstanding this consideration, the Council already chooses to fly the Union flag permanently at seven locations and the proposal would increase this number to eight. The existing policy position is already at the extreme among councils in Northern

Ireland, and if the proposal is adopted it may not only further marginalise the council but also may harm good relations among staff and within the wider community, as well as perhaps increasing the risk of legal challenges on grounds of unfair discrimination.

These challenges could be predicated on the belief that the Council is not promoting a 'good and harmonious working environment' but instead is more welcoming to those from one community.

6.47 The Equality Commission is explicit in stating that any decision should reflect the Council's legitimate policy aims and 'not cause unlawful discrimination or harassment, unintentionally or indirectly through its likely effects or impacts.'¹⁸ A number of staff surveyed indicated opposition to the proposed policy and this finding should not be disregarded in the Council's further deliberations.

6.48 Undoubtedly, Ards and North Down Borough includes a significant majority of those from Protestant/unionist/loyalist communities¹⁹ but in itself the principle of 'majority rule' cannot form a firm foundation for a change to the policy. While the voice of these communities may well be the loudest, and has been heard clearly and powerfully throughout the consultation process, the council cannot ignore its moral and statutory responsibilities towards all communities, and including minorities.

6.49 With this in mind, while acknowledging that the staff sample size was small, responses to the survey from Roman Catholic staff in particular revealed a level of disquiet with not only the flying of flag at various locations but also the display of memorabilia within council buildings generally, and this concern is unlikely to subside should the proposed policy be adopted.

6.50 On a more practical note, one consultee pointed out that the Church Street offices faced a health trust facility that included services for those with mental health problems that could include heightened sensitivities and anxieties. Recognising how emotive the topic of flags can be among those from all communities in Northern Ireland, the positioning of the flag to avoid causing the potential for distress among residents of the facility should be afforded due attention.

6.51 Finally, with reference to the two options as set out earlier (see p.20), when taking all these considerations into account it is likely that the second option (No change to the existing policy except to fly the Union flag for 365/6 days at Council Offices, Church Street, Newtownards) may have the potential to harm good relations, and will run counter to both the promotion of equality of opportunity and a good and harmonious working environment within the Council.

War Memorials

6.52 Apart from those few members of council staff who may be tasked with maintaining their upkeep, war memorials affected by the policy do not represent part of

¹⁸ Advice on Flying the Union flag in Councils, www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/Public%20Authorities/AdviceflyingtheUnionflagincouncils2013.pdf?ext=.pdf

¹⁹ According to the 2021 census, 68.0% of the Borough population self-declared as 'Protestant, other Christian or Christian related' and 11.3% 'Catholic'.

the Council's workplace but instead are prominent features of public spaces within the Borough that fall under the Council's aegis. Hence anti-discrimination employment legislation is less likely to be relevant and instead broader considerations of shared spaces, ambience and atmosphere may come into play.

6.53 Further to the creation of the new Ards and North Down Borough Council, determining the status of all war memorials in the Borough in relation to this policy is not always straightforward but Council has some level of responsibility for at least 14. As to the current status of each of these memorials, and the role played by Council in raising and lowering the flag at each, protocols tend to be determined by longstanding local custom and practice. During the course of the consultation, it became apparent that there was a need to clarify the precise status of each war memorial in relation to the flying of the Union flag, and the following table summarises the outcome of this research:

War Memorials	Union Flag Flown	Council Owned
Donaghadee War Memorial	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Millisle War Memorial	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Ballywalter War Memorial	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Ballyhalbert War Memorial	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Cloughey War Memorial	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Portavogie War Memorial – Princess Anne Road	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Portavogie War Memorial – Harbour Road	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Newtownards War Memorial	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Hollywood War Memorial	Remembrance Sunday only	No
Bangor War Memorial (Ward Park)	Remembrance Sunday only	Yes
Comber War Memorial	365 days/year	Yes
Ballygowan War Memorial	365 days/year	Yes
Greyabbey War Memorial	365 days/year	Yes
Groomsport War memorial	14 days to Rem. Sunday	Yes

6.54 In other words, the Union flag is raised before sunrise and lowered after sunset on Remembrance Sunday at ten war memorials, and flies for a fortnight leading up to Remembrance Sunday at one site (Groomsport), while the flag currently flies permanently at a further three locations. Council staff are responsible for maintaining and raising and lowering the flag at all flagpoles.

6.55 Over recent times, and allowing for local custom and practice, generally it has been the tradition within Northern Ireland to fly the Union flag at war memorials either on Remembrance Sunday or for two weeks during the period of remembrance (around 11 November), along with special anniversaries (e.g. Somme Day, 1 July). (Permanent flags are often flown at unauthorised memorials that fall outside the scope of this policy.)

6.56 This stance would appear to have been broadly supported by a number of relevant organisations and bodies over the years including the Royal British Legion. To date the Legion has been reluctant to play a significant role in local political debates around flags and emblems but did endorse the existing policy of only flying the Union flag on three days (1 July; Remembrance Sunday; and cross laying day [Monday preceding Remembrance Sunday]) when consulted on this matter by Belfast City Council in relation to the Cenotaph in the grounds of Belfast City Hall in 2013 (see p.14).

6.57 By flying the flag only during periods of remembrance, on the one hand it could be argued that this highlights, and shows due deference and respect to, a special and significant period of remembrance and commemoration, i.e. 'less is more and more is less'. On the other hand, it could also be argued that acts of remembrance should not be confined to a limited period of time but should be permanent reminders of past sacrifice.

6.58 It has also been argued that flying the Union flag permanently at these locations may act as a disincentive or deterrent to the flying of unauthorised flags more generally across the Borough - although this hypothesis has yet to be tested empirically.

6.59 Whatever is the case, agreeing to fly the Union flag permanently at several war memorials across the Borough will have the effect of proliferating the display of emblems that tend to be associated with only one community or identity in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, as a direct consequence, in certain towns or villages the Council would then have responsibility for maintaining two or possibly even three Union flags throughout the year.

6.60 As a number of consultees pointed out, the maintenance of so many flags may well have a considerable cost implication for the Council, and would be necessary to ensure that the displays do not fall into disrepair.

6.61 To move to a position where the Union flag is flown permanently at 14 locations, over and above those already flown for 365/6 days at seven Council facilities, does not help align the Council with other public bodies but instead would serve to increase the likelihood that the Borough could be perceived as more welcoming for members of only one community. How this perception may impact on residents and visitors alike is worthy of further consideration but is unlikely to be seen as helping promote good relations across the Borough.

6.62 At the same time, the consultation did reveal overwhelming and powerful support for the proposal to fly the Union flag permanently at affected war memorials and, in contrast to Church Street, appeared to generate little by way of strong opposition. While support was highest among members of the Protestant community, this was to be anticipated, but this strong endorsement was not countered by a significant 'anti' sentiment among other communities, where elements of support were also noted. One community association did, however, raise concern that flying the flag permanently could dilute the impact of it being flown specifically during the period of remembrance, a sentiment echoed by a small number of respondents in the public survey.

6.63 The location of the war memorials in towns and villages that are predominantly of one community may have played some part in determining opinions on this matter, and taken some of the 'heat' out of this element of the policy. However, in reaching a decision on this matter, the impact on both visitors and residents of seeing so many council-maintained Union flags across the Borough, and often in close proximity, should not be ignored but instead be afforded due attention in reaching a decision.

6.64 In its 2013 advice to Northern Ireland's 11 Councils on the flying of the Union flag, the Equality Commission stated that, 'The flying of the Union Flag must be viewed within the context in which it is flown or displayed. Factors affecting the context include the purpose, manner, location and frequency with which flags are flown.' In reaching a decision, the Council must bear these considerations in mind, and also whether the decision marries with the stated aim of the Council's flags policy, and including proposed revisions, 'to strike an appropriate balance between respecting the traditional flag of the United Kingdom while acknowledging that the flag has the potential to be used to mark sectional community allegiance in the context of Northern Ireland.'

6.65 To conclude, in contrast with Church Street, which is a place of work for Council employees, the legal imperative informing any Council decision on war memorials is not likely to be quite as prominent and hence may offer scope to take into consideration a number of contextual factors. Of the two options set out in the EQIA (No change to the existing policy; The Union flag to be flown 365/6 days at all designated war memorials within the Borough), while the latter may provide consistency this may be at the cost of overriding local considerations. The former option may have aligned with local custom and practice over many decades, for example where other authorised and council-maintained Union flags may have also flown permanently and in close proximity.

6.66 With this in mind, Council should strive to reach a decision on this element of the policy mindful not only of statutory responsibilities along with the potential harm that any change may have on the promotion of good relations generally across the Borough but also the impact that this proposal may have locally, and in particular where existing arrangements are seen to be accepted and appropriate.

7 Monitoring for adverse impact

7.1 The final stage in the EQIA process is the establishment of a system to monitor the impact of the proposed revisions and /or any agreed mitigation, in order to find out its effect on groups within the Section 75 equality categories.

7.2 If the Council should choose to adopt the proposed policy, or to continue with the existing policy, then in each case it will be imperative to establish a monitoring strategy that is able to identify adverse impact at an early stage, among both staff and members of the public. This will be achieved by way of surveys and/or focus groups, along with an annual review of the complaints register.

7.3 Regarding the general public, the Council already operates a bi-annual ratepayers survey, and will commit to including questions that relate to this matter in this survey. It also regularly uses on-line surveys to consider the views of visitors who attend events in the Borough, and will also commit to including similar questions regarding flags in these surveys in future. Other opportunities to gauge public opinion will also be explored as and when appropriate.

7.4 The Council further commits to including as a standing agenda item on its quarterly meeting of the Staff Consultative Committee consideration of decisions reached by the Council (including this decision). It will also ensure that the quarterly Section 75 Screening Panel and monthly Joint Forum (with trade unions) continue to review this matter.

7.5 It would be intended that the policy will be scrutinised on an ongoing basis and reviewed at least every two years, in line with the Council's standard policy review cycle.

7.6 The results of the monitoring will be reviewed on an annual basis and published in the Council's annual Section 75 report to the Equality Commission.

7.7 Where monitoring and analysis show that the proposed changes have resulted in adverse impact, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity and/or good relations to be promoted, the Council will ensure that the policy is further revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant Section 75 groups.

Appendix 1: Designated Days, 2022



Department for
Communities

An Roinn
Pobal

Department fur
Commonities

Chief Executive of each District
Council

Dear Chief Executive

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CIRCULAR 01/2022

DAYS IN 2022 FOR HOISTING FLAGS ON GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

I enclose a list of the days in 2022 for hoisting flags on government buildings in Northern Ireland.

A government building is defined as a building which contains, in the majority, civil servants working for government.

I should emphasise that this circular is for guidance only, as it is a matter for each council to make a decision regarding flags flown from its own buildings.

Yours sincerely

ROBERT COUSINS
Local Government & Housing Regulation Division
Local Government Circular 01/2022

Local Government & Housing Regulation Division
Level 4
Causeway Exchange 1-7 Bedford Street Town Parks BELFAST
BT2 7EG
Phone: 028 9082 3387

Email: lghrd.secretariat@communities-ni.gov.uk

4 January 2022

2022

DAYS FOR HOISTING FLAGS ON GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN NORTHERN IRELAND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FLAGS REGULATIONS

9 January	Birthday of The Duchess of Cambridge
20 January	Birthday of The Countess of Wessex
6 February	Her Majesty's Accession
19 February	Birthday of The Duke of York
*TBC	Commonwealth Day
10 March	Birthday of The Earl of Wessex
17 March	St Patrick's Day
21 April	Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen
2 June	Coronation Day
21 June	Birthday of The Duke of Cambridge
*TBC	Official Celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday
17 July	Birthday of the Duchess of Cornwall
15 August	Birthday of The Princess Royal
*TBC	Remembrance Day
14 November	Birthday of The Prince of Wales

Flags should be flown at full mast all day and not at half-mast.

*Dates to be confirmed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) these will also be published in the *Belfast Gazette* by the Northern Ireland Office – a further note will issue in the New Year confirming dates.

ON THE ABOVE DAYS FLAGS SHOULD FLY FROM 8AM UNTIL SUNSET

Appendix 2: Section 75 Profile of the Borough

Religion or Religion Brought up in (Numbers with % in brackets)

According to the 2011 Census, the profile of residents of the Borough indicates:

	All usual residents	Roman Catholic	Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)	Other Religions	None
Northern Ireland	1,810,863 (100%)	817,385 (45%)	875,717 (48%)	16,592 (1%)	101,169 (6%)
Ards and North Down Borough Council	156,672 (100%)	20,550 (13%)	117,589 (75%)	1,729 (1%)	16,804 (11%)

The makeup of the council in relation to employee religious belief is 80% Protestant, 14% Roman Catholic and 6% Other.

Males	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Other	Total
Full Time	358 (84%)	33 (8%)	34 (8%)	425 (100%)
Part Time	*(63%)	*(25%)	*(13%)	*8 (100%)
Totals	363 (84%)	35 (8%)	35 (8%)	433 (100%)

Females	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Other	Total
Full Time	223 (78%)	58 (20%)	6 (2%)	287 (100%)
Part Time	20 (54%)	12 (32%)	5 (14%)	37 (100%)
Totals	243 (75%)	70 (22%)	11 (3%)	324 (100%)

Total Emp	606 (80%)	105 (14%)	46 (6%)	757 (100%)
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* No figures have been given as low figures may serve to identify individuals

Source: Religion or religion brought up in. Census 2011, NISRA

Employee details: Figures taken from Monitoring Return for 01/01/2017, Ards and North Down Borough Council

Political Opinion

The most recent local council election (2nd May 2019) showed:

Ards and North Down Borough Council Election Result 2019 ^[3]								
Party	Seats	Gains	Losses	Net gain/loss	Seats %	Votes %	Votes	+/-
DUP	14	0	3	▼3	35.0	33.4	16,759	▼2.0
Alliance	10	3	0	▲3	25.0	22.2	11,162	▲8.8
UUP	8	1	2	▼1	20.0	17.8	8,943	▲0.4
Green (NI)	3	0	0	—0	7.5	10.2	5,106	▲5.8
Independent	3	2	1	▲1	7.5	8.6	4,321	▼1.1
SDLP	1	0	0	—0	2.5	3.2	1,621	▼1.0
TUV	1	0	0	—0	2.5	1.4	695	▼3.4
UKIP	0	0	0	—0	0	1.3	672	▼1.2
NI Conservatives	0	0	0	—0	0	1.3	660	▼2.0
Sinn Féin	0	0	0	—0	0	0.5	267	▼0.3

Source: <https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/about-the-council/elections-2019/results-2019>

Party strengths, 2014, 2019, Present

Party	Elected 2014	Elected 2019	Current
DUP	17	14	12
Alliance	7	10	10
UUP	9	8	8
Green (NI)	3	3	3
SDLP	1	1	1
TUV	1	1	1
Independents	2	3	5

Ethnic Group (Numbers with % in brackets)

The A&NDBC employee profile shows that less than 2% of Council employees are from an ethnic minority background.

In relation to the resident population NISRA, NINIS and Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership data provide up to date data. The 2011 census showed that 32,000 (1.8%) of the usually resident population in Northern Ireland is from a minority ethnic background.

Within the Borough, the 2011 Census showed that 1.5% (2,300) were from a minority ethnic background. Across the borough this ranged from 5.2% in Loughview ward to 0.3% in Lisbane ward.

See table below

	All usual residents	White	Chinese	Indian	Bangladeshi	Other Asian	Black African	Black Other	Mixed	Other
Northern Ireland	1,810,863 (100%)	1,778,449 (98%)	6,303 (0%)	6,198 (0%)	540 (0%)	6,089 (0%)	2,345 (0%)	1271 (0%)	6,014 (0%)	3,654 (0%)
Ards and North Down Borough Council	156,672 (100%)	154,365 (99%)	406 (0%)	283 (0%)	177 (0%)	415 (0%)	139 (0%)	132 (0%)	556 (0%)	199 (0%)

Source: [Ethnic Group, Census 2011, NISRA](#)

Age Groups (Numbers with % in brackets)

NISRA have published population projections for the Borough which show that the proportion of those aged 85 and over are expected to more than double within the next 25 years.

A&NDBC has the highest % population of older people in Northern Ireland.

See table below

	0-15	16-39	40-64	65+	Total
Northern Ireland	385,200 (21%)	583,116 (31%)	591,481 (32%)	291,824 (16%)	1,851,621 (100%)
Ards and North Down Borough Council	29,801 (19%)	43,239 (27%)	54,094 (34%)	31,663 (20%)	158,797 (100%)

Sources: Demography and Methodology Branch, NISRA

Council employees by age and gender (30/08/2017)

Age	Female	Male	Total
16 - 29	20 (8%)	26 (6%)	46 (7%)
30 - 39	5 (2%)	83 (19%)	88 (13%)
40 - 49	105 (42%)	121 (27%)	226 (33%)
50 - 59	80 (32%)	176 (39%)	256 (37%)
60+	42 (17%)	41 (9%)	83 (12%)
TOTAL	252 (100%)	447 (100%)	699 (100%)

Marital Status (All aged 16+) (Numbers with % in brackets)

The 2011 Northern Ireland Census showed that 48% of adults (those aged over 16 years of age) in Northern Ireland were either married or in a registered same-sex civil partnership.

Within the borough, 54% of adults fell into this category. This varies across the Borough from 36% in Central (Ards) ward to 64% in Lisbane ward.

	All usual residents	Single (never married or never registered a same-sex civil partnership)	Married	In a registered same-sex civil partnership	Separated (but still legally married or still legally in a same-sex partnership)	Divorced or formerly in a same-sex civil partnership which is	Widowed or surviving partner from a same-sex civil partnership
Northern Ireland	1,431,540 (100%)	517,393 (36%)	680,831 (48%)	1,243 (0%)	56,911 (4%)	78,074 (5%)	97,088 (7%)
Ards and North Down Borough Council	126,945 (100%)	36,730 (29%)	67,866 (53%)	123 (0%)	4,328 (3%)	8,548 (7%)	9,350 (7%)

Sexual Orientation

It should be noted that no reliable data is available on sexual orientation. However, the 2011 census indicates that less than 1% of the Northern Ireland adult population (those aged 16 years and over) were in a registered same-sex civil partnership. This was similar to the Borough as a whole. The Continuous Household Survey in Northern Ireland estimated this figure between 0.9% and 1.9% in 2015-2016. The Office for National Statistics estimates a similar range for the United Kingdom (1.7%).

Source: Northern Ireland 2011 Census, Marital Status
ONS 2015 Sexual Identity

Sex / Gender

According to census (NISRA) almost half of the population of Northern Ireland were male (49%) and this was similar throughout Ards and North Down Borough Council (48%).

See table below

In relation to employees and their gender see table below

	Males	Females	All
Northern Ireland	887,323 (49%)	923,540 (51%)	1,810,863 (100%)
Ards and North Down Borough Council	75,920 (48%)	80,752 (52%)	156,672(100%)

Source: Age Structure, Census 2011, NISRA

Review of statistical classification and delineation of settlements, NISRA

Council employees by sex and full-time / part-time status (30/08/2017)

		Total
Female (f-t)	172 (22%)	322 (42%)
Female (p-t)	150 (20%)	
Male (f-t)	408 (53%)	447 (58%)
Male (p-t)	39 (5%)	
Total	769 (100%)	769 (100%)

Disability

The 2011 Census (NISRA) showed that 20% of the population in Ards and North Down area had a health issue or disability (including those related to old age) which has lasted or expected to last at least 12 months. (This was similar to the Northern Ireland figure of 21%.)

Disability Living Allowances, 2015

	2015 (Disability Living Allowance Recipients)	2015 (Multiple Disability Benefits) ²⁰
Northern Ireland	209,280	251,490
Ards and North Down Borough Council	13,840	18,080

Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011 Long-term health problem or disability by long-term problem or disability.

²⁰ MDB is aggregated data from Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance data, and data for Employment and Support allowance

Appendix 3: Staff Profile by Religion and Gender

The makeup of the council in relation to employee religious belief is 80% Protestant, 14% Roman Catholic and 6% Other.

Males	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Other	Total
Full Time	358 (84%)	33 (8%)	34 (8%)	425 (100%)
Part Time	*(63%)	*(25%)	*(13%)	*8 (100%)
Totals	363 (84%)	35 (8%)	35 (8%)	433 (100%)

Females	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Other	Total
Full Time	223 (78%)	58 (20%)	6 (2%)	287 (100%)
Part Time	20 (54%)	12 (32%)	5 (14%)	37 (100%)
Totals	243 (75%)	70 (22%)	11 (3%)	324 (100%)

Total Emp	606 (80%)	105 (14%)	46 (6%)	757 (100%)
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* No figures have been given as low figures may serve to identify individuals

Source: Religion or religion brought up in. Census 2011, NISRA

Employee details: Figures taken from Monitoring Return for 01/01/2017, Ards and North Down Borough Council

Appendix 4: Public Consultation Meeting Summaries

Public Consultation Meeting held in Portaferry Market House, Portaferry

Monday 24th October, 12pm

8 members of the public in attendance

It was mentioned at the beginning of the meeting that if people felt for whatever reason they could not voice their opinion, then an email could be sent to EQIA@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk which would be added into the report

The following were comments made in relation to the Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag.

Church Street Comments

- Is Church Steet really considered as a Headquarters?
- The timing of the meeting in not acceptable
- The current policy is acceptable, designated days work well and no one has raised an issue.
- The Workplace in Church Street should be welcoming to all – a flag may make it feel unwelcome. It does not promote good relations and there is no need to fly it more than the designated days.
- I support the flying of the flag 365 days over all Government buildings – this is what happens in the South of Ireland so why not in Northern Ireland.
- There should be 2 flags flown above the Council building as a representation of all constituents.
- If the constitution changes in this Country Council will fly the Irish flag but until then it will be the Flag of the UK.
- 2 participants agreed with designated days only.
- The policy was previously agreed by legacy Ards Council (i.e. designated days) and works in other Council areas so why change it in this Borough
- Proposed policy is a regressive step – it is non-progressive for Good relations.
- There should be no flags at all.
- It should fly on Church Street 365 in line with other Government buildings

War memorial comments

- The flag should fly on war memorials 365 day per year, both 'sides' participated in the war so the flag remembers all who gave their lives (Soldiers/Sailors and Airmen) and this should be remembered everyday not just for 2 weeks.
- The union flag only shows one 'side' of the community if all who lost lives are to be remembered then both flags should fly.
- The flag is not representative of the whole community.
- The union flag incorporates the Cross of Saint Patrick therefore, represents Ireland, so both 'sides' that fought in the wars, shows freedom and democracy.

- There is more impact if the flag flies for 2 weeks as opposed to 365 – less is more
- People lay wreaths on 1st of July at war memorials to remember those that died in the battle of the Somme, no flag flies on that day however they should to honour the dead.
- With the cost of flag poles/ flags and maintenance be at a cost to the ratepayer and has Council considered the cost.

The meeting ended at 1pm

DRAFT

Public Consultation held in Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex

Monday 24th October, 7pm

55 Members of the Public in Attendance

It was mentioned at the beginning of the meeting that if people felt for whatever reason they could not voice their opinion, then an email could be sent to EQIA@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk which would be added into the report

The following were comments made in relation to the Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag.

- This is the third time the flag issue has been discussed
- This is not a 'contentious issue' it is the flag of our country
- Unanimous decision that the flag should fly 365 on war memorials and Council buildings.
- People are good enough to take the queen/kings money yet do not recognise the flag
- Holding this EQIA is pandering to a minority
- If people don't like the flag they should go home
- It was requested that the flag be lowered at half mast to recognise the death of Prince Philip – Council said no as it wasn't in the policy – this is a disgrace as he was not only the husband of the Queen but served in the war.
- Felt the meeting and consultation was poorly advertised - felt another meeting would be beneficial in Bangor.
- Having a meeting in Portaferry was divisive
- Should be the majority rule
- It's the flag of the country and there is no harm flying it 365 days.
- Businesses feel that more flags in war memorials would benefit the Town as less would go up on lampposts.
- Flag discussions should not be up for debate and it should be a given
- This is a needless argument in Ards.
- This EQIA has been framed that the flag is an emblem, the Union flag stands beyond this, it stands for freedom and democracy. This stands against people who fought in the war for the freedom to fly the Union flag. The Status of the flag must be recognised.
- Just because people identify as Irish does not mean they are against the union flag. Many Irish soldiers serve in wars for his majesty's armed forces with the union flag on their uniforms yet are still happy to be called Irish – identity proves nothing.
- War memorials should honour the dead 365 days – they did not serve on designated days.
- Annoyed that people outside of the Borough could contribute – this should only be for the People of the Borough to decide.
- In other countries namely Normandy the union flag flies 365 over the British and commonwealth graves – why should we be different.

- Flying the flag over a war memorial 365 day does not take away the reason it is there in the first place.
- The council were willing to accept Bangor's 'City' Status from the Queen so why not fly the flag that represents the United Kingdom.
- Ards Councillors should never have allowed the flag to be removed in the first place this is legacy issue and should have been sorted before the Council Merged.

Meeting finished at 8.10pm

DRAFT

Public Consultation held online via Zoom

Tuesday 1st November @ 7pm

42 member accounts logged in attendance

(it should be noted that some accounts had multiple people in attendance, including around 30 people in attendance at Portavogie)

The following were comments made in the chat function of Zoom meeting in relation to the Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag.

- I've no concerns with the Church St Newtownards flag be present 365 days apart from costs of personal, replacement flags, etc
- I have a problem with War memorial flying all year round. They will be somewhat alienating for folks with a nationalist viewpoint. Also these would mean that more council personnel will be transporting to locations of war memorials perhaps every two months as they will be shredded by the weather in about that time.
- CNR also served in the Armed Forces, the flying of a flag on War Memorials is a sign of respect 24/7 365 days a year
- Can I ask why was it felt necessary to propose this change? – Answer via a Local Councillor – This should never have been changed in 2005, most Councillors feel it's appropriate to fly the British flag on their buildings and on War memorials for a consistent approach.
- I agree the flag should be flown 365 days a year. Susan Coffey.
- Tom, why propose for war memorials though?
- Has anyone asked how the staff in Church Street, who work there every day, feel about either option? If so what was the general feeling? – Answered via JK yes, staff had been consulted and views had been expressed and noted
- Are opinions restricted to residents of the Council area?
- The cost of maintaining the flying of the flags 365 would be insignificant when compared to the cost the council expends on equality issues. Equality has become an industry. If it's the right thing to do to fly the flag 365, and it certainly is, lets do it.
- Can I ask if it has yet to be costed as the ratepayers will ultimately be paying for it?
- Do England fly the flag on war memorials 365
- I would support 365 and 24/7 flying the flag on Council and War Memorials.
- Yes flags are flown 365 in England, Scotland and Wales
- I've lived in Newtownards all my life and I have never heard of anyone taking offence to the flying of the union flag. It's only since the Belfast City Council flag decision of 2012 that they've become an issue from what I've seen.

- I'm chairperson of the Eastend Residents Association and have been contacted by numerous residents who support the flying of the union flag 24/7 365 days, we've submitted this also in writing.
- The six members of Portavogie Regeneration Forum here tonight agree that we should be in line with Great Britain if we are talking about cost, the cost to those we are remembering was to lay down their lives for our freedom. My Grandfather and Great Grandfather fought in both World Wars all year round and not on designated days. 365 days per year is only out of respect. We support the proposed changes to the policy.
- On behalf of Ballywalter Community Action Group 10 members we fully support flags on council buildings and War memorials 24/7 365 days
- Given the religious/political make-up of the Borough, it is not likely to be seen as contentious. The extent of the consultation seems over-kill.
- I see no reason why the flag shouldn't be flown all year at war memorials and council buildings...
- As someone else has stated the cost of a flag is minimal to the cost of life which members of the armed forces gave up so that we could have consultations like this. Yes flags must be presentable, but they should be on display, we should be proud of what our forefathers did for our freedoms, as well as those that have lost their lives in wars since.
- It would be difficult to name any country that does not fly its Nation Flag at War Memorials
- We are proud of them that's why we have memorials...
- Is it one vote for both parts or two separate votes?

The following comments were voiced in relation to the Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag.

- We must remember that both sides fought in the Wars, it's the national flag, there would have been a religious service before the war where the Union flag would have been draped over. I'm in full support of the flag 365 on both War memorials and Church Street.
- Why not fly the Union Flag on other days (not 365) other than designated days on War memorials – this is to remember the dead on significant days i.e. 1st July, throughout November.
- The flying of flags on war memorials should be on special occasions only – no more no less than other days. There is an aggravating factor and it's not necessary – this may detract from remembrance.
- Both sides fought in the war – we should remember 365 days
- Both Church Street and Town Hall, Bangor are civic headquarters so why is there an issue – it's appropriate to fly on War Memorials 365.

- There is strong support from the People of Portavogie – This NOM follows the same policy that the UK and Irish government have, this is a constitution and should not be seen as offensive.
- An ex service man stated that he did not fight on designated days so why should the flag only fly on designated days.
- A Roman Catholic constituent got in touch via a Councillor to say that they had no objections to the flying of the flag either on War memorials or Church street - they stated that the flag should be well kept and not tattered.
- USA commemorate the war dead - we should do the same
- In the USA they do not have tattered flags flying from every lamppost with war memorials popping up everywhere and flags appearing
- The flag should fly 365 on Stormont as well.
- A question was asked if the debate on the report will be done 'behind closed doors' and will the public see who has voted for or against. The debate should be open and transparent. – The question was answered by a local Councillor that it will be in the public domain and it can be held as a 'registered vote' however it was unsure as to when the report will be debated by Council.
- A question was raised about a surcharge to Councillors should there be a legal challenge on the Flag and will Councillors stand up to 'officers' on this matter. The question was answered by a local Councillor that the EQIA was a requirement of the policy and Councillors were aware of this when the NOM was brought to Council, this was a part of the policy making process and that no surcharge would be brought to Council nor has this ever been mentioned.

The meeting ended at 19.50pm

Appendix 5: Staff Consultation Summary

Staff Consultation held in Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex

Monday 24th October, 4pm

2 members of staff in attendance

It was mentioned at the beginning of the meeting that if people felt for whatever reason they could not voice their opinion, then an email could be sent to EQIA@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk which would be added into the report

It should be noted that when invited some staff refused to attend and the following statement was passed to NIPSA union –

‘It’s highly inappropriate to ask staff to discuss such a personal, political and contentious topic in a group forum. Concerns about the proposed changes have been detailed at length in the online consultation. Staff would not feel comfortable airing these views in a group setting with colleagues.’

The NIPSA representative expressed the following:

‘We would not be in favour of this approach for the following reason, a discussion of this nature could reveal the political and or religious background of an employee. Which could lead to discrimination, harassment etc. if we have already given them written rationale then that should be sufficient.’

It was therefore arranged and communicated to all staff that anyone wishing to add additional comments but had reservations about attending a meeting could arrange a one-to-one via Teams or face to face with an independent facilitator. – this had no uptake

The following were comments made in relation to the Proposed Revisions to the Council’s Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag.

Council Buildings

The cost of erecting flag poles/flags and maintaining the flags, at a time when many Council events and budget slashing is taking place and the rising cost of living crisis is affecting everyone, was discussed. In addition, how the policy would impact on Council’s Sustainability Policy, as the replacement of flags would incur considerable cost and energy. How the display of flags may impact on visitors was also considered, including the possibility that flying flags may reduce the number on lampposts due to the parade routes. The overall cost to ratepayers was also discussed..

The meeting ended at 4.40pm

Appendix 6: Email and Fb Responses

Email responses (Via EQIA email, CEO email and JK email), and Fb (Facebook)

STAFF

I believe the proposal goes against the aspirations of both the secular and the Nationalist citizens of the Borough and having learned that ANDBC already has the most union flags displayed on civic buildings I believe it to be unnecessary. I believe it will cause discomfort and distress to my community and that it will create additional tensions within the Borough by being seen to endorse hidden sectarianism

Furthermore it goes against the Council's vision that " Ards and North Down will be a place to be proud of which is more prosperous, vibrant, healthy, sustainable and where people enjoy an excellent quality of life."

It also specifically contravenes the following professed Council value:

Progressive: We will be proactive, ambitious, innovative, forward thinking and outward looking.

Respect: We will treat everyone in a fair and equitable manner, respecting diversity and each other's roles

In July 2018 Britain First targeted Newtownards as the best place to try to recruit members, based on their perception of the Town as extremely Loyalist – something borne out by the presence of numerous flags – Britain First leader Paul Golding posted a video on social media to tell people about the meeting and described Newtownards as "patriotic British culture, undisturbed by political correctness" https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/britain-first-holding-first-northern-14958556?utm_source=linkCopy&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=sharebar

The proposed revision to the Council's policy on the flying of the union flag, shows that lessons have not been learned from this distressing incident by playing into the hands of the far right and the culture of fear that they engender.

As was noted at the meeting, it is very likely that the Equality Commission will lodge a complaint if this proposal is implemented and this will result in additional legal expense to Council and intense media scrutiny, which will tarnish the reputation of the Council, discourage investment in the Borough and be detrimental to tourism. The forward of the Corporate Plan states that the Council exists to provide civic leadership, promote prosperity and build community – implementing this proposal will do none of these things. In fact it will divide communities, negatively impact on prosperity and show that there is no cohesion or progression within our "civic leadership".

This Council persistently seeks to assert the primacy of one section of the community at the expense of another. As outlined in my response to the questionnaire, these actions are intimidating, infringe on the concept of a neutral and harmonious working environment and do not promote good relations or equality of opportunity within the Council. A harmonious working environment is not one in

which there are displays which are associated with one section of the community and where employees are drawn from both.

PUBLIC (via Cllr Naomi Armstrong Cotter)

- Name withheld - flag should be flown all council buildings, memorials, 365 days, BT23.
- Name withheld-, flag to be flown 365 days especially at town halls, BT23.
- Name withheld-, flags to be flown 365 especially at memorial Gardens and town halls, BT23.
- Name withheld- flag to fly 365 days especially at town halls, Bangor BT23.
- Name withheld- flag to be flying 365 days, BT23.
- Name withheld- flag to fly 365 especially at cenotaphs and council building BT23.
- Name withheld- flag to fly 365 days at memorial Gardens and council owned property's, BT23.
- Name withheld -, flags to fly 365 days at memorials and council halls, BT23.
- Name withheld- flag to fly 365 days BT23.
- Name withheld- flag should definitely fly 365 days at all civic centres inc town halls, BT23.
- Name withheld- flag should be flown as I'm ex service so definitely 365 days, BT23.
- Name withheld- flag should fly 365 days per year BT23.
- Name withheld,- in a mark of respect the union flag needs flown 365 days per year BT23.
- Name withheld- flag should always be flown 365 especially at town hall BT23
- Name withheld- flag needs to represent us 365 days BT23.
- Name withheld- i feel the flag should be flown on all council buildings my father recently passed away as ex service man and it would be great to see flag flown all year at cenotaphs BT23.
- Name Withheld - yes our flag should be flown 365 days as this is important to us as it reflects and represents the country we are living in BT23.
- Name withheld - At least this much but should be daily on all major civic buildings and cenotaphs BT19.
- Name withheld - Absolutely support this motion BT23.
- Name withheld - This should always been flown BT23.
- Name withheld - Keep our flag flying not to be divisive but to be accurately patriotic BT23.
- No name given - I fail to see why this question needs to be asked but since you want a response, this is right and proper to extend this flag flying and indeed should be considered Borough wide if feasible but at the lest at war memorials and Ards church Street. BT22.
- Name withheld - I believe that this is representative of the area we live in and hopefully it will give security to loyalists who feel their belief and opinion comes second in this Borough and country BT23.

Name withheld - I think this is the very least that we should flag the flag which so many people I knew and loved died under. BT23 8XG.

Name withheld - As a young man I will be pleased to see my belief reflected if not represented by my council acknowledging the place of our flag in our civic life within a borough council. BT23 4BG

PUBLIC (via Cllr Robert Irvine)

- The union flag should fly on all government buildings.
- My only ask is that they are lowered when they should be as marks of respect and replaced when tattered... there is nothing worse than a flag that is not in good condition.
- Regarding the recent meeting in Blair Mayne leisure centre on the Union Flag flying proposals, I feel the flag of our country should be flown at all times at the council owned war memorials and at council buildings in the Borough. This should already be happening and shouldn't have needed proposing at all. Please let me know of any future meetings that will be open to the public regarding these proposals.
- I don't see any problem flying the union flag outside any council buildings or war memorials all year round! We shouldn't have to take it down at any point in the year.
- Hello I don't see an issue of flying union flags on war memorials and council buildings all year round shouldn't be an issue
- The union flag is the flag of the UK, N Ireland is part of the UK and therefore we should be allowed to fly it where and when we so desire.
- I would like our union flag to fly from as many public buildings and cenotaphs as possible thanks.

Via Facebook (fb) messenger (names redacted)

- I was intending to go but I am back in Hospital. Fly it every day
- It's an absolute disgrace that this is even being debated!
- Needs to be flown x
- Needs to be flying Every Day!
- America fly the national flag everywhere why can't we absolutely ridiculous that it needs to even be discussed
- The flag of our country needs it to fly everyday
- Fly the flag each day
- It shouldn't even be discussed!
- Get it flown!
- Up all year round! Don't need a consultation!!
- Why is this even being discussed?
- As long as it's only residents in the Borough that can join the meeting.
- Keep those flags up!

- Any councillors care to comment or contact me? Unannounced in addition to the meetings held in Portaferry and Newtownards
- There's no point complaining its not up. Unless u put ur views forward to the council it won't count.
- Shameful!!
- Disgrace to be called into question, hang your heads.
- An utter disgrace.
- I'd like to hear from our elected representatives about this and their views on previous meetings
- Should be up all year, especially at war memorials.
- I am unable to join this online meeting however I wish my views to be put on record. I totally disagree with any extensions of the present flying of flags. I would prefer a NO FLAGS policy in the Borough. NI flags does not offend anyone and creates an everyone welcome Borough.
- Keep the flags up
- Is this an early April fools?
- Why is this even being discussed?
- Absolutely disgusting that this is under consultation.
- Keep the flags up.
- I want to see it flown every day of the year. I am grateful that I live in the UK.
- I've read the documents. There seems to be no way of commenting on these changes other than to attend a zoom meeting (where the public won't be active participants, just observers). In other words this ISN'T a CONSULTATION with the people paying the councillors wages - it's a way of telling us what you're going to do irrespective of our opinions on this.
- The Union flag should be flown all year round. I don't understand what the fuss is about. My brother will be turning in his grave. He protested and protested over the flag being removed at City Hall. He was respectful to all, he had a lot of Irish friends, but it didn't stop him standing up for his beliefs.
- The Union Flag is the flag of the country it's not offensive so just fly it.
- It's a flag, fly it. It's not as if it's a flag belonging to Russia, it's the flag of this country. Has anybody any idea how ridiculous it sounds that in the name of 'equality' we have to have meetings about meetings to fly the flag of our own country?
- Disgusting!!!

Via JK personal email

I attended your Portaferry meeting & Zoom this evening. I would like my views to be considered.

In my opinion, there should be either no flags or both flags flown in order for the council to be adhering to its commitment to nurture equality & good relations. As well as this the council should be considering the cost involved and keep in mind the principles of economy, efficiency & effectiveness while serving the needs & interests of ratepayers, residents & visitors. I feel that this is a divisive issue which

is evident from the comments on the Facebook & the way certain members of the public have negatively reacted to other people's opinions. Instead of being progressive this council appears to be regressive in terms of promoting equality and good relations. How does this fall into the TBUC strategy? As usual A& NDBC seem to represent only one section of the community. Far too many flags already flying in my opinion.

If you could include my opinion it would be very much appreciated.

DRAFT

Appendix 7: Written Responses

1: Alliance Party

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA): Proposed Revisions to the Council's Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag

“At Council on 30th March 2022, it was RESOLVED that, subject to the completion of an equality impact assessment, Council amends the current flag policy to fly the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round, and will also include Church Street Newtownards Council building.”

Designated Days Policy

The Alliance Party has a long-standing and well-known policy in support of flying the Union Flag from Council Civic Headquarters on designated days, in line with the schedule of days from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport guidance. This stance has been equality proofed many times, and shows equal respect for those who feel represented by the Union Flag and those who do not.

In Northern Ireland it is important that public buildings and civic spaces are inclusive for all. As people, we share much in common, but we clearly have political and cultural identities which divide us and at times challenge us. If we want to build a genuinely shared future then we cannot avoid or ignore these tensions, and need to tackle them head-on.

It should be noted that the Alliance Party does not support the Council's current flag policy. The current policy of flying the Union Flag permanently at seven sites throughout the Borough goes against our long-standing policy of flying the Union Flag on designated days at Council Civic Headquarters.

The general principle of respect in a divided society should guide the Council in deciding a policy on the flying of flags. Symbols should not be used to stress dominance or be used to exclude; rather symbols such as flags should be used to promote pluralism and aim to unite the community.

The Good Friday Agreement entrenches the Principle of Consent. Hence, the constitutional position of Northern Ireland is that it remains a part of the United Kingdom unless and until its people decide otherwise.

It is for these reasons that Alliance supports the flying of the flag from Council Civic Headquarters on designated days.

This policy is a balanced arrangement reflecting policy in place for other government buildings in Northern Ireland, acknowledging the constitutional status of Northern Ireland whilst also upholding legal obligations to promote good relations and ensure a good and harmonious working environment.

War Memorials Proposal

As a Public Authority, the Council must adhere to Section 75 duties to promote good relations:

“Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act places a statutory obligation on Public Authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in respect of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependants and sexual orientation.”

Flying the Union Flag permanently in the Borough, in areas which are shared spaces, risks having an adverse impact on residents, visitors and employees from a Roman Catholic and/or Nationalist and/or Republican community background. For example, if this proposal were to be agreed, there would be 3 Union Flags being flown 365 days a year in Holywood, including 2 in close proximity at the War Memorial and at Queen's Leisure Complex.

In addition, there is an increasing segment of society in Northern Ireland who are from a variety of other religious backgrounds or none; and a growing percentage who do not identify as Unionist or Nationalist, often referred to as 'Others'. This community want a shared and inclusive society without use of flags or emblems which could be seen to stress dominance or to exclude, and would prefer flags, symbols and emblems which promote inclusivity and unite the entire community.

The proposed amendment to the Council's current flag policy would put the Council at risk of failing to uphold legal obligations to promote good relations in respect of religious belief and political opinion.

It is also important to note the significance of flying the Union Flag during the Remembrance period. The Remembrance period is to commemorate the service of men and women during WW1, WW2 and later conflicts; however, the timing was chosen to coincide with Armistice Day, marking the end of WW1 in November 1918. Flying the Union Flag during this time serves to highlight the significance of the period, and flying the flag permanently could risk undermining this.

When describing Remembrance, the British Legion highlights that it unites people of all faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. Indeed, the British Legion has previously opposed proposals in 2013 to fly the Union Flag permanently at the cenotaph in Belfast City Hall, arguing that the Garden of Remembrance was "sacrosanct" and should not be politicised.

Alliance continues to support the flying of the Union Flag during the Remembrance period and at Remembrance events throughout the year.

Church Street Proposal

When addressing the proposal to fly the Union Flag permanently from the Council building on Church Street, Newtownards, there are a number of issues which must be considered.

The Council was issued guidance in 2013 from the Equality Commission, stating that it should promote a good and harmonious workplace in line with the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, which made discrimination on the grounds of religious belief and political opinion unlawful, both in the workplace and in the provision of goods, facilities and services.

In October 2009, the Equality Commission issued guidance on promoting a good and harmonious working environment, which stated:

"The flying of the Union flag must be viewed within the context in which it is flown or displayed. Factors affecting the context include the manner, location and frequency with which flags are flown. The Union flag is the national flag of the United Kingdom and, arising therefrom, has a particular status symbolising the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. On the other hand, the Union flag is often used to mark sectional community allegiance. There is a world of difference between these two approaches. Thus, for example, while it is acceptable and appropriate, in the Commission's view, for a local Council to fly the Union flag at its Civic Headquarters, the rationale for its display at every Council location, facility and leisure centre would be questionable."

The guidance also highlights that:

“an ‘harmonious’ working environment does not necessarily mean a ‘neutral’ one.”

This guidance from the Equality Commission justifies the Alliance Party’s long-standing policy of supporting the flying of the Union Flag from Council Civic Headquarters on designated days.

If the Council were to implement this proposal, it would leave itself open to the risk of legal action as a result of not adhering to legal duties to provide a good and harmonious workplace in line with the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

Reflecting on legal advice provided to Belfast City Council during their Equality Impact Assessment on changing the policy on the flying of the Union Flag in 2012, taking a more extreme approach could increase the risk of a successful discrimination claim, while taking a more balanced approach decreases the risk of successful challenge. Noting the case of *Johnston v Belfast City Council* (2000), the legal advice also highlighted that the display of emblems in a context which is removed from the administrative headquarters of the Council is much more likely to give rise to valid complaint.

Conclusion

As previously highlighted, it should be noted that the Alliance Party does not support the Council’s current flag policy. The current policy of the Union Flag being permanently flown at seven sites throughout the Borough goes against our long-standing policy of flying the Union Flag from Council Civic Headquarters on designated days.

However, it is undeniable that the proposal to amend the current flag policy to fly the Union Flag at every war memorial all year round, and also include Church Street Newtownards Council building would serve to make the Council’s flag policy more extreme. It may also result in the Council acting against its duties to ensure good relations and a good and harmonious working environment, potentially risking legal challenge from employees or service users.

2: Equality Commission

Response to Ards and North Down Borough Council's Equality Impact Assessment of proposed revisions to Council policy on Flying the Union Flag

The Commission welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Ards and North Down Borough Council consultation on proposed revisions to the Council's Policy on Flying the Union Flag EQIA.

The Commission's remit in this area stems from our duties under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 and our duty to offer advice to public authorities in relation to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Given that the EQIA references Commission advice on the flying of the Union Flag these comments relate to the EQIA process.

Defining the Aims of the Policy

The EQIA states that the policy amends the current flag policy (July 2021) to fly the Union flag at each war memorial in the Council area all year round, as well as in Church Street Newtownards. There is also a statement in the associated screening document that, 'Council adopts as policy the flying of the Union Flag on all Council buildings and war memorials all year round'. The EQIA should have clearly stated the Council's proposed policy i.e. what is meant by 'all Council buildings' and whether this refers to administrative buildings only or includes leisure and recycling facilities. It is also not clear whether the proposed policy includes continuing to fly the Union Flag at each of the designated sites included in the July 2021 policy, some of which are war memorials and some of which are not.

Consideration of available data and research and assessing impacts

The EQIA contains a range of information (pages 4-8) and data and research (pages 9-14) and determines that the policy may adversely impact on people with regard to religious belief and political opinion in terms of accessing services, the provision of a good and harmonious working environment and promoting good relations.

Consideration of alternative policies and measures to mitigate adverse impacts

Consideration of alternative policies and measures to mitigate adverse impacts which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity are a fundamental part of the EQIA process and should be considered at the various

stages of the policy-making process. It is the Council's responsibility to make these assessments in the EQIA report to enable consultees to make informed contributions and therefore assist the Council to ensure that it pays the appropriate level of regard to its equality of opportunity and/or good relations duties. While the EQIA presents policy alternatives, no assessment of the potential impacts of these alternatives on equality and/or good relations have been included. The Council could have used the information included in the EQIA to develop these alternatives and assessments, for instance by considering the rationale for flying the Union Flag at each location.

Monitoring

The Commission recommends that the final EQIA report sets out the monitoring arrangements that the Council will establish in order to monitor the impact of any policy decision in regard to this policy. There are currently no arrangements set out in the draft EQIA.

This response is made without prejudice to any consideration or determination which the Commission might make in performance of its statutory function to investigate individual complaints under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 or conduct any other investigation under that Schedule.

3: East End Residents Association

*East End Residents
Association 23A Queens
Square Newtownards
Co.
Down
BT238*

LF

Tel: 02891814969

Email:

eastend.community@btconnect.com

2s^{1h} October 2022

E.O.N.I RESPONSE

We the above resident's group are in support of the change in policy by North Down & Ards Borough Council. Our concerns are that the original Ards Borough Council policy was flying the flag 365 days of the year, but after some complaints by some residents of the Borough, the Equality Commission was of the opinion to only allow the flying of the flag at Church Street on designated days. Hence the change in policy at that time. Now with this new amendment it is looking to return to the old previous policy.

We have concerns that the Equality Commission will not take our views seriously as this will fly in the face of their recommendations at that time.

We look forward to hearing your reply.

Maoythfa

Ian Cox

Chairperson

4: Cloughey & District Community Association

Our response does not concern the flying of the Union flag all year round on council buildings, but is confined only to the flying of the Union flag year round on war memorials.

We start with the assumption that the council wish to fly the flag continually in order to commemorate better the sacrifices made during past conflicts in the belief that by amplifying commemoration in a more continual way it is better.

Commemoration is a good thing and while it may appear self-evident that the more commemoration there is or the more amplified that commemoration is - the better it is, this is not necessarily the case. If we pause to reflect on commemoration in our society and in many other societies and also in many different periods throughout history we find it is most often time-limited. It is confined to set days or times. The reason why it is most often not a continuous amplified activity lies in human nature – over exposure to anything can lead to a degree of numbing or blaséness and ultimately even to disregard. It is therefore incumbent on the council to consider that there is a very real risk of diluting the importance of the remembrance message that they wish to exalt by overexposure and overfamiliarity. Currently the raising of the union flag is used to draw attention to an upcoming time for community remembrance, however it is more than likely that continual flying of the flag will mean the loss of that important call to action as it will no longer stand out in people's attention.

While we may share the belief that commemoration is a good thing we would ask the council to please consider that it does not necessarily follow that amplified continual commemoration is better than contemplative background commemoration with recognised times that allow a high focus on communal remembering.

If the council's intent behind flying the Union Flag all year round at war memorials also includes a desire to make a political statement and assert Britishness at a time of heightened uncertainty then as a community we would have very grave concerns as we believe the commemoration of the dead and wounded from past wars and conflicts should not be used in this way. It is not the place. We believe it is for councillors to question their own hearts as to their true intent.

Lastly, even if we assume that the intent of council is noble and good and that council remain convinced that commemoration is best served by making it continual there still remains the very real question over perception.

We hope, indeed believe, that council places great value on the sacrifice made on our behalf by the dead and wounded in past conflicts and would like therefore to see as many people as possible share in commemorating this great sacrifice. If such is the wish of council, there remains a very real problem with this intended change to the flying of the union flag on war memorials – namely perception. If we wish to have full and also cross-community support for the sacrifices made then perception really matters. As we have said, councillors must judge their own intentions, and, even if they are good and noble, they still must take cognisance of how their actions may be perceived by others. If there is a risk, even the slightest risk, that commemoration is perceived as being politicised then, surely the wise step to take is not to do anything which may increase that risk. Surely to do otherwise would only risk council 'shooting itself in the foot' and increase the risk of turning more people away from commemorating the great sacrifice made on all our behalf.

ITEM 21

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Report Classification	Unclassified
Council/Committee	Council
Date of Meeting	26 January 2023
Responsible Director	Chief Executive
Responsible Head of Service	
Date of Report	10 January 2023
File Reference	CG 12172
Legislation	Local Government Act (NI) 2014
Section 75 Compliant	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Subject	Notices of Motion
Attachments	Notices of Motion - Status Report

Please find attached a Status Report in respect of Notices of Motion.

This is a standing item on the Council agenda each month and its aim is to keep Members updated on the outcome of motions. Please note that as each motion is dealt with it will be removed from the report.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council notes the report.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS UPDATE – JANUARY 2023

TO BE POPULATED BY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES							
DATE RECEIVED	NOTICE	SUBMITTED BY	COUNCIL MEETING DATE	COMMITTEE REFERRED TO	OUTCOME OF COMMITTEE WHERE NOM DEBATED	MONTH IT WILL BE REPORTED BACK TO COMMITTEE	OTHER ACTION TO BE TAKEN
31/05/15	Permanent recognition of Rory McIlroy in Holywood	Councillor Muir	24/06/15	Corporate Services Committee – October 2015	Agreed	June 2022	Update sought at Jan 22 Council – To be reported to CSC in June 2022. Further report to follow in 2023.
21/1/19	Shelter at slipway in Donaghadee	Councillor Brooks & Cllr Smith	Council – January 2019	Environment Committee	Agreed	TBC	
25/9/19	Report on feasibility of holding annual remembrance service for those lost to suicide	Councillor Martin	Council – October	Corporate Services – November 2019	Agreed	Reported to CSC January 2020. Further report to come	On draft agenda for CSC March 2023.

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						back. (September 2022).	
16/01/20	Closing of a public right of way at Andrew Shorefield, Groomsport	Alderman Keery	Council – January 2020	Corporate Committee – February 2020	Agreed	Reported to CSC in March and October 2020. Further report to come back (September 2022).	On draft agenda for CSC March 2023.
20.10.20	“I would like to task officers to produce a report to consider what could be a more environmentally friendly and benefit the wellbeing of the community for the use of the disused putting green on the Commons and play park at Hunts park in Donaghadee . Following the success of the Dog park in Bangor and the demand for a Dementia	Councillor Brooks	Council October 2020	Community & Wellbeing Committee – December 2020	Agreed	TBC	Officers to liaise with Regeneration and consideration of Masterplan and also take into account play strategy local consultation when it takes place in

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	garden, both should be considered as options in the report. The process should involve consultation with the local community.”						Donaghadee and bring back a report thereafter.
19 April 2021	Flying of Union Flag on all Council buildings and war memorials all year round. Flags at half mast on death of any monarch or any other member of the Royal Family or Prime Minister of the UK for the period of mourning.	Councillor Cooper	Council April 2021	Corporate Committee – September 2021	NOM as amended agreed at March 2022 Council	CSC - October/Nov 2022	Council - January 2023
10 May 2021	That officers are tasked to bring back a Report on how the Council might approach a Climate Change Action Plan and perhaps including - but not limited to - a review of all Council long-term investment, a Borough-wide engagement via an Innovation Lab, a Conference of Ideas, and	Councillors Walker & Egan	23 June 2021	Environment Committee – October 2021 (deferred from September Committee)	Agreed	TBC	

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	values-based recommendations for next steps.						
20.10.2021	That officers bring back a report to consider the option of transferring responsibility for bins which are currently the responsibility of the Parks Section into the Environment Directorate.	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Cathcart	Council November 2021	Community & Wellbeing December 2021	Agreed	Report to C&WC April 2022. Report to October 2022 C&WC	Further consideration by officers, update report to March 2023 C&W Committee
3.11.2021	That this Council, in liaison with the Department for Infrastructure, will seek permission for and explore a source of funding in order to make an artistic feature of the steps which lead from Princetown Road to Queen's Parade at Bangor seafront as part of Bangor Town regeneration, and brings back a report to	Councillor Douglas & Alderman Wilson	Council November 2021	Regeneration & Development December 2021	Agreed	March P&P Committee	Urban Team working up a scheme which will be forwarded to DfI for approval.

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	Council addressing how this can be achieved as a pilot for the Borough.						
31.12.21	Coastal and Storm Damage to Ballywalter Harbour, repair costs and reinstatement costs	Councillors Adair and Edmund	Council January 22	Environment February 2022	Agreed	TBC	Report to be brought back.
09.03.22	Calls for Council responsibility for a devolved Regeneration Budget	Councillor Walker and Alderman McDowell	Council -March 22	Regeneration and Development Committee – April 22	Agreed	Reported to Oct R&D Committee and ratified by Oct Council	Letter issued by CEx to Permanent Secretary 3.1.23. Reply received 16.1.23 Report to P&P Feb 23
13.04.22	Environmental damage caused by modern day packaging	Councillors McRandal and Douglas	Council – April 2022	Environment Committee – June 2022	Agreed - ratified by June Council		Report to be brought back - TBC.
14.04.22	Locking up schedule for Playparks	Alderman Irvine and Alderman Keery	Council – April 2022	Community & Wellbeing Committee May 2022	Agreed (to be ratified by April Council)	Report to Oct 2022 C&WC	Local Consultation to be undertaken by officers and

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							further report to be brought back to September C&W committee
10.05.22	Discussions with EA re redevelopment of the play area fronting Victoria Primary School as a potential Peace Plus project for Ballywalter	Councillors Adair and Edmund	Council – May 2022	Community and Wellbeing June 2022	Agreed (to be ratified at June Council)	Reported to Nov 2022 CWC	Report recommendati on amended to write to Dfl. Report on response to future Committee
17.05.22	2028 Centenary of the internationally renowned Ards TT races. Asking Council how best to commemorate this important sporting anniversary.	Alderman McIlveen and Councillor Kennedy	Council – May 2022	Community and Wellbeing June 2022	Agreed (to be ratified at June Council)	TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future Committee

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19.05.2022	Business case for redesign of the parallel sports pitches and facilities at Park Way, Comber	Councillors Cummings and Johnson	Council – June 2022	Community and Wellbeing Committee – September 2022 – deferred to October 2022		TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future Committee
20.06.2022	Review of health and safety process re community groups	Councillors MacArthur, Brooks, T Smith and Kennedy	Council – June 2022	Corporate Services Committee – Sept 2022 - deferred to October 2022	Agreed	Ratified at October Council	Further report to follow.
20.06.2022	Report exploring the possibility of introducing a policy that shows commitment to supporting the wellbeing of our workforce by ensuring appropriate support is available to anyone undergoing IVF.	Councillor Greer and Councillor McKee	Council – June 2022	Corporate Services Committee – Sept 2022 – deferred to October 2022	Agreed	Ratified at October Council	Further report to follow.
21.06.2022	Engagement with relevant community stakeholders to ascertain community need and desires in respect of the Queen's Leisure Complex	Councillors Kendall, McRandal and McClean	Council - June 2022	Community and Wellbeing Committee – September 2022 – deferred to October 2022		TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back

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							to future Committee
5.07.2022	<p>That this Council changes the name of Queen’s Parade to Queen’s Platinum Jubilee Parade in honour and recognition of the 70th anniversary of the Queen’s accession to the throne.</p> <p>*** Amendment Received from Councillor Cathcart</p> <p>That this Council, in recognition of Her Majesty’s Platinum Jubilee and her conferment of City Status upon Bangor, agrees to name an appropriate place or building within Bangor in her honour and that future Council Bangor entrance signs make reference to</p>	Alderman Irvine & Keery	Council – July 2022	Environment Committee - September 2022	Amdt agreed.		Sept 2022 - Recommendation to Council that item is referred to Corporate Services Committee and report to be brought to a future meeting - TBC

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	Bangor being a Platinum Jubilee City.						
19.07.2022	<p>This Council notes with concern that a number of planted trees in urban settings along roads which have died or have been removed but not replaced; Notes the importance of environmental and social benefits of such trees in the built environment;</p> <p>Notes that DfI Roads formerly had a partnership arrangement with Belfast parks for the replacement of trees but that this partnership ended some time ago;</p> <p>That Council officers are tasked with opening discussions with DfI Roads</p>	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Cathcart	Council – July 2022	Community and Wellbeing Committee – September 2022 Deferred to October 2022		TBC	Meeting with DfI Roads and DAERA to be organised. Officers will bring back a report thereafter.

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	and DAERA with a view to exploring the possibility of a partnership which will involve the supply and replacement of lost trees in the Borough and then providing a report to Council for further consideration.						
29.6.2022	That this Council notes with concern the significant impact rising energy costs are having on households across Northern Ireland; recognises the need for ongoing intervention from every level of Government and agrees to write to Her Majesty's Treasury to impress upon them in the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Executive the need to urgently deliver the energy bills support scheme to households here.	Councillor P Smith and Councillor Smart	Council – August 2022	Agreed to accept NOM to be heard at Council and amended to include: This Council also resolves to write to the Dept. for Communities to request a special fund for Councils in relation to the Cost-of-Living crisis in order to-	Letters sent from CEx to SoS and Minister – response from DfC received 27 Oct.	Report to December 2022 C&W Committee	Waiting ratification at Council.

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				<p>a. provide for the direct provision of localised responses; and</p> <p>b. assist local community and voluntary organisations</p> <p>Any such support would be additional to that provided by the Westminster Government and at Northern Ireland level.</p>			
29.07.2022	That this council withdraws all funding to any sporting organisations with any political objectives or named references to terrorism in	Cllrs Cooper, T Smith and Councillor Irvine	Council – August 2022	Corporate Committee – September 2022 – deferred to October 2022	Agreed with amdt	TBC	C&W Officers considering report to be brought to

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	their constitution, club names, stadiums or competitions, and tasks officers to bring back a report outlining the specific relevant council policy.						future C&W Committee
14.08.2022	That this council notes the widespread move to low traffic neighbourhoods in city centres across the UK and Europe and tasks officers with producing a report detailing the steps involved in progressing a project for Bangor City Centre. The report should highlight the benefits that a low traffic neighbourhood can bring, including how it could support the Council's ambitions to revive local retail and hospitality, encourage active travel,	Alderman Wilson and Councillor Douglas	Council August 2022	Corporate Committee – September 2022 – deferred to October 2022	Agreed	TBC	Further report to follow, to future Environment Committee meeting

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	support families, and play a positive role in tackling climate change. A preliminary consultation should also take place to obtain views and ideas directly from City Centre businesses, residents, and other relevant stakeholders.						
22.08.22	Street Clutter Audit for the Borough	Councillor Dunlop and Councillor Douglas	September 2022	Environment Committee – October 2022	Agreed	Reported to October 2022 EC Committee	Letter sent to Minister at DfI – update report to be brought to future meeting
14.09.22	Care Workers and Penalty Charge Notices for Parking	Councillor Cathcart and Councillor Gilmour	September 2022	Corporate Services Committee – October 2022 - deferred to November 2022		To be considered at CSC November 2022	Response to NOM to be taken at CSC in February 2023
19.09.22	Establishment of an Animal Abuse Register for the Borough and write to the	Councillor T Smith and	September 2022	Environment Committee October 2022	Agreed	Reported to October 2022 EC Committee	Update report to be brought

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	DAERA Minister to ask for the introduction of Lucy's Law and Reggie's Law for Northern Ireland.	Councillor Cooper Amendment received from Councillor Woods					to future meeting
21.09.22	Humane control of Pigeons in Conway Square, Newtownards	Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	September 2022	Environment Committee 2022	Agreed	Reported to October 2022 EC Committee	Update report to be brought to future meeting
21.09.22	That this Council notes with concern the situation regarding Priory Surgery, with the potential of services ceasing from February 2023 affecting over 14,000 patients across Bangor West and Holywood. We ask that this Council calls for a deputation from the Department of Health	Councillor McRandal and Alderman Wilson and Councillor Irwin	October 2022	Corporate Services Committee – November 2022	Agreed	January 2023	DoH, BMA & Royal College of GPs non-attendance at January 2023 committee. To be rescheduled.

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	and British Medical Association alongside the Royal College of Surgeons to discuss options for the practice should partners not be found to take over the contract. Given the urgency of the situation, this should happen at the earliest possible opportunity.						
7.10.22	That this Council opts out of the Service Level Agreement Commitments, under Item 5, in the Community and Wellbeing Committee in January 2022 and subsequently ratified in Council in January and will write to all other Councils in Northern Ireland to urge them to follow our lead.	Councillor Cooper and Councillor S Irvine	October 2022	Community & Wellbeing Committee – November 2022		TBC	Deferred and awaiting confirmation from proposer on next steps
12.10.22	In light of the fact that the Coronation of King Charles III will take place on 6 May	Councillor MacArthur and	October 2022	Corporate Services Committee – November 2022		TBC	C&W Officers considering report to future

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	2023, this Council tasks officers to make provision for community celebrations across the Ards and North Down Borough Council area, and tasks them to allow for this in the forthcoming rate setting process.	Councillor Gilmour					Committee or Council
17.10.22	<p>This this Council reviews its policies in relation to the Northern Ireland Protocol; Provides a list to Members of what measures are currently undertaken in the implementation of that Protocol;</p> <p>Highlights which of these measures being taken by the Council are obligatory and which are discretionary;</p>	Alderman McIlveen and Alderman Armstrong-Cotter	October 2022	N/A	Heard and Agreed at Council October 2022		Report to go to January 2023 Council.

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	<p>And in the meantime, ceases actions which relate to the now expired Service Level Agreement with Causeway Coast and Glens Council and reverts to actions undertaken pre-Service Level Agreement.</p> <p>Council requests that officers action these matters with due urgency in order that Members may take any necessary actions without undue delay.</p>						
9.11.22	That Council task officers to work with The National Trust to source external funding to develop and regenerate the Car Park at both Glastry Clay Pits & Knockinelder Bay for the benefit of residents and tourists alike in seeking to deliver the Councils Tourism	Councillors Adair & Thompson	November 2022	Environment Committee - December 2022 Heard at R&D Dec 2022	Agreed	Sept P&P Committee	

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	Strategy for the Ards Peninsula						
10.11.22	That this Council requests officers bring back a report on the possibility of serving an Urgent Works Notice on the owners of Ballyrolly House, Millisle, in light of its status as a Grade B2 listed building which is in a perilous state.	Councillors Irwin and McAlpine	November 2022	Planning Committee - December 2022 - Not heard.		Feb Planning Committee	
15.11.22	That this Council recognises the difficulties faced by local businesses during this 'cost of doing business crisis' especially on business cash flow. The Council will therefore review the current requirement or advanced payments for Council bin collection services to help ease cash flow issues. An officers' report will be brought back to the appropriate committee.	Councillors Cathcart and Councillor Gilmour	November 2022	Environment Committee - December 2022	Agreed	TBC	

TO BE POPULATED BY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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16.11.22	That Council officers open discussions with Historic Environment Division regarding the return of the 13th century 'Movilla Stones' to the Borough and the provision of a suitable site for these to be located. Officers are also tasked with promoting these extremely important archaeological artefacts in the local community and local schools when the stones have been returned.	Alderman McIlveen & Councillor Cummings	November 2022	Community & Wellbeing - December 2022	Agreed	TBC	Officers considering report to be brought back to future Committee
24.11.22	That Council task officers to bring forward a report on options and potential funding opportunities to enhance and improve Council Football Pitches at Abbey Road Millisle to ensure they can be used and enjoyed by the local	Councillors Thompson & Adair	December 2022	Community & Wellbeing Committee – January 2023	Agreed	TBC	Waiting ratification at Council

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	sporting clubs and community of Millisle,						
09.12.22	That this Council adopts the White Ribbon Pledge to ' <i>Never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls</i> ', agrees to sign the Pledge, and tasks Officers to bring back a report outlining how we can amalgamate existing relevant policies, undertake the Listen, Learn, Lead programme within the Council, and identify effective routes to encourage other agencies and organisations in our Borough to engage with the White Ribbon Project.	Councillors Douglas & Walker	December 2022	Corporate Services Committee – January 2023			Awaiting ratification

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13.12.22	That this Council expresses concern with the number of residential and commercial bins left on public footways in the Borough long after the bin collection date. Bins left on public footways are not only unsightly, they can lead to hygiene and contamination issues, as well as safety concerns, forcing pedestrians onto the road due to the blocking of a footway. This Council notes its own lack of enforcement powers to tackle this issue and expresses concern at the Department for Infrastructure's reluctance to	Councillors Cathcart and MacArthur	December 2022	Environment Committee – January 2023	Agreed	TBC	

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	use its own enforcement powers. Accordingly, this Council agrees to write to the Department for Infrastructure asking the Department to engage with Councils with the aim of creating appropriate enforcement powers to tackle this issue. Council Officers, will in the meantime, bring back a report to the appropriate committee detailing action that the Council can take under current powers to try address the issue of bins left on public footways.						
13.12.22	That this council supports all NHS staff who provide unstinting and unwavering service and will write to all trusts in Northern Ireland	Councillors S Irvine & Cooper	December 2022	Corporate Services Committee – January 2023			Awaiting ratification

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	assuring them of our support for their industrial action and their objectives of safe staffing levels and adequate remuneration in the current cost of living crisis, in line with other government and council employees.						