



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE ROUND CHAMBER, ANTRIM CIVIC CENTRE ON  
TUESDAY 9 JANUARY 2024 AT 6.30 PM**

**In the Chair  
(remote)** : Alderman L Clarke

**Members Present  
(In person)** : Alderman – L Boyle  
Councillors – N Kelly, H Magill, A O'Lone and B Webb

**Members Present:  
(Remote)** : Aldermen P Bradley and P Michael  
Councillors - M Brady, S Cosgrove, H Cushinan, S Flanagan,  
E McLaughlin, L O'Hagan

**Non Committee  
Members  
(remote)** : Councillor R Lynch

**Officers Present** : Chief Executive – R Baker  
Director of Finance & Governance – S Cole  
Deputy Director of Finance – J Balmer  
Deputy Director of Governance – L Johnston  
Head of Finance – R Murray  
Head of ICT – G Smyth  
Head of Organisation Development – L Millar  
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson  
Member Services Officer – S Boyd

## **CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

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

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Councillor M Stewart

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

### **3. PRESENTATION**

#### **3.1 FI/FIN/11 DRAFT RATES ESTIMATE UPDATE 2024/25**

An update on the 2024/25 Estimates for the Finance and Governance and Organisation Development departments was provided by the Head of Finance.

The Chairperson thanked the Head of Finance for his presentation.

Proposed by Alderman Boyle  
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

**the presentation be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

### **4 ITEMS FOR NOTING**

#### **4.1 FC/FA/8 MID-YEAR REVIEW OF PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS & TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2023/24**

This report provided a mid-year update on the Council's borrowing and investment activities for Members' information and noting.

Members were reminded that the Council approved the Prudential Indicators for 2023/2024 to 2025/2026 and the Treasury Management Strategies for 2023/24 in January 2023.

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

The Council's Treasury Management Policy requires a mid-year review of treasury management activities.

The report provided an update on the Prudential Indicators and a mid-year review of the Council's borrowing and investment activities; a copy of the report was circulated for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.2 G/MSMO/41 MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS – JUNE 2023 TO NOVEMBER 2023**

This report provided a summary of Members' attendance for each of the Council meetings and Committee Member attendance for each of the Committee meetings, from June to November 2023, prior to publication on the Council's website.

Members were advised that in a previous term of Council it was agreed attendance records for each of the Council and Committee meetings would be summarised on a six monthly basis and published on the Council's website.

A summary sheet had been prepared showing the total attendance for the period 1 June 2023 to 30 November 2023 (circulated).

Proposed by Councillor Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

**the summary sheet recording Members' attendance for each of the Council meetings, and Committee Member attendance for each of the Committee meetings for the period from 1 June 2023 to 30 November 2023 be noted.**

*ACTION BY: Member Services*

#### **4.3 HR/GEN/019 MANAGING ATTENDANCE UPDATE APRIL 2023 – NOVEMBER 2023**

This report provided an update on the management of attendance for the period April 2023 to November 2023 (summary circulated).

Absence at the end of November was above target by 1.07 days with 9.28 average days lost per employee against a target of 8.21 days. Covid absence is not included in the reported figure as a significant number of these cases work from home during the isolation period.

There continued to be a positive return to work of short term cases along with 5 long term cases ending in November 2023.

Further analysis of absence figures for November 2023 indicated the following:-

### 100% attendance

The 100% attendance rate continues to be above target with 68% of our workforce achieving this to the end of November 2023, against a target of 60%.

If employees with 100% attendance were excluded from the average day's calculation, the actual absence incurred by those employees with absence episodes would be as follows:-

Period	% of workforce with absence	Long term average days	Short term average days	Overall average days
November 2023	32%	24.27	4.11	28.38
Same period last year 2022/23	29%	28.71	3.87	32.58

The above figures showed a reduction in the average length of long term absence when compared to the same period last year. This demonstrated our active commitment to reducing days lost to long term sickness absence.

### Formal Case Reviews from April 2023 to date

Formal Case reviews (FCRs) are normally held where all possible steps have been taken, and have failed to secure the employee's return to work within a maximum of 9 months.

Cases Concluded	10, with employees at formal case review stage have either returned to work, obtained ill health retirement or left the organisation.
Cases In Progress	2
Cases Approaching	1

### Long-term Absence – 85% of the overall absence figures

Long-term absence is defined as a continuous absence greater than 20 days. Although there was a slight decrease in long-term absence from 87% to 85% compared to the previous month, 5 long-term absence cases had ended and it was expected that the number of cases attributing to long-term sickness absence would decrease in the coming year.

This was due to our continued efforts to address complex long-term absence cases, conduct regular well-being meetings with employees, utilising Occupational Health services, promotion of the Staywell App, and holding timely absence review meetings.

- **% of challenging long term cases – 79%**, this includes absence related to road traffic accidents, disability related illness and general injuries.
- **Returned to work – 5 cases** have successfully returned to work.

### **Short-term Absence – 15% of the overall absence figures**

Short term absence is defined as absence less than 20 working days. Whilst it is understood that short-term absences are inevitable, it is crucial for Managers/Supervisors, Human Resources, and employees to work together to minimise the impact of these absences on service delivery.

#### Main Reasons:

- o Cold/flu, stomach bug, infection (accounting for 60% of short-term absence)
- o Stress, depression, mental health
- o Chest and respiratory issues

### **Overall Absence**

Stress-related absences, including work-related stress, accounted for 45% of total absences. Proactive work was ongoing to address this as follows: -

- Encouraging open communication to address stress and mental health concerns in well-being meetings,
- Providing mental health awareness training for employees,
- Providing access to mental health support services, through Inspire counselling service, the Council's Occupational Health service, Northern Recovery College, and additional information available through STAYWELL,
- Implementing flexible working arrangements, supporting phased returns, and reasonable adjustments where possible in the workplace,
- Encouraging physical activity through the promotion of the Council's employee subsidised gym membership scheme,
- Encouraging participation in our wellness programme with regular well-being activities and health advice promoted weekly through the STAY MORE CONNECTED Kudoboard,
- HSENI Managing Work-Related Stress training "A Line Manager's Approach" was held in October 2023 with 45 line managers across departments attending out of 74 invited.
- Partnering with legal advisors and Employers for Disability NI to arrange awareness sessions on mental health illnesses, to provide training to managers on managing stress and how to encourage open communication to reduce stress-related absence and to promote a healthy work environment.

#### **To improve absence rates and encourage earlier returns to work, the following actions are being undertaken:-**

- The consultation for the alignment of Terms and Conditions of employment has commenced and this includes the proposal of one single

policy for managing attendance. Subject to the successful outcome of a workplace ballot, it is anticipated that the agreement of a single policy will support staff, line management, and HR in the management of absence cases.

- Case management discussions are held with legal advisors to support a targeted approach for complex cases. These discussions support Directors, Heads of Services, and HR to review cases, consider reasonable adjustments, and understand the legal context, enabling specific action plans for individual cases.
- Meetings held with directorates with high or complex absence cases have been increased to analyse cases and agree the next steps, with attendance from relevant Directors, Deputy Directors, and Heads of Service. Formal case reviews are scheduled as needed.
- The HR Business Partnership Team work closely with managers and Occupational Health on an individual case management basis. This ensures prompt action is taken to keep absences within target and provides support to managers in absence review trigger meetings for a fair and consistent approach.
- Monthly case management discussion meetings were scheduled as needed to review complex cases with an Occupational Health consultant. Case managers attend these sessions to ensure effective use of the Occupational Health service and support earlier returns to work where possible.
- The Corporate and Human Resources risk registers had been reviewed to reflect the current absence rate position, with actions and interventions recorded to mitigate risks.
- Managers within Parks and Planning had received training on effectively managing absence caseloads. A number of toolkits have been identified and shared on STAYWELL to further assist managers and employees.
- Targeted training is being planned in areas of high absence provided by Human Resources, legal advisors, and in partnership with employers for disability or other relevant organisations.
- Development continues on an on-line training module to promote the importance of attending work. This will be rolled out to new staff initially and then across the wider organisation.
- Annual flu jab clinics were held in October and November 2023, with 88 employees receiving the vaccine.
- A number of health and wellbeing initiatives were held in November 2023 as part of the Employee Engagement Framework including:
  - Action Cancer Big Bus where 21 employees attended Breast Screening

appointments and 11 employees availed of an MOT Health check,

- The International Men's Day event was held on 27 November 2023 where Dr Michael McKillop MBE spoke to staff about resilience. The event was also attended by Inspire and Men's Advisory Project NI (MAPNI) to support men's mental health and domestic violence.
- The use of the Wellbeing Calendar is promoted to continue to support employee wellbeing.
- Our Employee Engagement Working Group recommenced in November 2023 with participation being cross-departmental and cross-generational.
- Physiotherapy services are being provided for appropriate cases of back and musculoskeletal-related absences.
- HR Officers will review the absence paperwork, including the absence notification and return to work forms.
- A Managing Attendance Action Plan is being developed by the Human Resources Department.

Following questions from Members regarding Work Related Stress training for line managers, the Head of Organisation Development advised that she would look into this further and revert back to Members.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*ACTION BY: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development*

#### **4.4 HR/HR/019 AGENCY WORKERS UPDATE**

This report was to provide a monthly update on the engagement of agency workers across the Council.

Agency workers are engaged to provide temporary cover for absence such as:

- Maternity leave
- Secondments
- Sickness absence
- Vacant posts
- Seasonal events

The engagement of agency workers is subject to a rigorous approval process and requires the approval of the Corporate Leadership Team. There is budgetary provision for the majority of posts filled through departmental salary budgets, salary contingency and grant funding.

### **Current Agency Workers**

The utilisation of agency workers in November 2023 compared to November 2022 was circulated at Appendix 1. This excludes limited ad-hoc agency cover which is necessary to provide operational cover at short notice.

In reviewing the number of agency workers it should be noted that there are 16 seasonal workers to help support Enchanted Winter Gardens in 2023. These seasonal agency workers will end on 19 December 2023. Of the 8 seasonal Parks Operatives 17 who have ended in early November 2023 and 1 will remain to cover a vacancy.

### **Agency Expenditure**

The expenditure on agency workers in November 2023 was circulated at Appendix 2. The cost remains unchanged at 7% (of all staffing costs) for the period April 2023 to November 2023 compared to April 2022 to November 2022.

### **Current Recruitment**

Following recent recruitment exercises, 4 agency workers (HR and Sustainability) have been offered permanent roles with 3 commencing on 1 December 2023 and 1 will commence in January 2024.

Recruitment exercises are ongoing to fill vacant positions which will further reduce our reliance on agency workers. Within Finance and Governance there are 2 vacant positions currently being covered by agency workers that we anticipate will be recruited directly on a permanent basis in January 2024.

We are committed to reducing our dependency on agency workers and will continue to recruit directly for vacant positions. However, we may still require agency workers for ad-hoc, seasonal or temporary assignments.

Following a question from a Member as to whether reserve lists were drawn up following recruitment for vacant posts the Director of Finance and Governance advised that if it was appropriate for that post a reserve list would be drawn up.

Proposed by Councillor Magill

Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

NO ACTION

## **4.5 CCS/CS/006 CUSTOMER CHANNELS REPORT**

This report was to note the update on the Customer Service performance indicators as set out in the Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24.

The Plan sets out the performance improvement target; *'we will achieve high levels of customer satisfaction'*.



**We achieve at least 80% satisfaction with overall Council services:**

Each issue of the Borough Life magazine has a specific themed survey and within each one residents are asked to rate their satisfaction with Council services. In addition, further surveys throughout the year will request feedback on satisfaction with Council services and other areas of interest.

Within quarter 3 to date, results have been received from surveys for Halloween (38 responses) and Christmas Switch On events (47 responses). Feeling Safe in Borough and Enchanted Winter Garden (Residents) surveys will close at the end of December.

During quarter 4, further responses will be included from the Cleanliness of our Borough survey in the January issue of Borough Life.

A total of 448 responses have been received in 2023-24 so far.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3 (October/ November)	2023-24 (April to November)	Status
87.5%	92.9%	80%	91.9%	94.4%	91.8%	92.9%	On Track

**The percentage of abandoned calls will be 6.5% (or less):**

A total of 121,632 calls were presented from 1 April to 30 November 2023-24, a 0.4% increase compared to the same period in 2022-23. The percentage of abandoned calls during 2023-24 to date is 5.1%.

There has been a consistent decline in the percentage of abandoned calls, from 6.0% in quarter 1, 4.8% in quarter 2 and 4.3% in October & November. To achieve target, the following actions have been implemented:

- Additional daily telecoms performance reports provided to each team
- The Customer Service team have identified and monitored performance and technical issues, and provided support as required

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3 (October/ November)	2023-24 (April to November)	Status
6.0%	5.1%	6.5%	6.0%	4.8%	4.3%	5.1%	On Track

**We have achieved at least 650,000 online transactions:**

Officers continue to promote and monitor the shift of transactions to an online basis, where practical and beneficial. For the purpose of maintaining consistency with previous benchmarks, this indicator focuses on the number of online transactions including:

- Caravan bookings
- Online theatre and events bookings
- Leisure bookings
- Dog licensing applications
- Bulky waste bookings

Results are reported on a quarterly basis, and the next set of data will be available in January 2024.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	2023-24 (April to September)	Status
652,593	874,10	650,000	151,743	138,264	January 2024	290,007	On Track

**There are at least 8,000 downloads of the Residents App:**

Downloads of the ANBorough App are measured through official app stores (Google and Apple). Total downloads for 1 April to 31 October 2023-24 are 8,959 which is 112% of target. Data for the number of downloads during November is not yet available. The target of 8,000 downloads for 2023-24 has been exceeded.

2021-22	2022-23	Target 2023-24	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3 (October)	2023-24 (April to October)	Status
14,481	13,963	8,000	3,355	4,494	1,110	8,959	Achieved

Progress on the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023-2024 is reported on a quarterly basis to the Policy and Governance and Audit and Risk Committees, and final, validated figures are contained within the Annual Report on Performance 2023-2024 (Self-Assessment), which will be reviewed by Council and published on the Council's website by 30 September 2024.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Alderman Bradley and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

NO ACTION

#### **4.6 CCS/CS/009 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE – CONSULTATION AND SURVEY UPDATE**

This report was to note the ongoing delivery and reporting on the consultation and survey programme for 2023/24.

The Council actively seeks feedback through surveys and consultations throughout the year. Consultations offer a formal approach to gaining constructive feedback on a specific project and surveys are used to inform service improvements. The feedback we receive through consultation and surveys enables our residents to shape how we deliver our services.

In the period 1 April to 30 November 2023-24, 28 public consultations and surveys were undertaken that generated 1,967 responses. A detailed report for each consultation or survey was shared with the relevant Officer, including a summary of comments with actions developed where necessary. An overview of the surveys which had concluded up to the end of November 2023 were contained within Appendix 1 (circulated).

Council's consultations and surveys are in various formats and primarily use a data collection and engagement platform, Citizen Space, which is accessible through the Council's website. This analytical tool additionally supports the collation and interpreting of data for specific services. To obtain direct feedback from our leisure customers we utilise the Listen 360 integrated software which provides real time feedback on any aspect of the leisure experience. This provides analytical tools to support the collation and interpretation of the data for individual services.

Listen 360 feedback from Leisure customers was detailed in Appendix 2 (circulated). This indicated a much higher Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 65 against the UK leisure standard of 34. Although NPS was not a current corporate performance indicator within Leisure, it was a positive indicator of customer experience.

The planned consultations and surveys which were due to conclude in December 2023, along with the surveys that were scheduled for January – March 2024 were enclosed at Appendix 3 (circulated). The outcomes and feedback from the surveys would be reported to the relevant committee upon completion.

Proposed by Alderman Bradley  
Seconded by Councillor Brady and agreed that

**the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 6.51pm.

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**MAYOR**