ARC21 JOINT COMMITTEE
AGM & Meeting No 109
MINUTES
Thursday 24 September 2026
Hosted by Ards and North Down Borough Council
at Bangor Town Hall

Members Present:

Councillor A Bennington *(Chair)*	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
Councillor E Thompson	Ards & North Down Borough Council
Councillor J Cochrane	Ards & North Down Borough Council
Councillor A Givan	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
Alderman O Gawith	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
Councillor U Mackin	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
Councillor G McKeen *(Deputy Chair)*	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

Members' Apologies:

Councillor M Goodman	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
Councillor H Cushinan	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
Councillor C Blaney	Ards & North Down Borough Council
Alderman S Copeland	Belfast City Council
Councillor M Collins	Belfast City Council
Councillor E McDonough-Brown	Belfast City Council
Councillor A Skinner	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
Alderman M Morrow	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
Councillor C King	Newry, Mourne & Down District Council
Councillor T Andrews	Newry, Mourne & Down District Council
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Newry, Mourne & Down District Council

Officers Present:

M Kelly	arc21
H Campbell *(Secretary)*	arc21
T Walker	arc21
K Boal	arc21
J Green	arc21
M Laverty	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council
G Bannister	Ards & North Down Borough Council
K Patterson	Ards & North Down Borough Council
S Leonard	Belfast City Council
A McCann	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
G Richardson	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
D Bone	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

Officers' Apologies:

W Muldrew	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
R Moore	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
M Baker	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
S Murphy	Newry, Mourne & Down District Council

Item 1 - AGM

Procedures

Mr Kelly referred to the procedures for the election of a Chair and Deputy Chair for the forthcoming year.

Election of Chair

Nominations were sought for the position of Chair to serve the Joint Committee for the forthcoming year.

Proposed: Councillor Alison Bennington
Nominated by: Councillor Eddie Thompson
Seconded by: Councillor Uel Mackin

It was resolved that Councillor Bennington be re-elected as Chair of the Joint Committee for the incoming year [2026/27].

(Councillor Bennington in the Chair)

The Chair thanked the Committee for her re-election.

Election of Deputy Chair

Nominations were then invited for the position of Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee.

Proposed: Councillor Gregg McKeen
Nominated: Councillor Alan Givan
Seconded by: Councillor Eddie Thompson

It was resolved that Councillor McKeen be re-elected as Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee for the incoming year [2026/27].

Cllr McKeen thanked the Committee for his re-election.

Item 1 - Conflicts of Interest Statement

The Chair read out the Conflicts of Interest Statement, and none were noted.

Action: Noted

Item 2 - Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Action: Noted

Item 3 - Minutes of Joint Committee Meeting 108 held on 28 August 2026

The Joint Committee approved the minutes. Proposed by Cllr McKeen, seconded by Ald Gawith, and agreed by all.

Action: Agreed

Item 4 - Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Action: Noted

IN COMMITTEE

The Chair recommended that the meeting would now move "*In Committee*" which was agreed. Proposed by Cllr Thompson and seconded by Ald Gawith.

Matters of a confidential and commercially sensitive nature were discussed under these agenda items.

Following discussion on the commercially sensitive matters, the Chair recommended that the meeting would now return to the main agenda, which was approved, but whilst "*In Committee*" during this part of the meeting, there were four matters discussed.

Item 5 - Minutes of Joint Committee Meeting 108 held on 28 August 2026 'in committee' - approved

Item 6 - Matters Arising - noted

Item 7 - Residual Waste Treatment Project - noted

Item 8 - Commercially Sensitive Contract & Procurement Issues - approved

OUT OF COMMITTEE

Proposed by Cllr Thompson and seconded by the Chair.

Item 9 - Contracts & Operations Briefing Report

Ms Boal presented a report to provide the Joint Committee with an update in relation to current contracts and operations.

Service Status

She stated that all services had operated well throughout August.

Performance

She provided an update on contractor performance across all the contracts and highlighted where some service credits had been applied for turnaround times, the number of overweight vehicles, reporting issues by contractors, and the bring contracts rectification requests issued and serviced.

Health & Safety

An incident during August was noted in regard to a hinge breaking on a vehicle door during a delivery of HWRC waste causing a near miss and the actions taken.

She noted that Council officers continue to be asked to liaise with their H&S officers and operational managers, including those of external contractors, to ensure that all councils' operational teams have due regard to Health & Safety obligations and that they understand and abide by the site rules of each site.

Audits

She reported that the external H&S audit programme continued, with an audit conducted at Regen sites and BCC at the Dargan Road Transfer station. She noted that some actions were identified and all parties were working to complete these as soon as possible.

Health and Safety Workshop

She reported that a workshop with health and safety/operational officers had taken place and had been very engaging and had representatives from 5 of the 6 councils. The issues covered were noted in the report and she advised that a number of follow-up actions will be progressed.

Rejected Loads

She reported that there had been one rejected load in regard to the organic waste treatment contract due to mixed waste in vehicles and not being emptied accordingly.

arc21 Contract Tonnages

Details of the tonnages delivered in August for the main contracts were provided, along with a comparison against the same period last year and these were discussed more fully in the Waste Tonnage Trends report.

Supplies

A summary of supply orders and deliveries for August was included in Ms Boal's report. She noted that there was no non-conformances during the period, with all other deliveries completed as planned.

ISO Recertification

She reported that arc21 had successfully completed its ISO recertification process, which is undertaken every three years in order to retain the certification. She advised that the assessment focused on procurement and contract management and that she was pleased to confirm that arc21 had passed with no non-conformances or even minor observations identified.

Ms Boal thanked all arc21 staff involved for their hard work and contribution to this achievement.

The Chair echoed these sentiments and congratulated the team on successfully retaining the accreditation and on the positive outcome of the recertification process.

Following discussion, the Joint Committee noted the report. Proposed by Ald Gawith and seconded by Cllr Givan.

Action: Noted

Item 10 - Waste Tonnage Trends

Ms Boal presented her monthly report comparing tonnages of material received through the arc21 contracts, highlighting trends in increases and decreases over the reporting period.

She highlighted the following:

Residual waste:

- some contracts have not yet completed a full four-year period, therefore current figures are not fully representative of four-year performance.
- Lot 1: combined tonnage is just under 4,500 tonnes, with a relatively consistent pattern.
- Lot 2: HWRC material remains relatively stable, with no significant fluctuations noted.
- Lot 3: largest contract area. Tonnage has increased following the addition of the Newry, Mourne and Down legacy Newry area from April, contributing approximately 2,000 tonnes per month. The increase is therefore not considered to represent a significant underlying rise in residual waste.
- overall residual waste: August figures followed a broadly similar pattern to the previous year.

Organics:

- Type 1 (HWRC): tonnage is around its lowest level in four years, although longer-term patterns appear to be evening out.
- Type 2 (kerbside food/garden waste): a noticeable decrease was reported, reaching the lowest point in four years. This may negatively affect the ability to secure previously negotiated gate-fee savings when the contract ends in November.

MRF/recycling contracts:

- a downward trend in tonnages was noted. Caution should be applied when comparing Lot 1 figures due to changes in collection arrangements within Mid and East Antrim.
- overall commingled recycling tonnage remains comparatively low and will continue to be monitored.

Awaiting the outcome of the Waste Composition Analysis undertaken on behalf of councils. It had been anticipated for September but has not yet been released by the Department. It was noted that receiving the Composition Analysis before procurement of the next dry recycling contract would have been beneficial, although this now appears unlikely.

Smaller contracts were not discussed in detail due to their relatively low tonnages.

Textiles:

- tonnage had improved and is at its highest level in approximately four years, despite difficulties in finding markets for the material.

The report also provided an overview of recycling rates (against targets of 60% and 65%) and landfill diversion (less than 10%) in the first quarter 2026/27 (based on unvalidated figures for 2025/36 & 2026/27).

She noted the following:

Landfill:

- overall performance is below the 10% threshold, with significant improvement over the past year, largely due to more material being directed to recovery.
- some councils/contracts remain more reliant on landfill, at approximately 26–27%. Work is continuing with the contractor to reduce reliance on landfill, with a 4% reduction achieved over the past year.
- future procurement will consider tighter contract requirements to further reduce reliance on landfill, alongside market engagement on longer-term solutions.
- overall for arc21, sitting well below the 10% threshold.

Recycling and composting:

- performance was assessed against potential 60% and 65% targets, including the improvement required by individual councils.
- some councils are already achieving the 60% target, with several progressing towards 65%.
- municipal waste recycling shows a similar position, although seasonal changes, particularly reductions in organic waste, may affect annual recycling rates.
- the potential impact of future initiatives, including Extended Producer Responsibility and the Deposit Return Scheme, will continue to be monitored in relation to council waste volumes and recycling performance.

Following discussion, the Joint Committee noted the report. Proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Thompson.

Action: Noted

Item 11 - Vapes

Ms Boal provided a verbal update and reported that, following last month's meeting, she had submitted a number of queries to the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) including questions regarding enforcement and the obligations on vape retailers to provide take-back facilities. She noted that a response was still awaited.

She advised that at the recent meeting between arc21 and DAERA, they had confirmed that OPSS did not have a physical presence in Northern Ireland. It was also understood that retailers were not obligated to show that they are operating a vape take-back scheme. Therefore, it may not be obvious but she noted that this did not necessarily indicate that a retailer was not providing a take-back facility.

She also provided and update on discussions with Material Focus, who had developed a range of communications and promotional materials relating to the safe disposal of vapes and associated fire risks. She noted that OPSS also had templates available which could potentially support future communications activity.

It was noted that the Department are reticent to commence a wider communications campaign without ensuring that there is infrastructure in place and that increased returns would not inadvertently create additional fire risks.

Mr Kelly reported that he had written to the Permanent Secretary, Katrina Godfrey and that this meeting with DAERA officials had been arranged promptly and was well received. He suggested that the recent large fire at Clearway may also have helped bring the issue into sharper focus and had highlighted the importance of addressing the matter.

Members received an update on the discussions with DAERA and he noted that they were seeking data and supporting evidence on the number of fires and incidents being recorded that we collect. It was agreed that information held by both parties would be shared to help identify any gaps and build a clearer evidence base. This would include consideration of information and trends from both NI and GB.

It was noted that GB appeared to be experiencing a higher number of fires associated with the disposal of vapes and batteries than was currently reflected in NI statistics. Further work would therefore be undertaken to better understand the reasons for this difference.

Members were advised that retailers selling vapes were required to provide take-back arrangements. The Department was also keen to progress a communications campaign but wished to ensure that the messaging and implications for retailers were fully considered

before information was made public, particularly to avoid creating additional safety or fire risks at retail premises.

It was reported that the Minister had indicated an interest in taking action in this area, which was welcomed.

He noted that a further meeting with the Department would be arranged. In the interim, both parties would continue to collaborate on a communications plan, identify opportunities for appropriate “quick win” messaging, and consider longer-term policy options. Reference was also made to a potential 4-Nations approach, although it was acknowledged that this could take time to develop.

Ald Gawith thanked the officers for the report and inquired about the PSNI campaign on destroying e-scooters and if we were aware of what was being done on disposal. Mr Kelly advised that we would look into it and the whole issues of lithium batteries.

Following discussion, the Joint Committee noted the report. Proposed by Ald Gawith and seconded by Cllr Thompson.

Action: Noted

Item 12 - AOB

Joint Committee Meetings

Issues were raised by a Member on the IT connectivity and Wi-Fi difficulties at the meeting and it was suggested that perhaps Belfast Castle may be more appropriate for future meetings.

Mr Kelly advised that the Wi-Fi connectivity was not particularly good at Belfast Castle which was perhaps due to the nature of the building and restrictions on network access.

He advised that he would liaise with the council directors to ensure that testing is carried out in advance of any future meetings and the hosting facilities were appropriate to hold a hybrid meeting.

He further advised that there had been recent discussions with the Chair and council directors on the frequency and scheduling of meetings including content, format etc. It was noted that the current arrangement provided for 10 meetings per year, with no meeting in July and some adjustment to the timetable towards the end of the year.

A proposal was outlined to move to eight meetings per year, broadly operating on a six-weekly cycle and providing hybrid facilities. It was noted that there appeared to be general support for this approach among council officers and that it would provide greater opportunities for face-to-face attendance.

Members were advised that the meeting schedule would need to retain sufficient flexibility to accommodate time-critical business, particularly procurement approvals, to ensure that key decisions were not delayed between scheduled meetings. Provision for exceptional or additional meetings would therefore remain where required.

The Chair suggested that a proposal for eight meetings per year would be circulated to Committee members for consideration and to provide feedback on the proposed arrangements.

Action: Mr Kelly

Mr Walker's Secondment

The Chair informed the Committee of Mr Walker's return to Belfast City Council on 1 October after a seven-year secondment as Acting Chief Executive to arc21.

She thanked Mr Walker for his significant contribution during his seven-year secondment, acknowledging Mr Walker's extensive knowledge and expertise in the waste sector in NI, and noting the considerable value his experience had brought to the organisation. The Chair wished Mr Walker every success for the future.

Members echoed these sentiments, thanking Mr Walker for his support, expertise and commitment to arc21 throughout his seven-year tenure, and wished him every success on his return to Belfast City Council.

Item 13 - Next Meeting Thursday 29 October 2026 using MS Teams

The Chair advised that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on 29 October using MS Teams and encouraged all to attend.

Action: Noted

Officers left the meeting.

IN COMMITTEE

The Chair recommended that the meeting would now move "*In Committee*" which was agreed. Proposed by Cllr Givan and seconded by Ald Gawith.

Item 14 - Members' discussion on the Organisational Review - approved

Meeting ended

Date: 5 November 2026 **Chair:** A Bennington