


Date	Signed by Chairman
05 May 2026	

**Minutes of 186th Meeting of The Drainage Council Northern Ireland
09:30am Wednesday 04th February 2026**

<u>Members Present:</u>	<u>DFI Officials & Guests in Attendance:</u>
Maureen Brunt (Agriculture specialist) Jim Martin (Drainage specialist) Dr Alex McGarel (Conservation specialist) Cllr Pete Wray Cllr Mervyn Storey (left 10.50am) Cllr Callum Bowsie Cllr Keith Kerrigan Cllr Mark Robinson Cllr Robert Irvine (joined 10.00am) Mr Gary Quinn (Director of Rivers Operations) Ex-Officio	Mrs Mary McCann (Secretary) Mr Ronan Devlin (Rivers Directorate) Mr Nick Gregg (Rivers Directorate) Mrs Gail Richie (Rivers Directorate) Miss Louise Mailey (Rivers Directorate) Mrs Glenda Cahoon (Rivers Directorate) (Minutes)
<u>Apologies</u> Cllr Eddie Thompson Kathryn McFerran (Strategic Planning Directorate) Ex-Officio	<u>Did Not Attend</u> Cllr Michael Goodman Cllr Dermot Nicholl Cllr Phillip Campbell

Welcome and introduction

Gary Quinn opened the 186th meeting of the Drainage Council NI, welcoming all attendees, particularly new members.

Following introductions the Secretary advised the members of the changes in members since the last meeting. New members since last meeting include:

Terms effective 1st July 2025

- Maureen Brunt – Agriculture Specialist - second term
- Jim Martin – Drainage Specialist
- Dr Alex McGarel – Conservation Specialist – second term

Terms effective 1st October 2025

- Cllr Eddie Thompson – Ards and North Down Council, appointed following the resignation of Alderman Julie Middleton on 6th May 2025.

Terms effective 5th January 2026

- Cllr Mark Robinson – Mid Ulster Council, appointed following Gareth Sharvin's departure from council. **Gary Quinn** acknowledged Gareth Sharvin's contributions to the Drainage Council which has been appreciated.

1. Apologies and Conflicts of Interest

Secretary advised apologies had been received from Cllr Eddie Thompson, and Kathryn McFerran.

No Conflicts of interest were declared.

Gary Quinn provided an overview of the work being undertaken by Rivers Directorate.

There are currently 50 Capital Projects at various stages of development. The budget position is strong, and several high-quality cases have been progressed.

A key priority is strengthening specialist staffing. The organisation has around 330 staff but needs 470 to fully meet operational needs.

The Secretary provided an update on resourcing.

Robert Irvine joined the meeting.

2. Presentation – Drainage Council Induction

An induction presentation was delivered to provide an overview of Rivers Directorates and outline the functions of the Drainage Council.

3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Gary Quinn offered to step out of the room to allow members the opportunity to vote in secret.

Members all agreed that they were happy to have an open discussion.

Gary Quinn invited nominations for Chair.

A discussion took place regarding potential nominees.

Maureen Brunt nominated **Jim Martin**.

Alex McGarel seconded the nomination.

Robert Irvine requested clarification on eligibility for the roles as Chair and Vice Chair.

The **Secretary** confirmed that all members were eligible.

As no further nominations were received, it was agreed that **Jim Martin** was elected Chair.

Election of Vice Chair

Mervyn Storey nominated **Alex McGarel** for Vice Chair.

Maureen Brunt seconded the nomination.

No further nominations were received, and it was agreed that **Alex McGarel** was elected as Vice Chair.

6. Minutes of 185th Meeting

The **Secretary** asked if members were content with the minutes of the 185th Meeting.

Peter Wray Proposed that the minutes were accepted and Maureen Brunt seconded

The Minutes were agreed and accepted.

7. Matters Arising from Minutes of 185th Meeting

[Action Point 1](#)

Secretary to maintain issues log to track outstanding actions, with each action assigned a specific timeframe for resolution.

This action is complete

[Action Point 2](#)

Secretary to share Flooding Review email/webinar with new Drainage Council members to raise awareness in their respective councils.

This action is complete

Secretary to issue to new members.

[Action Point 3](#)

Secretary to share outputs from the Parliamentary Excellence presentation when available.

This action is complete

Secretary to issue presentation to new members.

[Action Point 4](#)

Secretary to share list of Regional Community Resilience Groups (RGRG's) with all new members.

This action is complete

Secretary to issue to new members.

[Action Point 5](#)

Secretary to share process map for schemes, (once developed) with Drainage Council members and coordinate training session on EIA function.

This action is ongoing

[Action Point 6](#)

Gary Quinn to keep members updated on flood forecasting centre progress.

This action is ongoing

Gary Quinn informed members this will take time to develop and that there is a meeting with the Minister in March 2026.

[Action Point 7](#)

Gary Quinn to consider inviting Chair to climate change conference.

This action is complete

[Action Point 8](#)

Peter Archdale to send Gauge-Adjusted Radar information links to Gary Quinn.

This action is complete

[Action Point 9](#)

Chair to organise workshop with Mark Horton (NbS) in early autumn and also include Maureen Brunt.

This action is ongoing

[Action Point 10](#)

Secretary to share NIEA's response in relation to the seed mix for Portadown Flood Alleviation Scheme with Peter Archdale once this has been returned to Rivers Capital Project team.

This action is complete

[Action Point 11](#)

Secretary to send copy of Rivers Annual Maintenance Programme 2025–26 presentation to all members.

This action is complete

[Action Point 12](#)

Rivers to share Biosecurity guidance with Drainage Council.

This action is complete

Secretary to reissue to Maureen Brunt

[Action Point 13](#)

Secretary to include location links with Minor Works for information to make this more accessible for members.

This action is complete

[Action Point 14](#)

Secretary to write to David Porter congratulating him on becoming ICE President.

This action is complete

[Action Point 15](#)

Secretary to share Assembly briefing links for reservoirs with members.

This action is complete

Actions arising from this discussion: -

Action	Description	Responsible
1.	<i>Secretary to issue the following to new members:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Flooding Review email/webinar</i>- <i>Parliamentary Excellence presentation</i>- <i>List of Regional Community Resilience Groups</i>- <i>Biosecurity guidance</i>	Secretary

Mervyn Storey proposed that the Drainage Council send a note to the new Permanent Secretary for the Department for Infrastructure, Emer Morelli to wish her well. Possibly consider a visit.

Actions arising from this discussion: -

Action	Description	Responsible
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2.	<i>Note to new Permanent Secretary from Drainage Council to wish her well.</i>	Chair
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Mervyn Storey left the meeting

8. Presentation – Development of Rivers Capital Works Projects

Ronan Devlin delivered a presentation providing an overview of Rivers Capital Works Projects.

The presentation prompted a wide-ranging discussion, with members raising questions about operational capacity and priorities (including staffing for maintenance and flood forecasting, which plan work is being progressed against, how local community engagement is managed, how schemes are prioritised, and how community assets are reflected in assessments).

Rivers staff responded during the meeting, and two follow-up actions were agreed: to share the TGN when available and to share the Capital Works Projects PowerPoint to members.

Actions arising from this discussion: -

Action	Description	Responsible
3.	<i>Ronan Devlin to share TGN with members</i>	Secretary
4.	<i>PowerPoint presentation on Capital Works Projects to be shared with members</i>	Secretary

9. Recent Flood Events

Nick Gregg provided an overview of recent flooding incidents.

Calls are received through the Flood Incident Line and are then directed to the appropriate team, such as Rivers, Roads or NI Water. Staff were placed on early standby, for example on Tuesday morning ahead of Storm Chandra. Affected areas included South Down, the Lagan, Antrim and Riverside.

Increased inspections were carried out, with significant work required before, during and after a storm event. Screens represent a high risk, and inspection activity has been ramped up and will continue for some weeks.

Storm Bram generated a tidal surge, during which the Belfast tidal defence was deployed, and Newtownards experienced damage to the sea defence. Flood response operates in three stages: initial preparation, response and recovery. The key message is that all incidents should be reported through the Flood Incident Line.

Members discussed recent flood risk and response pressures, with Rivers staff noting concern about further storms and an increased likelihood of flooding following prolonged wet weather and emphasising that adequate staffing is essential to deliver effective response and recovery.

The discussion also covered strengthened consultee processes linked to climate change, potential future policy considerations around limited commercial development in floodplains, and local issues including investment in flood defences and maintenance on the Clogher Valley (Blackwater River). Rivers staff advised that around 110 industrial staff are needed to manage high-risk areas, that wider maintenance capacity remains constrained, and that biodiversity requirements can limit river-cleaning activities, requiring a balanced approach. Members also noted that dredging has limited benefit in reducing flood levels in large events but debris and trees can create blockages that are best managed through regular inspections.

10. AOB

Secretary asked if there was any other business.

No other business was presented.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed that availability would be sought for the next meeting to be scheduled for April/May 2026.

Meeting ended.