



## **Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs by Newry Mourne and Down District Council**

### **Withdrawal of DAERA and Local Authority Staff from Ports**

1. Following news reports of the withdrawal of staff from SPS checks at the point of entry/border control post at Larne, Newry Mourne and Down District Council staff continued to work at the point of entry/border control post at Warrenpoint throughout this period.
2. On the evening of 1 February 2021, Newry Mourne and Down District Council officials made contact with colleagues at Belfast City Council and Mid and East Antrim Borough Councils to establish if their staff were withdrawn from the ports. The initial action taken was to contact the staff member due to start shift at 4.30am to ask her to work from home as a precautionary measure. The message wasn't received by the staff member until further contact was made at 7.30am the next morning when she was already at work. The DAERA staff member due to work in Warrenpoint port was also in attendance.
3. The Chief Executive contacted the PSNI locally to establish if there was an increased risk to staff attending the point of entry/border control post at Warrenpoint and confirmed that threat assessments at Warrenpoint port remained low.
4. Following discussions with the Chief Executive the Assistant Director of Health & Wellbeing, Head of Environmental Health (Commercial) and the Safety, Health and Emergency Planning Manager, the decision was made that staff would not be withdrawn from duties at the port. Staff were fully briefed and reassured by the Chief Executive on the available information and decision made in keeping staff at the port. They were given opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns at the meeting and to line managers on an on-going basis.
5. Health and Safety risk assessments in relation to personal safety were reviewed and updated and, although through continued engagement with PSNI the Council were informed that the threat assessments remained low, control measures were implemented to provide additional assurance to staff. These additional measures were agreed and implemented in partnership with the PSNI, DAERA and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority and included:
  - Increased patrols by PSNI at start and finish times of the shifts.
  - PSNI spoke with staff and provided reassurance, advice and contact numbers.
  - New procedure for staff to remove and put on Council and Port branded clothing and Hi-Vis PPE once inside the port boundary.
  - Warrenpoint Harbour Security also increased surveillance inside the port at start and finish times of the shifts
  - Spaces for car parking within the controlled area of the port were identified and made available to DAERA and Council staff.
6. Newry Mourne and Down District Council continue to attend the SKIES meetings with PSNI, DAERA and council colleagues where we are informed of the status of the Threat Assessment and continue to keep any risk to staff under review.